The London School of Economics and Political Science

Life's Work and the Gendered Processes of Migrant Precarity:

The Case of Mongolian Migrant Women in Seoul, South Korea

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Abstract

In this thesis, I identify and explain the empirical processes - namely citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation - which reproduce the various forms of gendered precarity that Mongolian migrant women experience in Korea. I explain how these three processes are interconnected, and mutually exacerbate the legal, labour, and social precarity they each reproduce. By focusing on Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women, I illustrate how different groups of migrants navigate and mitigate these processes and their outcomes in distinct ways.

With the concept of Life's Work at the centre of my conceptual framework, and gender as a complementary conceptual lens, this thesis is based on approximately six months of qualitative fieldwork in the Seoul metropolitan area, split across two phases between October 2021 and May 2022. Conducting fieldwork whilst COVID-19 measures were still in place, I adopted life-story, in-depth, and semi-structured interviews as key methods. Interviews were conducted in person and online with Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women

In this thesis, I firstly argue that the empirical process of citizenship-making, which is deeply informed by gendered expectations determining migrant women's value in Korea's visa system, contributes to the social reproduction of Life's Work in the form of legal precarity. Secondly, I show that pre-existing material structural barriers, stemming from the social structure and relations of gender, reproduce the devaluation of migrant women's market value, which in turns results in migrant women's labour precarity, which I define as the devaluation of their human capital and subsequent marginalisation into visa-specific precarious segments of the labour market. Finally, I argue that the everyday process of ethnicisation that Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women deal with, contributes to the social reproduction of Life's Work by reproducing everyday social precarity. By social precarity, I am referring to the social hierarchisation of Mongolian women on the basis of their nationality and ethnic traits, and gender.

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1. Introduction: the evolution of my research agenda

Back in November 2017, I was visiting Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, for the second leg of fieldwork for my master's dissertation. At the time, I was investigating the relationship between internal migration, unplanned urbanisation, and socio-spatial conflict in post-socialist Mongolia, and conducting interviews with the city's residents, civil servants, and national authorities. My field diary was filled with questions and stories about physical and social mobility, about disappointment and compromise, but also hope for a better future that seemed perpetually out of people's reach. Some of my interviewees and research assistants discussed in passing that perhaps their vision for a better life could be kickstarted elsewhere. They shared anecdotes of how they or their relatives had worked abroad, specifically in South Korea. They worked hard and then came back home with enough money to build a better home for themselves, or even purchase a newly built flat, thus getting a step closer to that better, shinier future that the national and city governments were struggling to materialise for them. Every day after each interview, I would go back to the flat I was staying in one of the many residential buildings from the Soviet-era, known as *microrayon*, in central Ulaanbaatar. One evening, I was sitting on my sofa, going through my field notes, when the idea came to me: I could expand on my research on internal migration in Mongolia, and write a PhD thesis about Mongolian migration to Korea, transnationalism, remittances, and social mobility. Back then, I did not fully know what a PhD entailed, I simply felt excited at the realisation of how much I enjoyed doing research, and the social and academic contributions that this project could ideally bring forward.

In October 2021, four years later and two years into my PhD, I was finally embarking on my doctoral fieldwork in Korea. I initially went to Seoul with the intention of investigating and comparing the economic and social remittances of Mongolian migrant women through the intersectional lens of gender and class. My research agenda, at the time, was also about investigating Mongolian marriage migrant women's capital formation and experiences of paid work, and Mongolian labour migrant women's experiences in the male-dominated low-skilled migrant labour

market of Korea. During fieldwork, I soon realised that my initial research questions and objectives seemed no longer relevant vis-a-vis the actual lives, needs, and plans for the future of Mongolian women in Korea. My interviewees had so little to say about remittances, and instead, wanted to share more about life in Korea, why they thought the immigration system was working against them, what kind of jobs they felt had been the most rewarding and why, and, equally importantly, how they saw and negotiated their identities as Mongolian women in Korea. My focus on remittances and social mobility slowly shifted towards questions of social reproduction and precarity, and gradually, upon returning from fieldwork, of migrants' agency, too. Hence, whilst the focus on migrant women's lived experiences remained, the project itself took on a new meaning and agenda.[1]

There are important theoretical questions that have stayed relevant throughout the evolution of my research agenda. What is the theoretical significance of analysing the experiences of Mongolian women in Korea? Why am I focusing on Mongolian women, specifically? Why not another group or another country? Firstly, from a theoretical standpoint, my intention was to investigate migration between two Asian countries and contribute to the growing study of intra-Asian migration and the rise of Asian countries as key destinations of international migration (Asis et al., 2019; Liu-Farrer & Yeoh, 2018; Yeoh, 2021). Secondly, I felt drawn to focus on Mongolia and Korea, specifically, as these two countries have gone through incredibly similar political, socio-economic, and cultural processes of nation-building after long periods of authoritarian regimes (Bulag, 1998, 2003; Campbell, 2015; Rossabi, 2005; G.-W. Shin, 2006, 2012). As a result of these processes, both countries also have socio-economic systems and labour markets that are actively reproducing precarity and inequality for both women and their migrant population. Additionally, Mongolia and Korea share similar gender norms and expectations for women in terms of what their desirable role in society should be. Thirdly, and related to my previous point, existing literature on migration to Korea tends to focus on either co-ethnic groups or migrant populations from Southeast Asian countries whose socio-cultural norms and histories are considerably different from Korea's (Yu, 2023; Hough, 2022; Chung, 2020). Therefore, in the context of intra-Asian migration, the case study of Mongolian migration offers

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[1] I discuss fieldwork in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

insights on the lived experiences of migrant women who are not co-ethnics but share considerable socio-cultural similarities with their host society. In other words, the theoretical significance of focusing on Mongolian women in Korea lies in shedding light not on one of the two extreme poles - that is, either co-ethnics and members of the host society's diaspora, or migrants from considerably different geographical and socio-cultural contexts - but on the 'middle ground', on the lived experiences of migrants who do not quite fit either pole.

There are also practical reasons that guided my choice to research Mongolian migration to Korea. On the one hand, I wanted to build upon my pre-existing knowledge and understanding of post-socialist Mongolian society and migration trends; on the other hand, the fact that the majority of Mongolian nationals living abroad (approximately 40,000 out of 120,000) reside in Korea (T. Lee, 2022; National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2020, p. 158) called for critical reflection and examination. More specifically, my decision to focus on the experiences of Mongolian women, rather than men, stemmed from my desire and commitment to challenge the gendered biases that migration scholarship tends to suffer from, especially when focusing on the Northeast Asian region (Piper & Lee, 2016; Piper & Withers, 2018). I am referring to the tendency of viewing marriage migration primarily through the lens of women's reproductive oppression under assimilationist host societies (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021; G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016; Yeung & Mu, 2020), and labour migration as predominantly experienced by men through temporary sojourns and labour exploitation (Collins, 2012; S. Seo, 2019; Yeoh, 2021).

Whilst I understand that, statistically, in Korea, most Asian marriage migrants are women, and most Asian labour migrants are men (E. A. Chung, 2021; A. E. Kim, 2012; W.-B. Kim, 2004; H.-K. Lee, 2015), I critically challenge this clear-cut divide. The theoretical framing resulting from this divide is usually one that puts great emphasis on marriage migrant women's unpaid care work, and gendered role in the family unit (Kim and Kilkey, 2016; Chiu and Yeoh, 2021; Chung 2020). It can be argued that this approach reproduces a gendered binary and bias that constrains our understanding of the lived experiences of migrant women, beyond their sexualities and role in the

household. Therefore, in this thesis, instead of examining the lived experiences of Mongolian marriage migrant women only, I will illustrate how different groups of Mongolian migrant women navigate precarity in Korean society beyond the prescribed boundaries of care work and the family (Norton & Katz, 2017; Piper & Withers, 2018; Strauss, 2018; Strauss & Meehan, 2015), and through their experiences of visa rights, paid labour, and ethnicity. Additionally, I thought it was important to research the lived experiences of migrant women who are not at the two extreme poles that migration studies tend to focus on (i.e., either high-skilled expats or low-skilled domestic workers and manual foreign workers) to better understand how different groups in the 'middle' negotiate their many experiences of precarity. In other words, my intention is to contribute to existing research highlighting the multifaceted lived experiences of migrant women, and the wide range of structural precarity they deal in different spaces of their host society. In the rest of this introductory chapter, I present and explain my research questions, and summarise the conceptual framework of this thesis. I then provide general information about the context of my research, including recent political and economic transitions in Mongolia and Korea, socio-spatial inequalities in their capital cities (i.e., Ulaanbaatar and Seoul), and other challenges that particularly affect Mongolian and Korean women. Finally, I set out the structure of this thesis.

1.2. Research questions and key contributions

In this thesis, I identify and explain the empirical processes - namely citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation - reproducing the various forms of precarity that different groups of Mongolian migrant women experience in Korea. I show that these processes, as well as the legal-institutional and social spaces they take place in, are interconnected with each other in a way that actively normalises and exacerbates the subordination of Mongolian migrant women across Korean society in different ways according to the women's visa statuses. These processes, however, do not exist in a vacuum (Katz et al., 2015; Norton & Katz, 2017; Rodriguez-Rocha, 2021; Strauss & Meehan, 2015); through a focus on the socio-cultural structure of gender, I explain how specific

gender norms from both Mongolian and Korean society inform these empirical processes, and help 'justify' the structural precarity. Whilst acknowledging that Mongolian migrant women, albeit in different ways depending on their visa and background, find themselves in a disadvantaged position vis-a-visa these empirical processes of precarity, they are active participants in said processes. As Cindi Katz (2004, p. xi) puts it, "[t]he possibilities for rupture are everywhere in the routine. If the efflorescence of cultural forms and practices that make up social reproduction hegemony is secured, so, too, might it stumble." In other words, my intention is also to show that neither Mongolian marriage nor labour migrant women are passive victims of the empirical processes reproducing their precarity. This focus on agency helps to blur the lines between vulnerability and political strategy (Favell, 2022; Katz, 2004; MacLeavy et al., 2021; Yeung & Mu, 2020), and demonstrates the complicated and flawed resilience of migrant women. Therefore, this thesis askes the following research questions:

1. What are the empirical social processes contributing to the social reproduction of precarity in the lives of Mongolian migrant women in Seoul?

2. How are these empirical social processes connected to each other and to the socio-cultural structure of gender?

3. How do different groups of Mongolian migrant women navigate and mitigate these processes and the precarities they reproduce?

By answering these three questions, this thesis brings forward the following three contributions. First, it clearly identifies the empirical social processes that contribute to the social reproduction of precarity. Instead of taking the structural oppression, exploitation, and precarity of all migrant women as a given, I identify the actual empirical mechanisms and socio-cultural structures that enable the perpetuation of said disadvantaged position. Using the concept of Life's Work, which I introduce in Section 1.3, below, I identify and examine the processes of citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation, which, respectively, result in legal, labour, and social precarity. Second, this thesis also illustrates the interconnectedness between these empirical processes and the underlying

socio-cultural structure of gender. Indeed, these processes and structures do not happen in a vacuum, but rather, are deeply interconnected and exacerbate each other (Katz, 2004; Kobayashi & Peake, 1994; Mitchell et al., 2004). In other words, this thesis explains how these empirical processes and pre-existing socio-cultural structures, reinforce the norms, expectations, biases, and hierarchies that, in turn, are used by the Korean host state, its institutions, and society, to justify the conditional rights, labour differentiation, and marginalisation and subordination of Mongolian migrant women (Katz et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2004; Strauss & Meehan, 2015). Third and finally, I demonstrate the active entanglement of Mongolian migrant women in the social reproduction of these different, yet interconnected, iterations of precarity. I do so with two objectives in mind: to illustrate that these processes and precarity are not experienced in a single, uniformed way by all Mongolian migrant women; and to illustrate the relevance of their agency in mitigating precarity. In short, instead of framing my interviewees as either completely subordinated outsiders or strategic political activists, I show that different groups of Mongolian migrant women navigate these processes in ways that reflect their visa status and background, and are therefore entangled, in their own specific ways, in the power struggles, legal-institutional spaces, and social relations and processes that reproduce their precarity (Hughes, 2020; Katz, 2004; MacLeavy et al., 2021).

1.3. Conceptual framework: Life's Work, gender, and agency

In order to answer the questions above, I develop a conceptual framework that draws primarily from Social Reproduction Theory and the concept of Life's Work, specifically. I explain my framework and the related literature in Chapter 2 of this thesis. At the core of my research approach lies the concept of 'Life's Work', first developed by Mitchell, Marston, and Katz (Katz, 2008; Katz et al., 2015; see also Mitchell et al., 2004; Strauss & Meehan, 2015). Life's Work captures the idea that precarity and exploitation are the norm in every aspect of life (i.e., life outside work) in patriarchal, nationalist, capitalist societies, rather than being a feature of labour relations only (i.e., life at work). I use this concept to identify and examine the empirical social processes which normalise the social

subordination of marginalised social groups across scales, and in doing so, reproduce various forms of interconnected precarity, exploitation, and oppression. Whilst Life's Work is at the centre of my conceptual framework, I engage with it using the lens of gender. I view gender as a process which creates and reproduces ever-evolving norms and expectations (i.e., gender identities) about what roles, behaviours, and attitudes are acceptable for women and men (see Section 2.3 of Chapter 2). Through the lens of gender, I highlight intra-group differences amongst Mongolian migrant women, specifically in terms of the different ways Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women navigate and mitigate the empirical social processes of Life's Work. Drawing on feminist geography literature (Kobayashi & Peake, 1994; Panelli, 2020; Hopkins, 2017), I also pay attention to migrant women's agency vis-a-vis these gendered power dynamics, and the empirical processes reproducing Life's Work. Reflecting and engaging with ideas and expressions of individual and collective agency is essential to avoid underestimating women's oppression or overestimating their individual power to resist systems of oppression (Meyers, 2002, p. 5). Indeed, "agency always needs to be 'grounded' or re-embedded in the space-time contexts of which it is a constituent process" (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2010, p. 218). Migrant women respond to their precarity and social disenfranchisement by employing their agency daily and across a spectrum of intentional acts, which complicate and blur the lines between vulnerability and political strategy (Favell, 2022; Katz, 2004; MacLeavy et al., 2021; Yeung & Mu, 2020). In short, whilst I discuss their disadvantaged position in Korean society, I do not view Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women as complete outsiders to or victims of these processes and structures of Life's Work.

1.4. Situating the research context: Mongolia and Korea

Whilst I provide detailed information about Mongolian and Korean norms and processes of gender, and about the Korean immigration system, labour relations and policies, and more throughout the thesis, in the subsections below, I include broader contextual information about Mongolia and Korea. I provide demographic data, and concisely explain Mongolia and Korea's recent political, economic,

and social transformations from the 1980s to the present. Both countries have experienced significant changes in their political, economic, and social systems over the past forty years, and it can be argued that these transformations have influenced emigration patterns in Mongolia, as well as immigration trends in Korea. In short, approximately during the same time, both Mongolia and Korea underwent drastic politico-economic transformations, which entailed complex and challenging democratisation processes and resulted in context-specific instances of inequality and gender discrimination, migration policies, and unwelcoming labour markets. Hence, below, I explain the current state of the Mongolian and Korean politico-economic systems, recent societal changes, and general information about migration trends to help contextualise my interviewees' lived experiences of migration.

1.4.1. Mongolia: democratisation, urban inequalities, and gender discrimination

Landlocked between Russia and China, Mongolia is a country often associated with its nomadic past and historical figures like Chinggis Khan (Ghengis Khan). Whilst the collective imagination often imagines pastoralism in the Mongolian steppes as the 'authentic' Mongolian way of life, I believe that paying attention to more recent politico-economic transitions, as well as contemporary urban inequalities, and systemic gender discrimination and labour precarity, is necessary to fully grasp why Mongolian women migrate in the first place. From the late 1980s, in its transition from a Soviet socialist system to a neoliberalmarket economy-based democracy, Mongolia underwent a dramatic period of economic, political, and social crises, the aftermath of which are still felt to this day (Buyandelgeriyn, 2007; Sneath, 2018). High inequality and unemployment rates, as well as limited access to housing and basic services in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar (Hamiduddin & Plueckhahn, 2021; Terbish et al., 2022; Terbish & Rawsthorne, 2016) make life in contemporary Mongolia challenging for its population of three million people (The World Bank, 2022b), especially for women who experience systemic gender discrimination at work and in broader society (Sneath, 2010, 2018). Below, I first discuss the aftermath of the democratisation of post-socialist Mongolia, the relationship between internal migration and socio-spatial inequalities in the capital city, and the main challenges that Mongolian women face in contemporary Mongolian society.

After a tumultuous separation from and violent conflict with the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty in 1911, Mongolia eventually became a Soviet socialist state, backed by the USSR, in 1924 (Rossabi 2005). During the Soviet era (1924-1989), the socialist state enforced collectivisation and provided a welfare and educational system to create a widespread sense of safety and support among the Mongolian people. Propaganda mechanisms were also implemented to portray starvation, illiteracy, and homelessness as issues of the past, ultimately resolved by the 'heroic socialist state' (Buyandelgeriyn, 2007, p.128-129). Critics point out that whilst education, healthcare, and employment in collectivised factories and farm were managed and provided by the state (Dierkes, 2012b, pp. 5–8), the socialist Mongolian state was also actively concealing the fragility of its economic system, its overstretched budget, and the inflated national debt to the Soviet Union (Buyandelger, 2013; Rossabi, 2005, p. 64). By the late 1980s, following the collapse of the USSR, several political parties and peaceful demonstrations intensified the call for democratisation, which ultimately led to the first democratic election in July 1990 (Sneath, 2010, 2018). In August 1990, the Soviet Union started cutting back on its trade relations with Mongolia, terminating its supply of mining equipment and gas, and ceasing the purchase of Mongolian meat. Soviet international aid and loans stopped soon after (Buyandelgeriyn, 2007, p. 129).

With its economy in complete shambles due to the termination of the USSR's support, the newly democratic Mongolian state sought the assistance of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, and of Japan, the United States, and other European countries. These international loans came with conditions: the newly elected Mongolian government had to establish a neoliberal market economy through a series of economic policies known as 'shock therapy' (Buyandelger, 2013, pp. 1–2; Dalaibuyan, 2012, p. 37; see also Dierkes, 2012b, p. 7). Privatisation of assets and land, farms and factories, the dismantlement of health and education-related welfare, and the growth of the mining sectors became the focal point of this shock therapy (Plueckhahn & Bumochir, 2018, p. 342). Privatisation, in particular, meant that, on paper:

"every Mongolian became, fleetingly, a potential capitalist – a property-owning shareholder entitled to a tiny portion of the profits made by former state enterprises. In practice, however, most Mongolians received next to nothing" (Sneath, 2018, pp. 475–476).

It should be noted that Mongolian political elites took advantage of the privatisation reforms and the sudden collapse of entire sectors and industries, and acquired most of the existing resources thanks to their political connections and other dubious deals (Plueckhahn & Bumochir, 2018; Sneath, 2018, p. 477). Herders and factory workers were left with no cattle, equipment, supplies, or land. Unemployment, inflation, inequality, and poverty, and a widespread sense of anxiety soared and spread across the country (Buyandelgeriyn, 2007; Dierkes, 2012a; H. Jones, 2006, p. 419; Rossabi, 2005, p. 45). A 'scavenger economy' based on the sale of scrap metals and construction materials from collapsed buildings and bankrupt companies became the norm (Sneath, 2018, p. 476). The economic devastation was particularly felt by ordinary Mongolians.

In the late 1990s, as the economy began to improve thanks to international aid and the growth of the mining sector (Daley et al., 2018; Empson, 2020; Sneath, 2018), so did Mongolians' views of capitalism (Sabloff, 2020; Theunissen, 2014). The capitalist economic model gained a dual purpose in newly democratic Mongolia. On the one hand, at the institutional level, neoliberal capitalist market economy-based democracy was and is still viewed as a political ideology and economic system that will allow Mongolia to be accepted by and become part of the 'free world', not just economically, but also culturally (Sabloff, 2020, p. 574). On the other hand, at the individual level, the Mongolian people began to view these newly acquired economic freedoms as critical aspects of democracy and self-determination, and, consequently, as tools to craft a better future for themselves. It should be pointed out that these hopes and economic advantages have not materialised yet, nearly three decades after the official establishment of the democratic Mongolian state. High rates of inequality, poverty, and unemployment are still widespread across the country (C. A. Johnson, 2008; Plueckhahn & Bumochir, 2018; Sneath, 2018; Terbish & Rawsthorne, 2016; Theunissen, 2014). In other words, whilst Mongolians were and still are deeply aware and dissatisfied with the current state of the

national economy, they hold somewhat optimistic and positive views about market economy-based democracy as a model (Plueckhahn and Bumochir, 2018), and what this system can do for them and their futures (Sabloff, 2020).

b. *Unplanned urbanisation and socio-spatial inequality in Ulaanbaatar's ger districts*

In the midst of the profound neoliberal restructuring of newly democratic Mongolia, the capital city of Ulaanbaatar (UB) has become the political, economic, and social focal centre of the country. UB is located in North central Mongolia (see Figure 1-1) and has approximately 1.5 million inhabitants - half of the entire Mongolian population (Terbish et al., 2022, 2024). Most of my interviewees were either from or had moved to UB before migrating to Seoul.[2] It is important to note that internal migration during the post-socialist transition has deeply shaped the expansion and the current socio-spatial landscape of the city. After the collapse of the USSR and of the Mongolian economy, urban residents initially fled to the countryside hoping to find a viable source of livelihood in pastoralism (Xu et al., 2021, p. 1). This initial de-urbanisation wave rapidly reversed as a massive number of former herding families started to settle down in the peri-urban areas of UB, once the economy began to show signs of improvements in the early 2000s (ibid., pp. 2–4). This move back to the city was also incentivised by the fact that, under the new 1992 Constitution, every citizen was entitled to a free plot of land. Ultimately, the city expanded from 7,282 hectares in 1988 to 31,144 hectares in 2017, especially in the peri-urban areas known as the ger districts (Myagmartseren et al., 2020, p. 146).

Over half of UB residents currently live in the ger districts, that is, nearly one third of the entire Mongolian population. The ger districts are unplanned semi-formal settlements comprising *ger* (i.e., the traditional felt tent used by nomads) and self-built houses (see Figures 1-2 and 1-3), which lack direct access to basic services like plumbing, heating, and electricity (Byambadorj et al., 2011; Heckmann, 2019; Terbish et al., 2022). These areas span from the centre of UB to the hills

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[2] The place of birth of my interviewees is in line with national statistics from Mongolia: according to the National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 74.5% of the total number of Mongolian citizens living abroad are from Ulaanbaatar (National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2020, p. 155).

surrounding the city (see Figure 1-4). In the ger districts, streets tend to be narrow, unpaved, unlit, and nameless, making the already limited means of affordable and reliable public transport even more inaccessible to ger districts residents (Hamiduddin & Plueckhahn, 2021). Additionally, discriminatory attitudes as well as the barriers reproduced through the physical built environment[3] (Terbish & Rawsthorne, 2016, pp. 90–94) mean that UB and especially, ger districts' residents, rely on their nuclear family and close relatives for support and economic opportunities.

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[3] By law, UB residents are expected to erect wooden fences to mark the area of land they own. It can be argued that the ger districts, despite being densely populated, do not facilitate interactions among neighbours, also due to the physical barriers that the required fencing creates. The lack of street addresses also contributes to exclusion from information and opportunities for community building (Terbish & Rawsthorne, 2016, pp. 97–98).
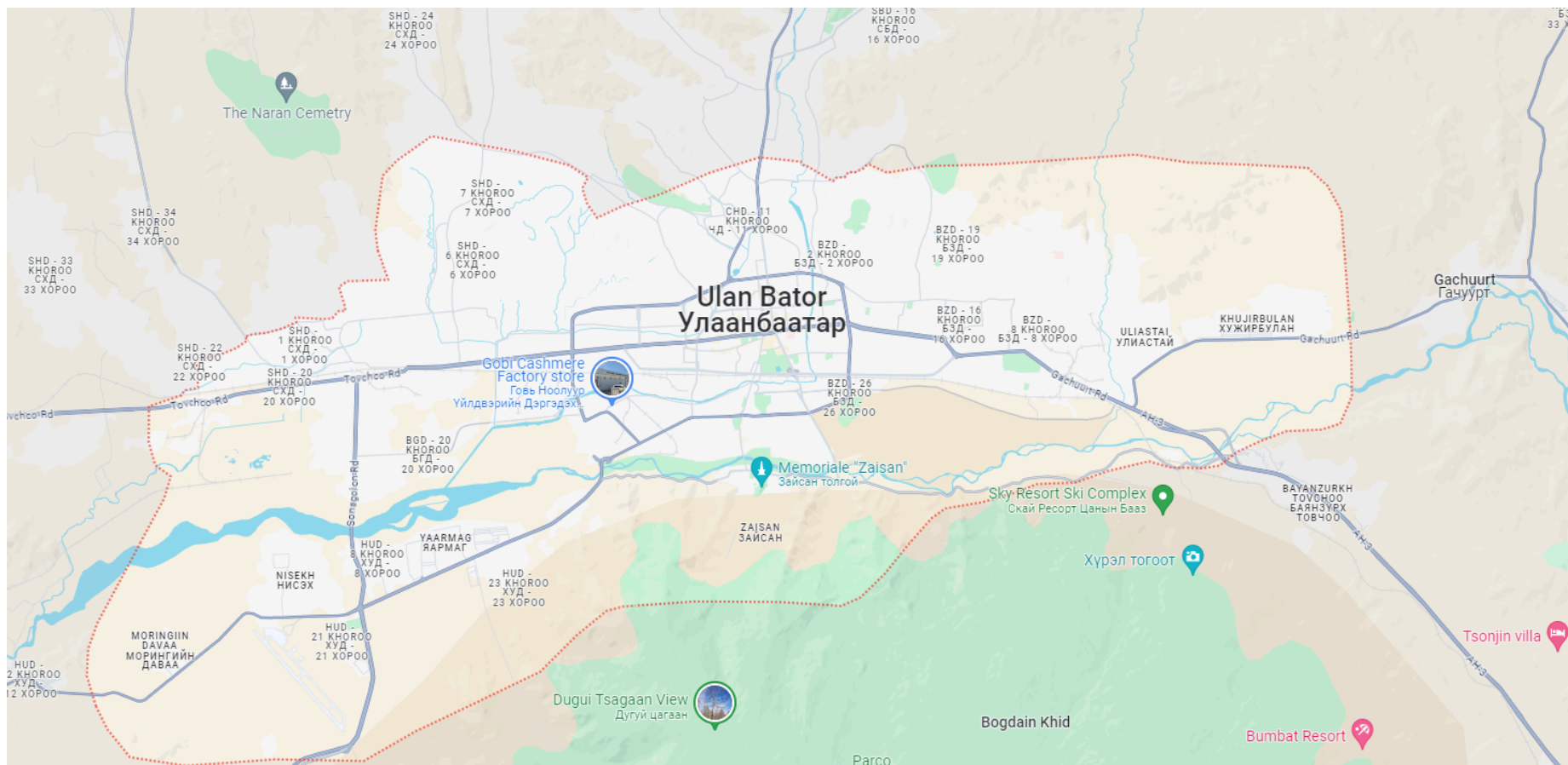
Figure 1-1: Map of Ulaanbaatar (Ulan Bator). Retrieved on Google Maps (May, 17th, 2024).

It should be noted that the unplanned expansion and problematic housing composition in UB have also become political points of contention in recent years. Whilst Mongolia has tried to reinvent itself to meet global standards of economic and urban development (Diener & Hagen, 2013b, 2013a; Erdenejargal, 2020; Szczap, 2020), the ger districts have remained a tangible and intangible obstacle to the pursuit of Mongolia's global status as a modern Asian powerhouse, which continues to exacerbate existing socio-economic divisions among UB residents (Hamiduddin & Plueckhahn, 2021; Plueckhahn & Terbish, 2018; Terbish & Rawsthorne, 2016). In terms of social divisions, it should be noted that socio-economic status and someone's place of birth are more important factors than ethnic background in the Mongolian society, since nearly all nationals are part of the same ethnic group, i.e., the *Halh* (Billé, 2010; Bulag, 1998, 2003). Simply put, being an internal migrant and living in the ger districts carry more weight than ethnic background in the interactions between UB residents because of the socio-economic and cultural implications these differences entail (Hamiduddin & Plueckhahn, 2021; Terbish et al., 2022; Terbish & Rawsthorne, 2016; Xu et al., 2021).

Figure 1-2: A picture of the ger districts in northern UB (taken by the author in 2017). Unpaved nameless streets create maze-like pathways around wooden fences encircling *ger*s and houses.

Figure 1-3: A picture of the ger districts in UB (taken by the author in 2017). Coal-burning stoves in gers and self-built houses alike create a thick fog of air pollution.

Figure 1-4: A view of Southern UB from the eastern ger districts (picture taken by the author in 2017). The ger districts spread from central UB in all directions, and all the way over the hills surrounding the city.

c. Life as a Mongolian woman: gender biases, labour discrimination, and migration

When compounded with structural issues in the national economic system, and limited access to healthcare and basic services, making a liveable and stable salary in UB and the ger districts can be particularly challenging for women. In general, despite higher levels of education among Mongolian women (Weller, 2020), the labour market remains highly segmented and openly discriminatory, resulting in high rates of unemployment, limited job offers, wage inequality, and unsustainable work/life balance for most Mongolian women, but especially for those of rural and/or lower socio-economic background (Betcherman et al., 2022; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018). Since UB is the social, cultural, political, and economic hub of the country, and is also where half of the entire Mongolian population lives, literature on the labour market in Mongolia mostly draws from experiences, issues, and trends from the capital city, where small firms in the private sector have not been able to generate the job creation needed to accommodate the skills and employment needs of the young and skilled working population (Betcherman et al., 2022, pp. 41–42; Khan et al., 2013). For those women who can afford it, higher education - rather than the workplace - is a site where social networks can be formed (Dalaibuyan, 2012, pp. 49–50) so that integral business negotiations and informal reciprocity can be maintained to secure economic opportunities (Plueckhahn & Terbish, 2018, p. 453).

Additionally, it should be noted that, regardless of their financial means or educational qualification, Mongolian women deal with the double burden of waged employment and domestic care labour (Benwell, 2006; Khan et al., 2013; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018), and face deeply rooted gender discrimination in and beyond the workplace (Batchuluun, 2021; Begzsuren et al., 2022; Janes, 2004). A sharp reduction in public childcare provision and facilities in the post-socialist transition has further constrained the participation of Mongolian women in the labour force (Burn & Oyuntsetseg, 2001, p. 12; Begzsuren et al., 2022, p. 4). Even for Mongolian women who do enjoy a higher socio-economic status, it is uncommon to gain managerial and top positions in businesses or the government, as these roles are predominantly given to men (Weller, 2020; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018).

Before migrating to Korea, many of my interviewees worked as independent sellers or in the service industry, more broadly, and only few had office jobs (more on current state of the Mongolian labour market in Section 5.2.1 of Chapter 5).

In the face of widespread inequality, unemployment, and informal urban economies and poor urban living standards (Plueckhahn & Terbish, 2018; Terbish et al., 2024), international migration has become for some Mongolians a way to better their lives (Heckmann, 2019). In the 2020 census, the National Statistics Office of Mongolia reported that there were 122,301 Mongolian citizens residing abroad, of which the majority (approximately 40,000) lived in Korea (National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2020, pp. 158–159). According to the same national census, the most common reasons for residing in Korea are self-employment (29.7%), study (27.7%), and employment contract (19.4%) (see Table 1-1). Indeed, Korea is the country where most Mongolian nationals reside for work-related purposes, and where most of my interviewees had an opportunity to gain additional educational qualifications and a higher salary than in UB (more on my interviewees' visa type and migration rationales can be found in Section 4.2 of Chapter 4). The national census data aligns with the migration rationales and visa types of my interviewees, the majority of whom held student visas, work visas, and business (self-employment) visas. Although not specified in the 2020 census, it is possible that Mongolian citizens holding a marriage visa fall into the 'others' (9.9%) group, as family reason refers to Mongolians, usually spouses and children of another visa holder, who hold a dependent or family reunification visa.

Country of residence	Number	Percent	Study	Residence	Employment contract	Foreign mission	Self-employment	Family reason	Others
TOTAL	**122 301**	**100.0**	**34.2**	**11.7**	**10.4**	**1.0**	**20.6**	**12.6**	**9.5**
South Korea	39 982	100.0	27.7	4.6	19.4	0.6	29.7	8.1	9.9
USA	19 170	100.0	37.0	17.2	3.6	0.8	15.4	15.0	11.0
Japan	8 772	100.0	49.1	8.1	8.6	1.5	13.8	11.7	7.2
Kazakhstan	7 218	100.0	21.5	40.2	2.8	0.2	9.8	17.9	7.6
Czech	5 997	100.0	19.6	10.7	19.8	1.0	25.1	15.9	7.9

Table 1-1: Mongolian citizens residing abroad by residence purpose at time of the census and percentage, 2020 (National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2020, p. 159). The table was edited by the author to only showcase the top five destination countries.

In summary, in Section 1.4.1, I explained that, following the collapse of the USSR in the late 1980s, Mongolia underwent a complex and challenging democratisation transition from a Soviet socialist politico-economic system to a capitalist market economy-based model. This shift was characterised by a series of 'shock therapy' reforms, which particularly emphasised privatisation of all land and assets, leaving ordinary people with little to no resources and jobs. Whilst in theory all citizens should have benefitted from this transition, in reality the national economy entered a state of deep crisis. Eventually, in the 1990s, international loans and aid, as well as the growth of the mining sector, improved the economy, incentivising Mongolian citizens to settle down in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar (UB) in the hope of finding stable forms of employment. Half of the three million Mongolian people now live in UB. I explained that as a result of this sudden and sharp increase in internal migration, UB became the political, economic, social and cultural focal point of the country. However, the unplanned expansion of the city, and especially of its semi-formal settlements known as the ger districts, has resulted in high levels of socio-spatial inequality, exclusion, pollution, and poor living standards. Residents in UB also face high job insecurity and unemployment rates. Work-wise, Mongolian women, in particular, are doubly disadvantaged, in that they are widely expected to engage in both waged employment and unwaged domestic labour, whilst being systematically discriminated against in the labour market. As a result of the politico-economic transition, socio-spatial inequalities, and limited employment opportunities, I explained that international migration has become for over

122,000 Mongolians a way to access better opportunities. The majority of them (approximately 40,000 people according to the national census) currently reside and work in Korea.

1.4.2. Korea: developmental policies, societal restructurings, and migration trends

In this subsection, I will discuss the recent politico-economic transitions, and social, economic, and cultural changes, that have contributed to Korea's international image as an appealing destination country. It should be noted that both in the Northeast Asian region as well as internationally, Korea has become renowned for its reputation as a modern, global, economic powerhouse (OECD, 2021; S. Yoon, 2022). Like Mongolia, Korea did not develop its current politico-economic system overnight. Korea's growth and modernisation accelerated first between the 1960s and 1980s, when developmental authoritarian regimes prioritised economic development to the detriment of political, social, and cultural rights and freedoms (H.-K. Lee, 2015, p. 81; B.-G. Park et al., 2011; C.-S. Suh & Kwon, 2014). From the late 1980s, as the democratisation process continued to unfold, state policies pushed the country towards industrialisation and a restructuring of the labour systems to ensure its rapid economic growth and international reputation as a modern economic powerhouse (P. Y. Chang, 2015, pp. 198–204; Noland, 2012). As the Korean economy transformed, so did its society. Despite its population currently exceeding 50 million people (The World Bank, 2022a), new employment expectations, gender wage gaps, a highly competitive labour market, high living expenses (especially in the capital city of Seoul), as well as an ageing population, have resulted in low birth rates and various manual labour and reproductive labour shortages, which the state has tried to address with specific migration policies (Heo, 2015; Hundt, 2015; C.-S. Suh & Kwon, 2014). Below, I explain in more detail the democratisation process in Korea, and the resulting societal changes that have shaped Korean women's lived experiences in the labour market, recent immigration trends, and the international image of Korea - and Seoul - that keeps attracting international migrants.

a. *Korea's developmental past and present*

Following the end of the Korean War (1950-1953), a series of authoritarian regimes and revolutions occurred, until a military coup in 1961 led to the establishment of the (third) Republic of Korea under

the oppressive and developmental regime of General Park Chung-hee, which lasted between 1963 and 1979 (P. Y. Chang, 2015, pp. 16–22). During this period, the Korean state actively and coercively intervened in every aspect of the national economy, including currency devaluation, real interest rate increases (Noland, 2012, p. 24), and government-led and export-led industrialisation (Hundt, 2015; C.-S. Suh & Kwon, 2014, p. 681). In the 1960s, Park's developmental regime also established strategic relationships with the *chaebols* (i.e., large family-run conglomerates) to promote the growth of the heavy and chemical industries (C.-S. Suh & Kwon, 2014). Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, civil movements comprising students, religious groups, academics, journalists and lawyers, whose activism and protest work started in the 1960s, intensified their calls for democratisation and protection of all human rights (P. Y. Chang, 2015; H. B. Shin, 2019). After the assassination of Park in 1979, major restructuring involving the liberalisation and deregulation of the economy took place, further spurred by the stability of the industrial economy.

The liberalisation and rapid growth of the national economy carried on until 1997, when the Asian financial crisis hit. In response to the crisis, the role and importance of *chaebols* in sustaining and shaping the Korean economy as vehicles of the state's economic reforms was challenged only partially (B.-D. Choi, 2012; Douglass, 2020; see also B.-G. Park et al., 2011; C.-S. Suh & Kwon, 2014, p. 689). Drastic financial and corporate restructurings were also implemented, under pressures from the International Monetary Fund, so that the *chaebols* would "reduce debt, abolish debt guarantees, sell unprofitable affiliate firms and concentrate on core businesses, and improve their financial transparency and corporate governance" (S.-J. Chang, 2006, pp. 57-58; see also Horowitz, 2002, pp. 90-93). For instance, labour reforms were introduced to facilitate the hiring process of temporary workers with fewer labour protections and rights (Y. Lee, 2015, p. 199), and, in general, the *chaebols* implemented sexist and classist corporate policies privileging South Korean middle-aged men in managerial positions (S. J. Yoon, 2021, pp. 18-21).

As far as today's Korean labour market is concerned, gender role attitudes and expectations, gender discrimination in the recruitment and promotion decision-making process, lack of affordable

childcare, and wage inequality are all factors perpetuating lower female labour participation rates (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; C.-H. Kim & Oh, 2022; H. Kwon & Doellgast, 2018; H. Yang, 2021). For reference, the male labour force participation rate was 72.7% in 2021, whereas the female labour force participation rate was 53% in 2021 (The World Bank, 2023). Cultural norms such as an excessive work culture emphasising and rewarding long work hours and performance over job security (S. J. Yoon, 2021, p. 84; Horowitz, 2002; S.-J. Chang, 2006), and parenting culture reproducing gender essentialism (i.e., the belief that men and women are born with distinctively different natures, which are biologically predetermined; e.g., men are leaders, and women are caregivers, 'by nature'), are still significantly widespread (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023, pp. 208-210; Um, 2023, pp. 1686-1687). I discuss the Korean labour market and all its features and shortcomings in more detail in Section 5.2.2 of Chapter 5. In short, the coexistence of excessive and performance-driven work culture mixed with gender essentialism have made labour relations unsustainable for many Korean women who either have to quit their jobs or work part-time if they want to have children (more on the gendered repercussions of developmental state labour policies in the subsections below).

b. *Key societal changes and related immigration trends*

In addition to developmental state policies, democratisation processes, and neoliberal economic restructurings, Korea has also undergone significant social, cultural, and demographic changes. Scholars have paid attention to the link between these changes and Korea's international rise as a migration destination for labour and marriage migrants, as well as international students (H.-K. Lee, 2015; Seol, 2015; Torneo, 2016). It should be noted that this was not always the case: Korea transitioned from an emigration to an immigration country in the 1990s (Torneo, 2016, p. 139; S. J. Yoon, 2021, pp. 14-15), with "international migrant stocks in the Republic of Korea increas[ing] by almost forty times from 43,000 in 1990 to 1,730,000 in 2020" (T. Lee, 2022, p. 9). According to national statistics, in 2023 (see Figure 1-5), the top three countries of origin of migrants in Korea are China, Vietnam, and the United States (T. Lee, 2022; OECD, 2023). China and the United States are home to large shares of the Korean diaspora. Korean ethnic Chinese are known as *Joseonjok* and

make up the largest share of migrants in Korea. Due to institutionalised discriminatory practices (i.e., certain nationalities are regarded as more desirable than others), Korean ethnic Chinese tend to only qualify for the Work and Visit H-2, allowing co-ethnic from developing countries to work in Korea with few labour rights, visa freedoms, and job prospects. Conversely, it is well documented that co-ethnics from the United States can easily receive the Overseas Ethnic Korean F-4 visa, which grants them more rights and opportunities in Korea (E. A. Chung, 2017, 2020a; Seol, 2015; Seol & Skrentny, 2009). Mongolia ranks as the tenth country of origin among international migrants in Korea (see Figure 1-6), with an approximately equal share of male and female migrants (T. Lee, 2022, p. 10; OECD, 2023, p. 247). Migration is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of factors (de Haas, 2014; de Haas et al., 2020; McAuliffe & Goossens, 2018; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003). In the case of Korea, various interconnected socio-cultural, demographic, and economic changes resulting from the politico-economic and social transformations of the 1990s, have been connected with recent immigration trends (more on Korea's migration governance and visa system can be found in Section 4.2.2 of Chapter 4). I will discuss these changes in relation to, firstly, labour migration, then marriage migration, and finally, international student migration.

Inflows of top 10 nationalities
(national definition)
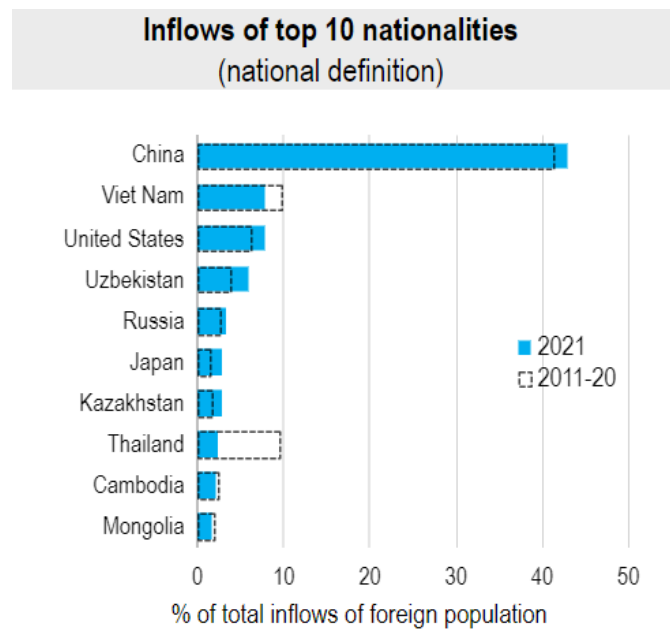
Figure 1-5: Inflows of top 10 nationalities to Korea (OECD, 2023, p. 247).
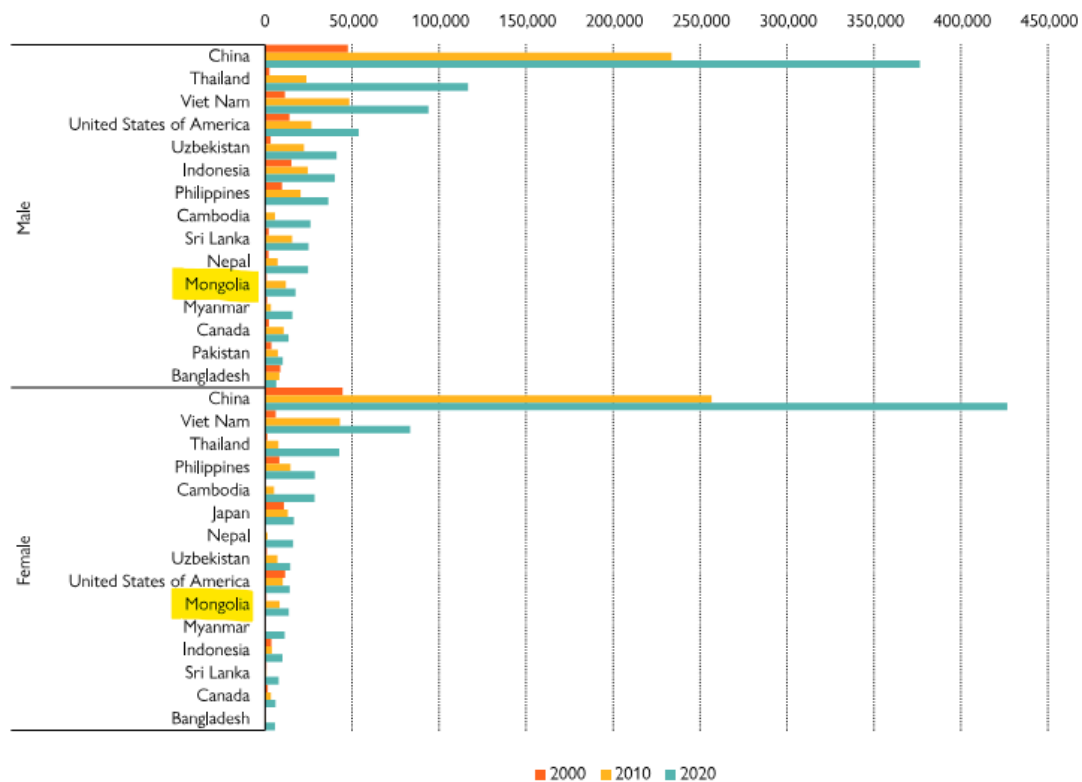
Source: DESA, 2020.

Figure 1-6: Top 15 countries of origin by sex, 2000–2020 (T. Lee, 2022, p. 10). The author highlighted 'Mongolia' in the Figure to increase readability.

First of all, whilst industrialisation in the late 1980s spurred the growth of the Korean national economy, it also entailed a high demand for manual labour, which Korean citizens were increasingly reluctant to engage in (C. Kim, 2015; Seol, 2015). Simply put, widespread economic prosperity meant that working in small- and medium-scale factories, in construction, farms and fisheries, became considerably less appealing to the Korean workforce, which now had the educational qualifications and professional skills to pursue more socially desirable forms of employment (Lim, 2012; OECD, 2019a; Stokes, 2024). Even in the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis, when unemployment rates skyrocketed, many Koreans were still unwilling to take up manual labour in factories and farms (H.-K. Lee, 2015; Lim, 2012, p. 517). This is not to say that Koreans stopped engaging in manual labour altogether; rather, it was - and still is - less common and less desirable for the majority of the population. Older generations and women tend to be employed in the service and informal economies often as a way to make a living on top of their pensions (H. Kwon & Doellgast, 2018; Y. Lee & Yeung, 2021; Y. Seo & Toh, 2023).

In the face of structural labour shortages, the hollowing out of factories, and changes in employment expectations in the national labourforce, the Korean state found a solution in temporary labour migration (Kong et al., 2010, p. 258; Lim, 2012, p. 508; OECD, 2019a). Labour migration was loosely regulated in the early 1990s, with tens of thousands of foreign workers being employed in factories, farms, and construction sites, despite these being non-authorised sectors under industrial training programmes at the time (Lim, 2012, p. 510). During this initial period, undocumented labour migration became a significant issue which, to this day, still is a "substantial, chronic and persistent" problem in the eyes of the Korean state and society (Torneo, 2016, p. 155; C. Kim et al., 2022; Lan Nguyen et al., 2023). From the 1990s to the early 2000s and the present, the Korean state has continued to establish, revise, and run various guest worker programmes and reforms to simultaneously secure a restricted inflow of cheap temporary foreign manual labour for small- and medium-scale enterprises, targeting both migrants of Korean descent and Southeast and Central Asian foreign workers. (Y.-J. Lee, 2011; Lim, 2012, pp. 510-512; S.-H. Park, 2017; Seol, 2015, p. 64). I

discuss Korea's labour migration policies and programmes in more detail under subheading *E-9, E-7, and D-10 work visas* in Section 4.2.2 of Chapter 4.

Secondly, industrialisation, democratisation, and economic prosperity also influenced and reshaped the role of Korean women in society, inadvertently contributing to Korea's reproductive crisis. Higher levels of education, greater employment opportunities as well as market competition and job insecurity, and lack of a strong welfare system, contributed to Korean women's decision to postpone or even reject marriage, in order to safeguard and prioritise their careers and personal development over caring responsibilities (E. A. Chung, 2020e; G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016, 2017, p. 24; H.-K. Lee, 2015, pp. 88-89). In the early 2000s, this change in societal preferences resulted in a decline in the national birth rate. Korean men, especially those of lower socio-economic status or living in rural areas, found themselves with little to no relationship prospects. Resorting to international marriage became a strategy to find a match in women from developing Asian countries, who were thought to be more likely to engage in domestic work and caring duties towards the husband and his elderly parents (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021; H.-K. Lee, 2015, p. 88; see also T. Lee, 2022; Yeoh et al., 2013).

Initially, international marriage started with a large number of ethnic Korean women from China, but later spread to Southeast and Central Asian countries, too (G. Kim & Kilkey, 2017, p. 27; Kong et al., 2010, p. 271; Torneo, 2016, p. 139). Commercial matchmaking industries also emerged and flourished from the early 2000s, and currently operate according to state policies aimed at limiting and deterring illegal activities and abuse (G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016, pp. 29-30; H.-K. Lee, 2015, p. 89; Seol, 2015, p. 67). It should be noted that the Korean state neither encourages nor suppresses international marriage, but rather manages it through specific integration policies aimed at the socio-cultural assimilation of marriage migrant women (E. A. Chung, 2020e; Seol, 2015, p. 67). I provide more information on marriage visa and integration policies under subheadings *F-6 marriage visa* and *Korean naturalisation* in Section 4.2.2 of Chapter 4.

Thirdly and finally, centralised and developmental economic policies, changes in employment preferences, and falling birth rates, also reshaped the higher education sector of Korea. During the 2000s, the government implemented a series of reforms to internationalise Korean higher education institutions. These policies had various objectives, but from the late 1990s onwards, they were meant to attract international students, and generate income for domestic universities which were dealing with a decrease in the freshman-age student population (Byun & Kim, 2011, pp. 468-470; Jon et al., 2014, pp. 696-698). Most notably, the 'Study Korea Project' was launched in 2004 to recruit 50,000 international students, primarily from China, by 2010 (Jon et al., 2014, p. 695; K.-S. Kwon, 2013, p. 39; S.-W. Lee, 2017, pp. 172-173). It should be noted that more than 70% of international students originated from two neighbouring countries, namely China and Japan (Byun & Kim, 2011; Jon et al., 2014; H. N. Suh et al., 2019, p. 992), and that in general, "Asian students from all regions prioritized the financial and practical aspects of studying in Korea, such as obtaining a visa, proximity to home country, living cost, and safety concerns than those from Western countries" (Jon et al., 2014, p. 704).

Since the 2000s, the Korean state has continued to actively invest in higher education programmes to increase the inflow of international students. In 2023, the Ministry of Education announced a plan to attract 300,000 foreign students by 2027 to fuel the national economy with high-skilled workers in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) by expanding English-taught programmes and streamlining the process to receive permanent residency (ICEF monitor, 2023; J. Park, 2024). The Korean state is still struggling to attract students from other regions (especially from Western countries), despite its considerable investments in English-taught instructions in the form of degree and non-degree programmes (Jon et al., 2014; K.-S. Kwon, 2013; Moon, 2023). As recently as May 2024, the Seoul Metropolitan Government also announced its own plan to attract approximately 1,000 foreign postgraduate students pursuing degrees in STEM to universities in the capital by 2028; these investments are part of the city's strategy to compete for foreign talent with other global cities (S. Cho, 2024; Jun, 2024). In short, it can be argued that the Korean state heavily regulates various types of migration flows through complex policies and criteria

which differ considerably according to the migrants' skills and expertise, but also their gender and country of origin (E. A. Chung, 2017, 2020a; Hong, 2018).

c. Global city Seoul: high-skilled migration versus migrant enclaves

Migration trends do not solely depend on national policies and macroeconomic factors. Whilst national economic and political systems in the origin and destination countries do play an important role in international migration rationales and patterns, so do cities with their infrastructures, amenities, and economic opportunities (Buch et al., 2014; de Haas et al., 2020; Hakim et al., 2022; Yap, 1977). On the one hand, poor living standards and limited job pool in Ulaanbaatar have driven Mongolians to seek opportunities abroad; on the other hand, it can be argued that the city of Seoul has also contributed to Korea's international image as an appealing destination country. Far more densely populated and urbanised than UB, Seoul has a population of over 9.6 million people (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2024). Since the 1990s, the city of Seoul has actively invested in its growing economy, infrastructure, marketing strategies, and urban landscape (see Figures 1-7), with the objective of becoming an exciting and liveable global city that could compete for global capital and talent (Collins, 2018; Gretzel et al., 2018; Joo, 2019, 2023). The attractiveness of economic opportunities and activities, the quality of infrastructure and amenities, together with the presence of firms and multinationals, all became important assets in these endeavours (see also Baas et al., 2020; J. Chang & Kim, 2016, pp. 545-546; Ewers, 2007). Megaprojects, including the beautification of downtown Seoul, the greenwashing of the Cheonggye stream project, and other strategic city branding, have also supported the city government's pursuit of 'global city' status (Douglass, 2020; Joo, 2019, 2023; S. H. Park et al., 2021).
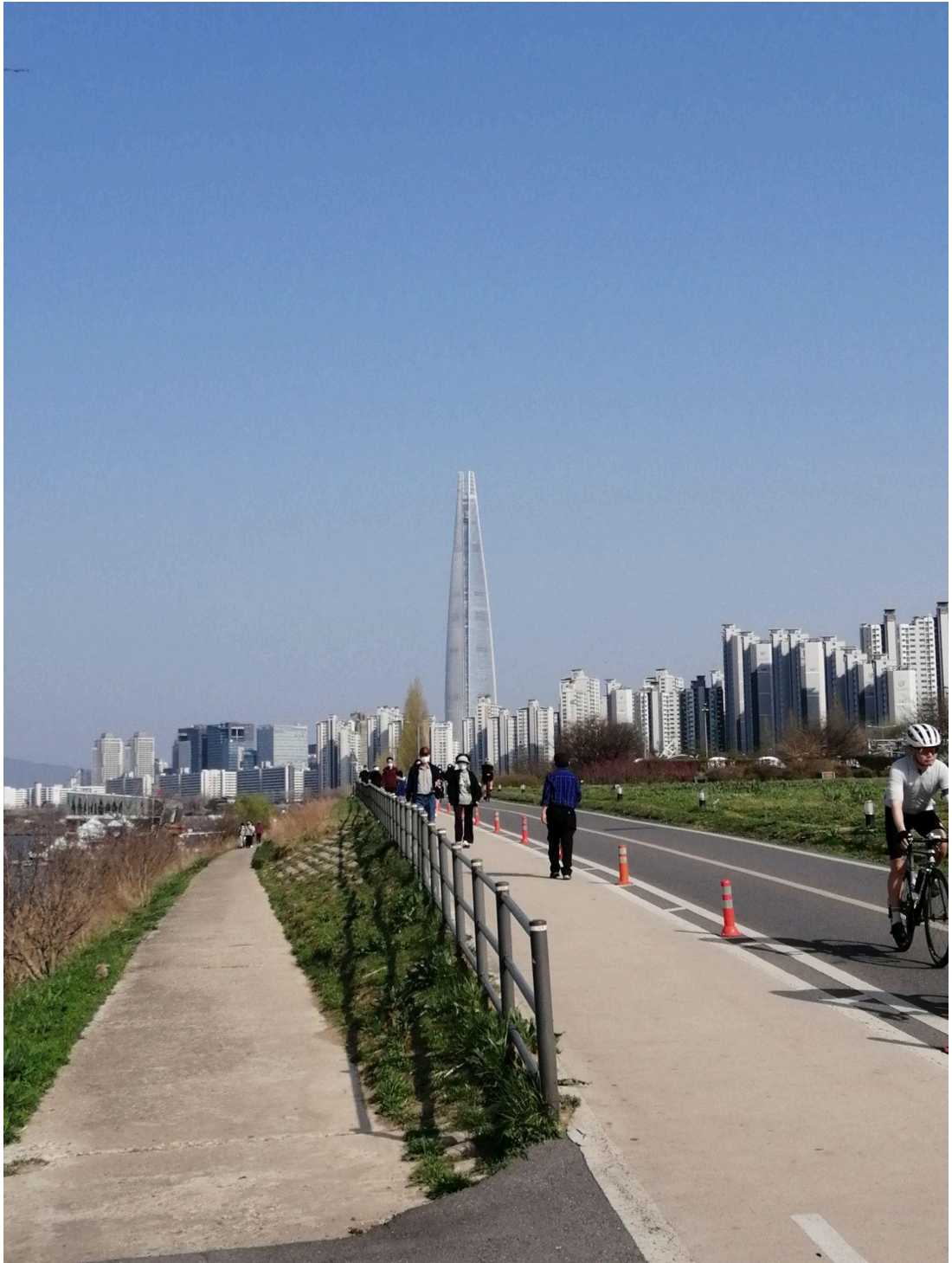
Figure 1-7: A picture of Seoul taken along the Han river (taken by the author in 2022). The south bank of Seoul has become known for its dense urban landscape, characterised by tall apartment buildings and spectacular skyscrapers like the Lotte tower (pictured).

It is important to point out that, like the national government, the Seoul Metropolitan Government actively and strategically invests in plans to attract and retain specific groups of international migrants. In the case of Seoul, these are 'global talent' such as top students in STEM as well as entrepreneurs, expatriates, and executives, whose international human capital can, at least on paper, benefit the social and economic development of the city itself (Beaverstock, 2011; Ewers, 2007; J. Park, 2024). In actuality, the overall share of high-skilled migrants in Korea is considerably low - only 3.2% in 2016, although it is likely some professionals may have acquired residence permits and are now classified as permanent migrants; the share of permanent migrants in Korea was 8% in 2016 (OECD, 2019a, p. 44). Additionally, whilst certain neighbourhoods do accommodate expatriates (J. Chang & Kim, 2016; J.-Y. Kim, 2016), most are characterised by ethnic enclaves and businesses (like Mongol Town, see Section 3.2 of Chapter 3; also see Figure 1-8) servicing labour, marriage, and student migrants (Jeon & Jung, 2019; Seol, 2010). It should also be noted that everyday encounters between migrants and Koreans in the workplace, public spaces, and higher education institutions, have resulted in instances of social exclusion and discrimination (Asor, 2020; H. Cho, 2022; Sottini, 2024; H. N. Suh et al., 2019; Udor & Yoon, 2022). I discuss these uneven power dynamics and instances of othering in more detail in Chapter 6.

Figure 1-8: A picture of an ethnic enclave (Korean Chinese) in Seoul (taken by the author in 2021).

In short, in Section 1.4.2, I explained that Korea, like Mongolia, underwent a complex politico-economic transition from authoritarian regime to democratic republic. Developmental state policies proved to be essential in delivering national economic growth and prosperity, albeit to the detriment of political, social, and civil freedoms. I also discussed the role of the *chaebols* - large family-run conglomerates - in the restructuring of the Korean economy, and the consequences this restructuring has had on Korea's labour market and on Korean women, especially. I then explained that other foundational societal shifts and transformations came out of the democratisation period. From the 1990s, changes in employment expectations, access to higher education, Korean women's prioritisation of career over caring responsibilities, and decrease in birth rates, led to manual labour shortages, a reproductive crisis, and drop in student population. I illustrated that the Korean state addressed each of these societal issues through specific migration policies, turning Korea from an emigration to an immigration country. In this regard, I also reflected on the role that the capital city of Seoul has had on recent immigration trends, and the relationship between its pursuit of 'global' status and migration.

1.5. Thesis structure

After this introductory chapter, this thesis is divided into six further chapters. Chapter 2 presents the conceptual framework that is at the core of the main arguments and contributions of this thesis. I engage with Social Reproduction Theory and specifically, the concept of Life's Work. I explain that the social reproduction of Life's Work does not happen in a vacuum, but it is rather a multiscalar, intergenerational process that involves a wide range of socio-cultural structures, like gender, and daily empirical processes. In Chapter 2, I also provide a review of the existing literature on migration to Korea, to exemplify how material structures like Korean immigration policies are actively contributing to the reproduction of Life's Work and gendered migrant precarity.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology that I adopted for data collection and analysis, and discuss the methodological, practical, and ethical challenges of fieldwork. More specifically, I focus

on issues regarding access, recruitment of interviewees, working with research assistants, positionality, and other challenges stemming from having to navigate COVID-19 social distancing measures. I also pay attention to and elaborate on the adaptive process and realisations that I dealt with after leaving the field. Specifically, how I had to rethink my approach to data analysis and post-research ethics to ensure my analyses and interpretations of the data were critical, ethical, and insightful.

In the first empirical chapter, Chapter 4, I examine the empirical process of citizenship-making, which I argue is deeply informed by gendered norms and expectations determining migrant women's value in Korea's visa system. I show that this process contributes to the social reproduction of Life's Work in the form of legal precarity, that is, as limited and conditional access to citizenship rights and freedoms in the Korean immigration system and broader society. This chapter explains how this process works in practice, what legal precarity looks like for different groups of Mongolian migrant women, and how each group employs their agency to mitigate said precarity. Here, I also provide a descriptive overview of my interviewees' migration rationales, and of the various types of visas my interviewees have applied for as a result of their migration rationales. I also present Korean immigration policies and mission statements and explain technical terms and visa application processes. The chapter ends with concluding remarks about the social reproduction of migrant women's legal precarity, and the complex entanglement between the citizenship-making, Life's work, and migrant agency.

In the second empirical chapter, Chapter 5, I examine the social process of labour differentiation in the Korean labour market. I argue that pre-existing material structural barriers (e.g., unwelcoming work culture, lack of public childcare, a highly competitive and segmented labour market), stemming from the social structure and relations of gender, reproduce the devaluation of migrant women's market value, which in turns results in migrant women's labour precarity. This precarity entails conditional access to a limited pool of highly segmented, insecure, and precarious jobs, which is further exacerbated by the legal precarity resulting from the process of

citizenship-making (see Chapter 4) and gender structures. Chapter 5 also shows that marriage and labour migrant women also experience and respond to labour precarity in different ways, depending on their specific resources and personal experiences of labour differentiation and precarity. In this chapter, I also explain Mongolia and Korea's current labour markets, which are equally characterised by systematically low female labour participation rates, and widespread gender discrimination, wage inequality, and job insecurity, and the specific societal expectations in terms of what kind of labour women should engage in both Mongolia and Korea.

The third and final empirical chapter, Chapter 6, examines the everyday process of ethnicisation that Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women deal with, which I argue reproduces Life's Work in the form of social precarity. By social precarity, I am referring to the social hierarchisation of Mongolian women on the basis of their gender, nationality and ethnic traits. In Chapter 6, I discuss the different ways Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women experience gendered ethnicisation and social precarity by providing examples of how they are differently ethnicised by Korean acquaintances and strangers in various spaces of everyday life. I also examine the different mitigation strategies (reciprocating ethnicisation and re-narration) that different groups of Mongolian migrant women use to mitigate their social precarity and navigate the process of gendered ethnicisation. In this chapter, I also explain why ethnicisation is better suited, compared to the widely (mis-)used concept of racialisation, to describe the process of essentialisation and othering that Mongolian migrant women experience in Korea.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this thesis by presenting the answers to the research questions in Section 1.2, and the three key contributions of this thesis. I discuss directions for future research and provide final remarks about Life's Work, gender, and agency.

Chapter 2 - Life's Work, gender, and the social processes of migrant precarity

Conceptual framework and literature review

2.1. Introduction

In this thesis, I identify and explain the empirical processes - namely citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation - which reproduce the various forms of gendered precarity - namely, legal, labour, and social precarity - that Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women experience in Korea across a wide range of scales (the national, the local) and spaces (private, public). To do so, my conceptual framework draws from Social Reproduction Theory. More specifically, it is centred on the concept of Life's Work, which I engage using the lens of gender. Life's Work (Katz, 2001a, 2008; Katz et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2004) captures the idea that the precarity, oppression, and exploitation that are usually associated with uneven labour relations under capitalism, are actually the norm in every aspect of life (e.g., limited and unfair access to infrastructure, social justice, healthcare, education, and housing; see Katz, 2008). This all-encompassing precarity thus involves a wide range of social actors across different scales, and is tightly intertwined with other underlying socio-cultural structures, including gender.

Since Life's Work stresses the all-encompassing nature of precarity under capitalism, it is essential to narrow down the focus of my empirical analysis onto specific empirical processes, and thus illustrate how these specific and distinct experiences of precarity are interconnected and reproduced. To demonstrate this interconnectedness between spaces and processes reproducing the reality of Life's Work, I use the lens of gender. I engage with feminist geography literature to demonstrate that gendered norms and expectations from Mongolian and Korean patriarchal societies deeply inform the empirical, socio-cultural processes which normalise and reproduce the multifaceted precarity of Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women (Bastia et al., 2023; Hopkins, 2017; McNally, 2017; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021). More specifically, the study of Life's Work can benefit

from a gendered analysis for three main reasons. First, it is important to remember that the empirical social processes reproducing Life's Work - namely citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation - do not happen in a vacuum. Rather, they operate and are entangled in pre-existing patriarchal norms and structures (Ferguson, 2016) that need to be addressed to allow for a thorough understanding of how Life's Work affects women in specific ways (more on this in Section 2.3). Second, applying the lens of gender allows for a critical analysis of intra-group differences among Mongolian migrant women. Indeed, to avoid falling into the trap of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2003), I use gender to identify and discuss how Mongolian women with different visas and backgrounds experience Life's Work in equally distinct ways. Thirdly, engaging with gender and feminist geography also allows space for a nuanced discussion of migrant women's agency potential vis-a-vis the socio-cultural processes reproducing Life's Work. Below, I provide a conceptual map (Figure 2-1). Life's Work is at the centre of my conceptual framework. I focus on three interconnected empirical processes which reproduce Life's Work. Pre-existing 'gender' encircles Life's Work to illustrate how ever-evolving, underlying gender structures inform the empirical processes reproducing Life's Work.
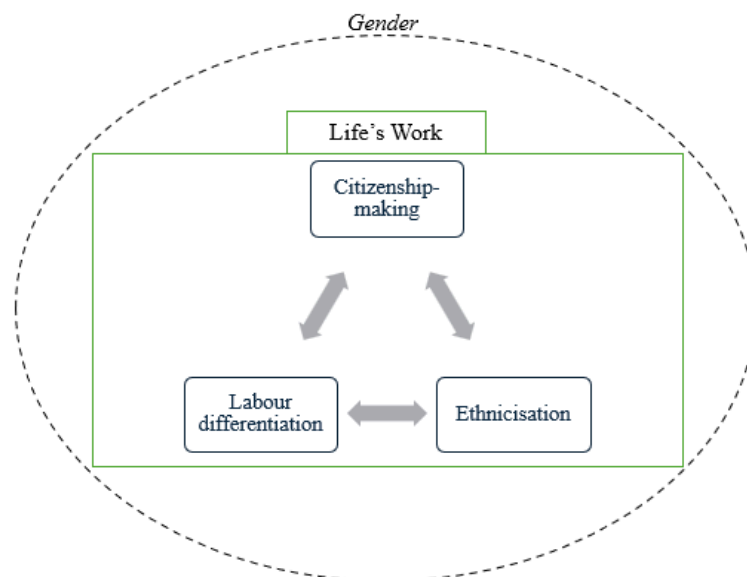
Figure 2-1. Conceptual map

The rest of the chapter is organised as follows. I start by explaining Social Reproduction Theory and the concept of Life's Work, specifically. I discuss how scholars have engaged with Marx's idea of social reproduction and why I centred my conceptual framework on Life's Work. In this section, I briefly introduce the three empirical processes of Life's Work that the thesis focuses on, which are citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation. These processes do not happen in a vacuum, so I also present the physical, mental, and social spaces (Massey, 1994: Soja, 1996) where they take place. In relation to these three processes, I also include a discussion of the literature on Korean migration policies to highlight how they, as material structures, are also contributing to the reproduction of Life's Work. Having explained what the empirical processes of migrant precarity are, I then introduce the concept of gender from the standpoint of feminist geography to illustrate how Life's Work draws on pre-existing socio-cultural structures, which in turn, deeply shape, and connect its empirical processes. In the discussion on gender, I reflect on the relevance of agency and explain why feminist geographers' approach to agency is also relevant in the study of Life's Work and migration. Chapter 2 ends with concluding remarks on Life's Work, gender, and the different yet interconnected processes and spaces of migrant precarity.

2.2. What is Life's Work? Understanding the concept using Social Reproduction Theory

Life's Work is the concept at the centre of this thesis's conceptual framework. It captures the idea that precarity affects all spheres of life and not just labour relations, and that its reproduction is time and place-contingent, and involves multiple macro-, meso-, and micro-level social actors. But to fully understand what Life's Work is, it is essential to take a step back and first engage with Marx's idea of social reproduction, of which Life's Work is a critical interpretation of and challenge to. Therefore, this section begins with a discussion of social reproduction and Social Reproduction Theory, which are necessary to contextualise and engage with Life's Work.

It should be noted that there exists more than one interpretation or theory on social reproduction, which is a concept that Marx discussed yet left fairly underdeveloped in his analysis of

capitalism (Gimenez, 2018, p. 284). In general, the existing literature on social reproduction is divided into two trends, namely Social Reproduction Feminism and Social Reproduction Theory (Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021, p. 3); Life's Work stems from the second. The first trend, Social Reproduction Feminism (SRF), defines social reproduction solely as the biological and social reproductive labour that women, especially, engage in to reproduce the labour force (Bhattacharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2016). Hence, the SRF scholarship conceptualises this type of labour as a pre-condition for the production of value. In other words, these scholars investigate "how we live outside of work" and *who* produces the worker under capitalism (Mitchell et al., 2004, p. 416). In Western contexts, the Fordist ideal of the male-breadwinner and the female-homemaker deeply informed this understanding of social reproduction. SRF began emerging in the 1960s, so the relevance of the Fordist gender model is arguably a sign of its times. It can be argued that a significant limitation of SRF is its tendency to reproduce binaries (production-reproduction; male-female; public-private), which inevitably limits the reach of SRF's debates and contributions about social reproduction (Winders & Smith, 2019, p. 875). On this note, SRF, with its sole focus on women's oppression and exploitation of unwaged care labour, offers a rather limited scope of analysis.

Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) is the second trend in the study of social reproduction and it firmly argues that "social reproduction must be understood as more than the simple reproduction of laboring populations" (Strauss & Meehan, 2015, p. 8). It follows that SRT's analyses focus on the everyday practices, cultural norms, social relations, and structural forces that interact with each other and in doing so, accomplish social reproduction (Katz, 2008). Hence, scholars following the SRT tradition aim at:

> "examining questions of agency and the production of hierarchies through the wage relationship, as well as between the waged, the wageless, and the unwaged in and beyond the household" (Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021, p. 3).

The conceptual framework of this thesis engages with SRT since this theory actively examines not only "the production and reproduction of a differentiated labor force", but also "the cultural forms and

practices that at once maintain these differences and make them common sense" (Norton & Katz, 2017, p. 1). In other words, SRT focuses on a wide range of social hierarchies, relations, and processes which take places both in the everyday and long-term, and at different interconnected scales (Gimenez, 2018; Herrera, 2020; Katz, 2008; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021; Winders & Smith, 2019).

The wider scope of analysis of SRT is far more apt and effective in researching the complex and multifaceted lived experiences of different migrant groups. For example, in the context of this thesis, SRF could have been used to frame why and how the Korean state outsources the biological and care labour of Mongolian marriage migrant women to address low birth rates. Yet, this theoretical approach and its focus on gendered care work alone would have fallen short in explaining the experiences of Mongolian labour migrant women within Korea's visa regime, who do not engage in gendered reproductive work with and for Korean nationals. SRF would have also carried limited explanatory power regarding what other types of labour (beyond unwaged care work) matter in the reproduction of Korean society's social hierarchies and the inequalities they reproduce.

Having clarified the two main Marxian theories of social reproduction, I would like to further elaborate on SRT and finally present and unpack the concept of Life's Work. Drawing from her collaborative work with geographers Katharyne Mitchell and Sallie A. Marston, Cindi Katz (2008) provided a fundamental definition of social reproduction. According to Katz (2008, p. 18):

"Social reproduction encompasses the broad material social practices and forces associated with sustaining production and social life in all its variations. It is the stuff of everyday life as well as the structuring forces that constitute any social formation. Its temporality is at once daily, generational, and the *longue duree*. Its spatiality is similarly varied; it has no single scale such as the household or the community, but rather is everywhere bound dialectically to production. It is not reducible to consumption, ideology, or the making of a labor force, but embraces all of these and more in a fluid congeries of material social practices [...] that are accomplished by social actors in multiple social contexts associated with the state, the workplace, the household, and civil society."

From this quotation, there emerge three key themes that I want to highlight. The first theme concerns the relationship between production and reproduction, and the role that cultural norms like gender play in normalising social divisions and inequalities (Katz, 2001b, 2008; Norton & Katz, 2017; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021). It is in this discussion of production and social reproduction that I introduce and elaborate on the concept of Life's Work. The second theme is the centrality of time and geographical space in SRT's analysis of Life's Work (Ferguson, 2016; Norton & Katz, 2017; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021; Winders & Smith, 2019). The third and final theme concerns the social actors (the state, meso-level institutions, individuals, communities, etc.) that accomplish the social reproduction of Life's Work (Katz, 2001b, p. 200; Katz et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2004).

As per the first theme, Marx left the concept of social reproduction fairly underdeveloped and viewed it as ambiguously external to the realm of value production (Gimenez, 2018, p. 288; see also Norton & Katz, 2017, p. 3; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021; Winders & Smith, 2019). Nowadays, as a result of this ambiguity, Marxist and Marxian traditions conceptualise the two concepts in different ways. For example, as mentioned earlier in the section, SRF views social reproduction as the precondition for value-production under capitalism. Simply put, SRF scholars argue that without the social and biological reproduction of the labour force there would be no labour to exploit to produce value and unequal profit under capitalism. Conversely, SRT actively challenges and implodes the distinction between production and social reproduction. The work of Cindi Katz, Sallie A. Marston, and Katharyne Mitchell (Katz, 2001b, 2008; Katz et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2004; see also Strauss & Meehan, 2015) has been particularly important in questioning this binary through the concept of Life's Work.

In their research, Katz, Marston, and Mitchell (2015, p. 175) state that "there can be no production without social reproduction, as Marx parsimoniously expressed", but they also argue that the boundaries between "work" and "non-work" have become increasingly blurred under capitalism (Mitchell et al., 2004, p. 417). By introducing the concept of Life's Work, these scholars highlight that the precarity, oppression, and exploitation usually associated with production or "life at work" have

actually become a normal and deeply rooted aspect of everyday "life outside of work", too. In other words, the concept of Life's Work challenges the binary between production and reproduction, and sheds light on how we exist in "a reality of being always available as a surplus worker for a global market dependent on flexibly mobilized cheap labor in multiple sites" (Winders & Smith, 2019, p. 880). In practice, this reality translates in, for instance, precarious, limited, uncertain, and unequal access to infrastructure, housing, education, healthcare, social and environmental justice (see Katz, 2008, pp. 19-23). For marginalised and disenfranchised groups (including migrant women), access to, and experiences of and within these infrastructure, institutions, and spaces, are marked by additional layers of oppression and inequalities, which compound and accumulate into a tight web of structural barriers that constrains them into multiscalar exploitation and disenfranchisement. Consequently, when we adopt Life's Work as a lens of analysis, it becomes evident that what is being reproduced under capitalism is not just the labour force itself (Gimenez, 2018, p. 299; Katz, 2001b, p. 711; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021, p. 2; Strauss & Meehan, 2015, p. 8), but the actual social norms, relations, processes and mechanisms that make Life's Work the norm.

The second key theme that is present in SRT and Katz's quotation above, is the significance of time and place. The social reproduction of Life's Work encompasses both "the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life" (Katz, 2001b, p. 711, see also 2008), and "[the] material social practices tak[ing] place across geographical and temporal scales, encompassing daily and generational relations that are as much intimate as global in their effects and charge" (Norton & Katz, 2017, p. 1). In other words, the social reproduction of Life's Work is a structural process that is both temporally and geographically contingent. Indeed, the SRT literature requires our analysis not to be atemporal, but to critically consider "how the cultural forms and practices through which [Life's Work] is accomplished - or not" (ibid., p. 4) have evolved over time, and how these forms and practices operate, both daily and intergenerationally, to normalise the reproduction of social hierarchies and oppression. In the context of this thesis, I apply this temporal awareness to pay attention to how recent societal and demographic changes have informed and continue to inform contemporary Korea's

migration policies, resulting in the daily and intergenerational, unequal and diverse treatment of different groups of migrant women. This awareness of time and context is also useful in understanding how patriarchal norms and expectations have endured and result in specific expectations of migrant women, today.

Additionally, Life's Work and the wider literature on SRT view geographical scale as fluid:

"Scales leak into one another and overlap in different ways that may be brought into view through a focus on place—homes, borders, bodies. [...] Thus, the geographies of social reproduction pull at the invisible threads that connect the intimacies of everyday life, with institutions, corporations, markets, states and circuits of global capitalism in ways that are highlighted at this critical moment in human history" (Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021, pp. 7; 11).

Engaging with the fluidity of space and scales (Anthias, 2012; Brenner, 2000; Brickell & Datta, 2016; Radcliffe, 2006; H. B. Shin, 2014) is helpful in analysing how migrant women's daily lives directly and simultaneously interact with structural power relations and systems of oppression across various spaces and borders (Winders & Smith, 2019, p. 881). Life's Work is not just reproduced at the level of the body and women's sexuality, it takes place in all spheres of life. Indeed, the concept of Life's Work also stresses that these spaces and scales are interconnected; what happens at the global scale (e.g., neoliberal economic restructuring) shapes and is shaped by socio-cultural, political and economic relations and processes at the scale of the body, the home, the city and so on. As I discuss in the empirical Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the empirical processes of Life's Work - namely citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation - are deeply intertwined with each other, even though they take place in specific legal-institutional, and physical, social spaces (i.e., the Korean immigration system; the Korean labour market; everyday public and private places).

Here, I want to stress further that, whilst these processes of precarity take place in and through distinct physical and institutional spaces and scales, they are interconnected and mutually shaping each other. The national visa policies, made in and implemented through the legal-institutional space of Korea's visa system, create and reproduce the legal precarity that pressures migrant women into

becoming desirable and productive citizens and legal subjects to the Korean state. The legal precarity, which is experienced and mitigated through the process of citizenship-making, exacerbates the power imbalances (e.g. between employers and Korean sponsors, and Mongolian women) that further normalise labour differentiation, and the subsequent segregation of most migrant women into precarious and undesirable segments of the institutional space of the labour market. As a result of legal precarity and labour differentiation, migrant women often end up working less desirable, less respected, less valued jobs, which in turn, feed biases and stereotypes about migrants from developing countries like Mongolia. These biases and negative beliefs are part of the process of ethnicisation (Urciuoli, 2020) taking place in the spaces of everyday life, where mundane social interactions in and across public and private social places essentialise migrant women on the basis of their recognisable ethnic markers and the value that the host society places upon them. In short, these three processes of precarity are interconnected, just like the spaces they take place in, and exacerbate each other, operating as the breeding ground for Life's Work to continue being the norm.

The third and final theme I want to discuss is the role that multiple interconnected actors have in the social reproduction of Life's Work, including "the likes of states, transnational corporations, welfare systems, and non-profits [as well as] households, families, and migrant workers" (Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021, p. 7). This being said, even in the context of intensified globalisation, the state is still viewed as an important social actor which reproduces the cultural norms needed to normalise unequal visa system, labour differentiation, and social ethnic hierarchies (Strauss & Meehan, 2015, p. 9). As Mitchell, Marston and Katz (Mitchell et al., 2004, pp. 429-430) contend:

> "The changing sociospatial contexts of subjects involved in Life's Work are shaped and constrained by the state in contemporary capitalist society, perhaps even more than ever before. Indeed, the state is not disappearing; instead, it is dramatically restructuring, such that its juridical-legislative systems, bureaucratic apparatuses, economic entities, modes of governmentality, and war-making capacities continue to define, discipline, control, and

regulate the residents of its territorial orbit (and those who wish to enter it) in most of the old ways as well as in startlingly new ones."

This analysis about the role of the state, and other meso-level institutions, in the social reproduction of Life's Work is especially important in the study of migration, as I illustrate in the sub-section below.

2.2.1. The relationship between Korean migration policies and Life's Work

So far, I explained that the social reproduction of Life's Work is made possible through a range of interconnected empirical socio-cultural processes, which in turn, take place across time and scales, and involve an equally wide range of social actors. In the context of this thesis, which examines the distinct lived experiences of Life's Work of Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women, it is important to reflect on the specific role that Korean migration policies, institutions, and actors play in the social reproduction of precarity - and their migrant precarity, in particular. Indeed, East Asian countries like Korea are known for regulating and limiting both marriage and labour migration with the objective of addressing specific shortages and needs in their societies, specifically low birth rates and low labour force participation in the first and second sectors (Wickramasekara, 2008; Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2011). On the one hand, demographic changes including ageing population (Kessler, 2009, p.198), and changes in employment and gender expectations (Wickramasekara, 2008; Zhang and Yeoh, 2020) have led to a decline in birth rates in Korea. Consequently, the Korean state has attempted "to solve a national reproductive crisis [...] via transnational means [...] by utilizing [marriage] migrant women to provide paid and unpaid forms of reproductive work" (Piper and Lee, 2016, p.476). On the other hand, "[d]rastic demographic transitions in the context of rapid economic growth created labor shortages in the industrial sectors and in the care of dependent family members" (Lee, 2011, pp.117-118). To tackle these labour shortages, strict selection processes have been established to allow the short-term (i.e., a three year-term) temporary employment of labour migrants (Seo, 2019; Torneo, 2016; Collins, 2012). These foreign workers are sought after for their willingness to take on job positions that the national population actively avoids or cannot fill completely (Lee, 2011). Whilst labour migration in the Korean context often refers to low-skilled migration, migration

policies do differ considerably according to skill level (ibid., p.121). As I discussed in Section 1.4.2, and will discuss in more detail in Section 4.2.2 of this thesis, Korean migration policies clearly treat migrant women in significantly different ways depending on their visa and purpose for being in Korea.

Under these conditions, Korean migration policies and institutions arguably reproduce the conditions for Life's Work, which takes on different forms and expressions depending on the migrant group. Let us consider, for example, the role that social actors like international brokers and receiving states play in marriage migrant women's embodied and gendered experiences of Life's Work. Brokers and employment agencies are non-state actors who are active agents within immigration systems, as they help facilitate or curb migration flows and place migrants in an uneven position to the state (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013; Kaur, 2018; McAuliffe & Goossens, 2018; Yeoh et al., 2017). In Korea, private international matchmakers, with and without a licence, facilitate this form of transnational marriage migration by connecting candidate wives with their prospective husbands (Lee, 2008, p.108). In general, the assumption has been that poorer and less educated women would apply for international marriage with poor men from richer countries like Korea in order to climb the socio-economic ladder and maximise their wellbeing (Yeung and Mu, 2020, p.2866). In reality, marriage migration to Korea is far more complex and nuanced than this assumption implies (ibid., p.2867). Physical and emotional abuse by the hands of husbands, abuse of power from the receiving family, clashing cultural scripts and expectations, as well as misleading and incorrect prospective husbands' profiles have all led to marriage migrant women and women to be wary of brokered international marriages (Zhang, 2022). Yet, relying on brokers remains a fairly common practice since there are still women who see international marriages as a strategy to enter a richer country legally without needing a work visa. In the end, "[marriage] migrant precarity [...] is not an indication of exceptional circumstances but a gendered and embodied everyday norm" (ibid., p.315).

Precarity, unsafety, and oppression is the norm for labour migrants in Korea, too. Unlike marriage migrant women, who have other options to enter the country and meet potential husbands besides using brokers, labour migrants have far fewer formalised options. These options are highly regulated and have systematically placed foreign workers at a disadvantaged position vis-a-vis the state since the 1990s. In Korea, labour shortages that began in the 1980s still affect sectors that nationals are increasingly reluctant to work in. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in the agricultural, fishing, farming, and industrial sectors, use official channels to get cheap foreign labour into Korea (Kim, 2004, pp.319-320; Choi and Kim, 2015, p.24). Since the early 1990s, there have been two key programs and policies that have dominated Korea's migration system, leading to the long-term, structural precarity of labour migrants. First, the Industrial and Technical Trainee Program (ITTP) was established in 1991 to create a 'rotation system' for migrant workers, who could be employed for up to one year, held the legal status of 'trainee', and were not granted any protections under labour laws. Exploitation and abuse, and high desertion rates became the norm under this programme (Torneo, 2016; Chung, 2020). Second, the Employment Permit System (EPS) replaced the ITTP in 2004. The main difference was that the EPS allowed employers to hire foreign workers as actual 'employees' for up to three years (Torneo, 2016, p.141). Under this new legal status, labour migrants were recognised more rights than before, but employers still had the upper hand and abuse of power has happened (Shin J., 2021; Amnesty International 2006). Forced overtime, poor living conditions, and even restriction of workers' mobility have been commonly reported over the years (Choi and Kim, 2015; Seo, 2019).

Across all these policy changes, it is evident that only the Korean state, and the local businesses and agencies had any significant leverage on policy making (Choi and Kim, 2015, p.23). This power imbalance has led, in Korea just as much as in other East Asian countries, to what Piper and Withers (2018) define as protracted precarity - a condition that is deeply rooted in the permanent temporariness of low-skilled labour migration in East Asia. As (Collins, 2012, p.322) further explains:

"On the one hand, [permanent temporariness] refers to the permanently temporary status of individual migrant subjects. On the other hand, the reference to permanence also highlights the continual presence of temporary populations in particular places even as individuals arrive and depart and the need to pay critical attention to their involvement in various aspects of everyday life."

Indeed, despite the improvements made with the EPS, this cycle of commercialised recruitment, power imbalances, and differential treatments continues to reproduce labour migrants' protracted precarity and the widespread conditions and processes of Life's Work. In the end, it is evident that both marriage and labour migrants in Korea experience various forms of precarity in and beyond the workplace because of the unequal migration policies that regulate their mobility, rights, and access to legal and social justice.

In short, in Section 2.2, I explained that Life's Work is the concept at the centre of the conceptual framework of this thesis. In order to fully understand the meaning and scope of this concept, I framed and explained it using Social Reproduction Theory (SRT). According to this Marxian approach to the study of social reproduction, the concept of Life's Work is a critical and powerful idea that sheds light on the all-encompassing, multiscalar, daily and intergenerational precarity that characterises not just labour relations, but all relations and spheres of life under capitalism. I also explained how the empirical socio-cultural processes reproducing Life's Work do not occur independently, but are interconnected with each other. In sub-Section 2.2.1, I focused on Korean migration policies and the related social actors to illustrate the way they reproduce migrant precarity for marriage and labour migrants in Korea.

2.3. Gender and Life's Work according to feminist geography

The empirical processes reproducing Life's Work take place in relation to not only each other, but also wider socio-cultural structures like gender. Hence, the study of Life's Work can benefit from a

gendered analysis for three main reasons. First, it is important to remember that the empirical social processes reproducing Life's Work - namely citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation - do not happen in a vacuum. Rather, they operate and are entangled in pre-existing patriarchal norms and structures (Katz, 2008; Ferguson, 2016) that need to be addressed to allow for a thorough understanding of how Life's Work affects different groups of women in specific ways. Second, applying the lens of gender allows for a critical analysis of intra-group differences among Mongolian migrant women. Indeed, to avoid falling into the trap of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2003), I use gender to discuss how Mongolian women with different visas and backgrounds experience Life's Work in equally distinct ways. Thirdly, engaging with gender and feminist geography also allows space for a nuanced discussion of migrant women's agency potential vis-a-vis the socio-cultural structures and empirical processes reproducing Life's Work.

Contemporary feminist geographers define the study of gender as the investigation of the power relations and material and cultural processes affecting what is expected of women and men (Amoore, 2020; Panelli, 2004, p. 85). Gender is commonly understood as a set of "contradictory, reiterative, and performative [...] social relations" which are made, negotiated, and circulated through social processes (Kobayashi & Peake, 1994, p. 230; McDowell, 2008, p. 497; see also Panelli, 2004, pp. 76–78). In this thesis, I use the lens of gender to show that the social processes of citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation are informed by dynamic and contradictory gender norms and expectations, which help justify and reproduce the condition of Life's Work. Like Life's Work, gender relations are time and place-contingent, and are socially constructed within specific places (Mollett & Faria, 2018, p. 570). As feminist geographers Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina (2018, p. 549) explain, "place is not only showing variability of [social] relations but rather configuring them." As such, gender structures and processes inscribe gender identities (in the form of meanings and practices) to bodies, which in turn, are expected to operate and behave in prescribed 'feminine' or 'masculine' ways in range of different spaces (Amoore, 2020, pp. 3–8; Panelli, 2004, p. 80; Rose, 1993, p. 535). It follows that gender should not be understood as a static parameter of

difference used to determine groups along patriarchal binaries (i.e., women versus men; Anthias, 2012b, p. 105), nor should it be equated to the study of women only (Longhurst, 2002, p. 547).

Whilst much of the literature by feminist geographers tends to prioritise the experiences of women (Knopp, 2007, p. 48), this scholarship pays great attention to differences among women and does not treat them as an essentialised group. Attention is given to the examination of the relations and processes shaping gendered identities, norms, and expectations affecting people, societies, and systems (Longhurst, 2002, p. 550). Queer geography has also greatly contributed to feminist scholars' broader understanding of gender identities beyond the heteronormative male-female binary. For example, queer geography sheds light on the often overlooked experiences of gay and lesbian, trans and non-binary people (Amoore, 2020; Knopp, 2007). However, given the scope and subjects of analysis of my research (i.e., cisgender migrant women in a patriarchal, capitalist host society), I do not actively engage with queer geography, and rather use the feminist geography literature to examine patriarchal gender binaries and the structures informing the empirical processes and precarities of Life's Work. In both the Mongolian and Korean contexts, gendered socio-cultural structures are deeply shaped by heteronormative ideals of the gender binary, gender roles attitudes, and gender essentialism (i.e., the belief that women and men are born with biologically determined, different natures, e.g. men are rational thinkers whilst women are emotional and caring; see Benwell 2006; Schmillen and Sandig 2018; S.-Y. Yoon 2023; Y. Cha and Kim 2023; H. Yang 2021).

Mongolian and Korean gender relations and structures are rooted in distinct historical and social, cultural, economic, and political processes. On the one hand, scholars argue that contemporary Mongolian gender relations combine norms, expectations, and gender identities rooted in nomadic practices and lifestyles, as well as social policies from the socialist and democratic eras (Benwell, 2006; Weller, 2020). As a result, nowadays, Mongolian women are expected to be self-reliant and independent (a nomadic value), but also active participants in society (an expectation from the socialist era) by being simultaneously economically productive (i.e., by engaging in waged labour) and family-oriented (i.e., by engaging in unwaged care labour). Since its recent democratisation, the

Mongolian state has also introduced various policies and subsidies to incentivise higher birth rates. However, without providing affordable public healthcare, it can be argued that the Mongolian state has also indirectly contributed to consolidating widespread gender disparities across the country (Batchuluun, 2021; Khan et al., 2013; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018). For instance, consider that in 2021, labour participation rates were 66.6% for men and 51.1% for women (The World Bank, 2023).

On the other hand, scholars argue that contemporary Korean gender relations and expectations are rooted in traditional Confucian family ideals that are still informing contemporary understandings of gender roles, as well as a result of recent changes in employment expectations and preferences among Korean women (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; Patterson & Walcutt, 2014; H. Yang, 2021; S.-Y. Yoon, 2023). Confucian traditional values place emphasis on harmony in interpersonal relationships. Simply put, this means that men are expected to sustain the family through outside work whereas women are expected to be "good wives and mothers" at home (H. Choi, 2009; O. Moon, 1992; Mun, 2015, p. 634; Y. J. Seo et al., 2020). Scholars have pointed out that these gender roles still inform today's workplace and employment dynamics (Stansbury et al., 2023; S.-Y. Yoon, 2023), which have changed considerably since the economic growth of the 1980s. Indeed, since then, it has become increasingly more common for Korean women to pursue higher education and professional development, which today are essential requirements to navigate the highly competitive labour market of Korea and deal with increasing cost-of-living expenses (Patterson & Walcutt, 2014; Um, 2023; H. Yang, 2021). Nevertheless, the inconsistent or partial implementation of national equal opportunities policies and lack of affordable public childcare have made it significantly harder for Korean women to hold their jobs and have a family at the same time (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; C.-H. Kim & Oh, 2022; Y. Lee & Yeung, 2021). For reference, in 2021, the male labour force participation rate was 72.7%, whereas the female labour force participation rate was 53% (The World Bank, 2023).

It can be argued that the contradictory and unfair gendered norms and structures concerning Mongolian and Korean women, and the lack of top-down gendered service provision, have contributed to the reproduction of women's precarity, exploitation, and oppression in and beyond the

workplace, as captured by the concept of Life's Work. In other words, Mongolian and Korean gender structures pressure women to engage in both waged employment and unwaged care work whilst having little effective support from state policies and limited provision of public childcare. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I provide more contextualised examples of the role that these ever-evolving gender identities, relations, and processes have in the reproduction of various forms of precarity as Life's Work.

Having explained the relevance of gender in the study of precarity, a discussion of gender also calls for a reflection about migrant women's agency within these gendered power dynamics, and the empirical processes reproducing Life's Work. Reflecting and engaging with ideas and expressions of individual and collective agency is essential to avoid underestimating women's oppression or overestimating their individual power to resist systems of oppression (Meyers, 2002, p. 5). Indeed, "agency always needs to be 'grounded' or re-embedded in the space-time contexts of which it is a constituent process" (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2010, p. 218) so that as scholars, we are fully aware of the circumstances our respondents are entangled in and dealing with. Migrant women respond to and negotiate their precarity and social disenfranchisement by employing their agency daily and across a spectrum of intentional acts, which complicate and blur the lines between vulnerability and political strategy (Favell, 2022; Katz, 2004; MacLeavy et al., 2021; Yeung & Mu, 2020).

In my research, I pay greater attention to individual rather than collective agentic responses because of the focus of my empirical material. When appropriate, I address when Mongolian migrant women collaborate with each other in more explicit and defined ways (e.g., Mongolian labour migrant women supporting each others' right to stay through information exchange; Mongolian marriage migrant women participating in local organisations to create a sense of community and support). But even in instances of individual agentic responses, for example speaking up against gendered and xenophobic prejudices in public spaces, Mongolian women based their claims in their real and imagined communities ("*we* as *Mongolian women* are …"; "*my Mongolian sisters and I* want to …"). Acknowledging that individual agency does not exist in a vacuum is important. In other words,

"agency is always relational, and never completely autonomous" (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2010., p. 221). "[G]ender and family identities, or loyalties based on ethnicity, age and place are often important shapers of agency potential" (ibid., p. 224; see also Kobayashi & Peake, 1994; Meyers, 2002). In short, I conceptualise agency as an intentional and relational response to precarity whereby migrant women negotiate their position vis-a-vis the gendered relations and empirical processes that systematically reproduce the conditions of Life's Work.

2.4. Conclusion: Life's Work, gender, and the social reproduction of migrant precarity

In this Chapter, I presented the conceptual framework of this thesis, which has at its core the concept of Life's Work. Life's Work captures the idea that the precarity, exploitation, and oppression usually associated with "life at work" is actually the norm in every other facet of "life outside work". It is a powerful conceptual tool that critically describes the reality that most people - including migrant women - experience in today's capitalist world. I engaged with this concept through Social Reproduction Theory to further explain how this reality of always being precarious and expendable is being reproduced, that is, through empirical social processes that are both time and place contingent, and involve a wide range of social actors across interconnected scales. As I will explain in more detail in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, this thesis specifically focuses on the processes of citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and ethnicisation. In the study of Life's Work, it is important to remember that processes like these are deeply interconnected, and mutually shape each other, leading to a tight web of structural constraints which can significantly hinder migrant women's rights, opportunities, and wellbeing.

In my discussion of empirical processes of precarity, oppression, and exploitation, I also introduced gender as a complementary lens to the study of Life's Work. By applying a gendered approach to my analysis of Mongolian migrant women's precarity, I intend to demonstrate that the empirical social processes reproducing Life's Work do not happen in a vacuum, but rather, are deeply entangled with and actively build upon pre-existing gendered norms from both Mongolian and Korean

patriarchal societies. Engaging with gender and feminist geography has also allowed my conceptual framework to avoid falling into methodological nationalism and the risk of disregarding the different experiences of Life's Work of Mongolia migrant women with different visa types and backgrounds. Equally important, feminist geographers's work on gender and migration has also shed light on migrant women's agency potential. By challenging binaries where migrant women are often framed and portrayed as either victims of their circumstances or strategic agents of political change, I defined agency as an intentional and relational response to precarity that operates between these two extreme poles.

Chapter 3 - Unpacking the methodological, practical, and ethical challenges of fieldwork in Seoul

3.1. Introduction: what I expected fieldwork to be like

The objective of this chapter is to unveil and discuss the daily challenges and achievements of my fieldwork in Seoul, from 'beginning' to 'end'. I focus on each research stage, starting from what I expected to encounter in the field, to conducting interviews with interpreters/research assistants[4], and the influence my positionality and implicit assumptions had on both the data collection and data analysis phases. Unpacking my positionality is an essential aspect of this chapter, and I do so in relation to not only my interviewees, but also to my research assistants, with whom I shared countless hours over a relatively short, but intense period of my life (approximately five months of fieldwork over two trips). When did fieldwork start? Rather than reminiscing about the day I landed in Incheon International Airport, I would like to start by reflecting on how the methodology for this project has changed from its first conception to its actual implementation in the field. This reflection is essential because of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the research project, its methodology, and me as a researcher. For example, whilst I had planned to conduct participatory observations in addition to interviews, COVID-19 social distancing measures made that practically infeasible. In the research proposal for my PhD upgrade examination, back in September 2021, I wrote:

> "The methodology for this project comprises qualitative and ethnographic methods which will allow me to collect rich and detailed data on the gendered and classed lived experiences shaping the remittances of Mongolian migrant women".

Clearly, that is not the methodology nor the focus of this thesis. Since the start of fieldwork in October 2021, both my research focus and methodology changed drastically. On the one hand, Korea had partially eased its travel restrictions, but the conditions to conduct research were far from being optimal: social distancing measures were in place, so meetings and gatherings were either happening

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[4] In this chapter and throughout the thesis, I use interpreters and research assistants interchangeably.

online or not happening at all. Yet again, can conditions ever be optimal? There should be room left for unforeseen challenges in our fieldwork plans, because something, at some point, will not go as planned. On the other hand, the thematic focus on my research also changed, moving away from remittances and closer to issues of migration, citizenship, labour, and ethnicisation. In a way, this drastic thematic change was another challenge that resulted from fieldwork. I thought that remittances and class would be the 'hot topic' in each and every interview, but in reality, my interviewees either did not send remittances back to Mongolia, and if they did, they had very little to say about them and the related process.

Fieldwork requires researchers to remain open to exploring the possible directions our research will take once we enter the field. As Sørenen (2022, p. 212) explains, "One of the issues pertaining to fieldwork is that we never seem to have as much control over what is going on around us as we would sometimes like." In my case, I had to accept and work with the methodological and practical challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic imposed, as well as the new and unexpected thematic direction of my project. Additionally, I had to confront and unpack implicit assumptions I was carrying about what 'good' research is, and what makes a researcher 'credible' (Wilkinson, 2019), both during fieldwork and in my own post-fieldwork ethics. Hence, embarking research in the field during the pandemic asked me to abandon those assumptions and expectations of being an over-achieving researcher. I adjusted my plans and expectations and accepted that I would have, practically speaking, less than five months to collect enough interviews to reach data saturation, before coming back to London and risking losing my EU pre-settlement status[5]. By the very beginning of fieldwork, I had to leave any self-serving and self-lacerating dogmas about what 'good' research and who a 'good' researcher is (Brookfield, 2017), and instead, be practical and adaptive to my time and place-contingent circumstances.

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows: having briefly discussed my expectations before fieldwork, I focus on its formal beginning, that is, when I entered the field, and started

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[5] EU citizens who have this residence permit cannot live outside the UK for more than six consecutive months or more, or their pre-settlement status will be revoked.

recruiting interpreters, finding gatekeepers, framing my research project for my potential respondents. I also address some of the methodological limitations I faced during fieldwork and how I mitigated them. The following section discusses what can be considered 'the middle' of fieldwork, that is, the practical and ethical challenges of conducting interviews and dealing with multiple positionalities. Then, in another section, I address 'the end', or how I navigated guilt after leaving the field, and the role that it played in my data analysis. In the conclusion of this chapter, I reflect on post-fieldwork ethics, including the long-term consequences and responsibilities a researcher has to deal with, especially in regard to their responsibilities towards the respondents, the writing process, and migration advocacy, too.

3.2. Entering the field: access, recruitment, and the purposes of qualitative research

3.2.1. Securing access

Upon entering the field, my primary goal was to firstly, meet up with various local institutions to introduce myself, and secondly, build trust and secure access to gatekeepers and potential interviewees. In my upgrade research proposal, I had included a list of gatekeepers, which included: the Mongolian Association in Korea (МИХ, pronounced 'meekh'), the Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Culture Promotion Centre, the Mongolian Women's Federation in Korea, the Mongolian Students Association in Korea, and the Soyombo Collective. During previous trips to Seoul, I visited Mongol Town (an ethnic business street in central Seoul) on several occasions, and believed I could recruit participants there, where several ethnic Mongolian businesses are located. Other non-Mongolian institutions and associations included: the multicultural family support centres (MFC) in Seoul, the MTU and KWAU (trade unions for migrant workers and women workers, respectively), the Onnuri Churches, and Mongol School (a secondary school for Mongolian children, established and run by the 'Seoul Foreign Workers Mission'). Back in September 2021, I wrote "The МИХ would be an ideal entry point and a location where I could get to know people". Unfortunately, they never replied to my

emails and because of the COVID-19 social distancing measures, their temporary office in the DongDaeMun global centre was closed.

So, the first month in Seoul was by far the most nerve-wracking: time was passing by and none of the organisations at the top of my list were getting back to me. An important turning point that helped me during this initial stage of fieldwork was meeting a Mongolian visiting scholar at the Seoul National University Asian Center (SNUAC), who kickstarted a series of meetings with potential interpreters. Upon encouragement from my supervisors, I had applied for the SNUAC Visiting Scholar Program and during my first visit to the centre I was introduced to a Mongolian scholar who was also visiting SNUAC. With the help of this Mongolian scholar, I first met Tumen, a visiting student at the SNU, who agreed to work as my interpreter, but because of the ongoing pandemic, she had to leave Korea as her exchange program period was cut short. She introduced me to another Mongolian woman, a younger and shier student who, after conducting a mock interview, I decided not to hire as I did not feel like she would be comfortable and prepared enough to conduct and translate interviews as efficiently and effectively as needed. So, Tumen posted a message in one of her group chats and eventually, I was introduced to Tsende, a 32-year-old PhD student from Mongolia doing research on education at the SNU. After we met and got to know each other better, I decided to hire Tsende as my first interpreter. She later introduced me to Undraa, a 27-year-old Mongolian student in computer science, who became my 'back-up' interpreter.

Whilst some practical challenges and uncertainties remained, working with Tsende and Undra meant we could start contacting potential gatekeepers and interviewees in both Mongolian and Korean. Their bilingual language skills were essential because of my limited knowledge of the Korean language. For context, I had completed language training at the LSE Language Centre before fieldwork, but my proficiency level (level 2 out of 6, 6 being proficient) was not high enough to enable me to carry out interviews or draft formal emails for Korean institutions. As per Mongolian, I only knew a few conversational words, so not enough to conduct interviews about complex and specific themes such as migration rationales and visa application procedures, job experience,

discrimination, and more. Hence, I needed to hire and work with research assistants who were fluent in both Mongolian and Korean. There were other challenges concerning the language barrier which I needed to mitigate, such as my inability to read Korean academic and public publications. To overcome this limitation, I relied on English-translated official governmental documents and Korea-based newspapers websites for the latter (see examples in Chapters 4, 5, and 6).

3.2.2. Recruitment approaches

I decided to start the recruitment process for marriage migrants first. There were two main reasons for this decision: first, during preliminary fieldwork in January 2020, I had met with a Mongolian marriage migrant myself who had done plenty of local activist and policy work, so I believed she could introduce me to more interviewees through snowball sampling.[6] Second, I was aware of the existence of the Multicultural Family Centers (see Chapter 2) and saw them as another potential entry point to marriage migrants. Given the constraining and limited timeframe of my visa[7], and after four weeks of radio silence and unanswered emails from potential gatekeepers, I was worried I would not find and interview enough people before having to leave Seoul in mid-January. So, with Tsende's assistance, I started to organise interviews through my contact (the politically active marriage migrant woman), who introduced us to another friend of hers. We also posted announcements on specific Facebook groups for Mongolian women in Korea. The recruitment announcement was posted by Tsende, and it was direct and written in Mongolian. Content-wise, it summarised that I was doing research on Mongolian marriage migrant women's lives in Korea, and that I wanted to interview women to learn more about their experiences, needs and hardships, and that I would give them a Starbucks coupon of 10,000 KRW (approximately £6) and pay for their transportation expenses. This first half of fieldwork was self-funded, so I was not able to 'pay' the interviewees for their time or offer a more financially attractive compensation.

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[6] Snowball sampling: "allowing pre-existing networks of friendship, kinship, and community to guide choice" in the recruitment process (M. Miles & Crush, 1993, p. 87).

[7] The Korean Immigration Service did not issue research visas during the pandemic, so I had to enter the country with a tourist visa, meaning my stay could be no longer than 90 days.

Specific complexities arise when providing interviewees economic compensation for participating in research projects, such as risking offending financially-sound respondents or risking recruiting participants who might not be part of the relevant study group (Saleh et al., 2020). When in the field, I quickly found out that providing economic compensation or other forms of service was common practice. At one of the Multicultural Family Centers, an employee was clear and direct about it. Here are two extracts from my field diary on this matter:

> *After several minutes, Tsende tells me that the woman is saying that no marriage migrants would participate in the interviews just like that, that we should pay or give some kind of remuneration to the participants, that we should change the methods from interviews to surveys, and so on.* (Field diary, entry 2021.12.01)

Another Mongolian employee, from a different Multicultural Family Center, expressed similar expectations:

> *We sit at the table, Tsende next to me at the head of the table, and the Mongolian woman is in front of me. Tsende starts translating. The Mongolian woman talks fast and seems to be giving many details. Tsende herself is so surprised at the woman's reply. In fact, she says that many come to do research about the women at the Multicultural Family Centers and that, usually, the most successful ones (when it comes to recruitment) are those who engage with the women by providing projects, events, and mentorship.* (Field diary, entry 2021.12.01)

The Multicultural Family Centers are, indeed, a widely discussed topic in the literature on marriage migration in Korea, and Korean scholars do invest long periods of time conducting ethnographies and interviews with the employees and migrant women at these centres (Jang, 2022; Song, 2015; for example see Yu, 2023). I decided that rather than paying respondents, I would pay for refreshments during the interviews, cover their transport expenses, and provide interviewees with a coupon that they could later use on. Moreover, once I realised that the Multicultural Family Centers would not introduce me or my project to their members, I contacted the Mongolian Women's Federation in Korea (hereafter, the Women's Federation) through Tsende. I got in touch with a member who spoke

English and agreed to help me find at least ten interviewees in exchange for English language classes for their members. I agreed and started organising classes which we later advertised through a Kakao group chat, and lasted until my return to London in May 2022. This was certainly another turning point for my research and fieldwork in general. Thanks to this member, who I later interviewed, I was able to conduct enough interviews with Mongolian marriage migrants to reach data saturation.

The recruitment process for Mongolian labour migrant women was equally challenging but in its own way. Having returned to Korea in mid-February 2022 (the beginning of the second leg of fieldwork), I met with Tsende and Undraa to discuss the next steps in terms of accessing and recruiting participants. According to Tsende, it would be fairly easy to find undocumented migrant women because, in her opinion, the majority of Mongolians are undocumented and she herself had met several. So, given her personal insights, I prioritised finding documented labour migrant women instead, as that might require more effort and time. With this goal in mind, I suggested we went to Mongol Town to recruit business owners and employees. Additionally, I asked Tsende and Undraa whether they could ask their friends and acquaintances about participating in the project. Of the two approaches, the snowball sampling being the most successful, and direct recruitment at Mongol Town being the least successful. I would like to reflect on what made the latter recruitment method unsuccessful. For context, Mongol Town is located in the DongDaeMun area of Seoul and extends over several blocks. There is a single nine-story tall building that is known as the hot spot of the neighbourhood (see Figure 3-1, taken from Naver Maps, edited by me; see Figure 3-2 for a picture I took of the main building in Mongol Town).
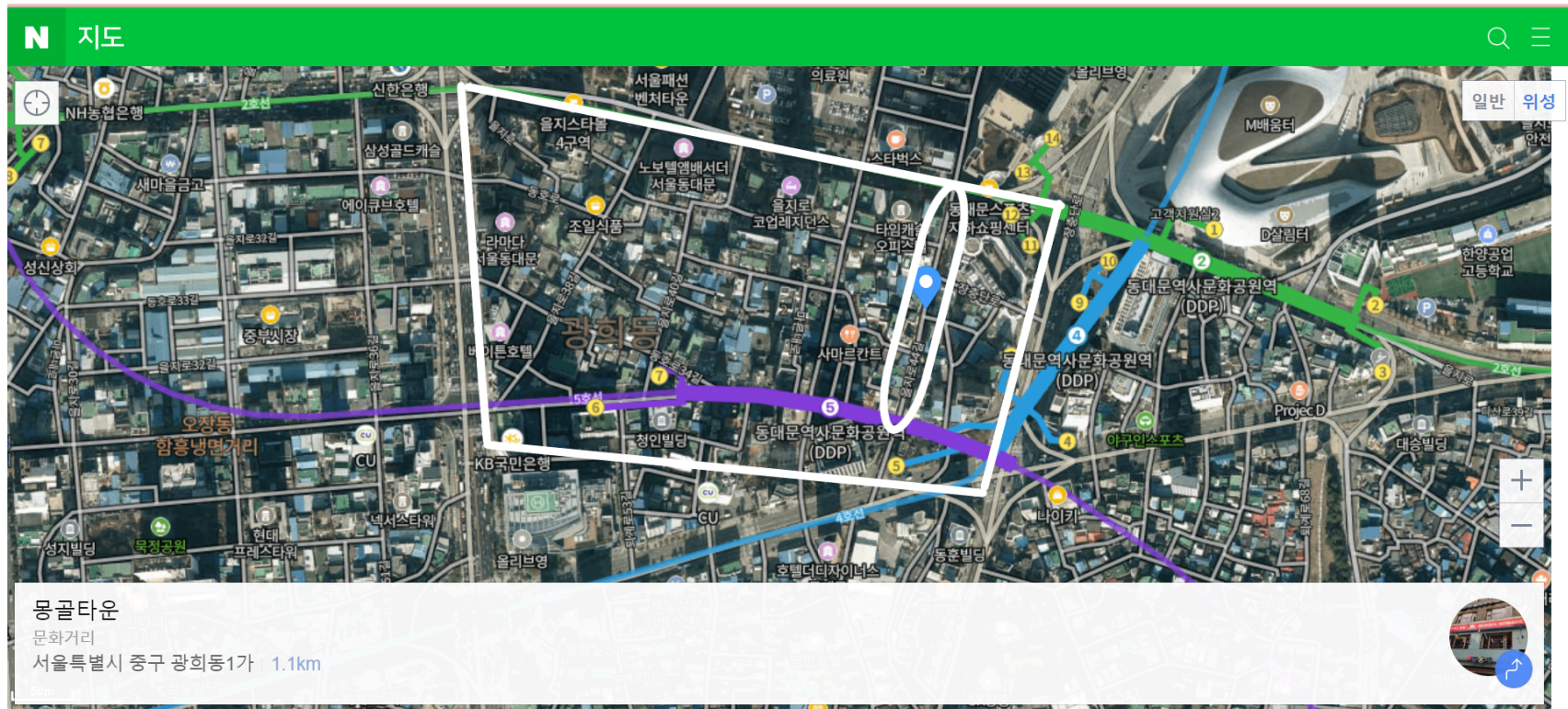
Figure 3-1: Map of Mongol Town (taken from Naver Maps, edited by the author).

The blue pin point is the main tower building, located in the main street (circled in white), but Mongolian ethnic businesses can be found all around, scattered across a few more blocks.

Figure 3-2: A picture of the main building in Mongol Town (taken by the author in 2021). It is a nine-story building where Mongolian restaurants and food shops, money transfer companies, 'cargo' delivery businesses, hairdressers and nail salons, can be found.

Going shop by shop to introduce ourselves was a time-consuming, emotionally draining, and disheartening process. In retrospect, it was clear that the employees were bothered by us and told us off and to leave them alone. After all, we were complete strangers asking for their time while they were at work. They were also considerably less interested in sharing their time and stories with us, unlike the marriage migrants whose limited rights and endless concerns for their children's future encouraged them to seek external advocates. I wrote on this matter in my field diary:

> *My past interactions, both in Mongolia and in Seoul, with Mongolian women had always been so positive and welcoming that I was caught off guard by [Mongol Town's] business owners' reactions. I noticed how they would be very straightforward and tell us to leave already. Their body language was also very crystal clear: some of them stopped looking us in the eyes, some turned their bodies away, facing their laptops or somewhere else. [...] They were busy at their workplace. Unlike the marriage migrants who were working from home or had mostly [only] interacted with other wives and their own kids, these women did not have 'time to spare'. They did not feel the need to 'tell their stories' to increase awareness about their lived experiences, nor did they feel inclined to put some of their precious time aside for us.* (Field diary, entry 2022.03.15)

In this extract, issues regarding my positionality also emerged, but for now I want to reiterate how the profoundly different needs and concerns of marriage and labour migrant women resulted in very different approaches and attitudes towards me and the project. That day in Mongol Town, Tsende and I had very little luck. We later managed to find a friend of Tsende's in one of the offices in the main building, who was having an informal gathering with some friends. These friends initially agreed to being interviewed, but eventually, they all turned us down. It is fair to assume that they had accepted the interview invitation out of politeness and because of the intimate and personal environment we were in. I recall this particular episode in my field diary: mixed emotions transpire from this extract, which captures the unexpected twists and turns of fieldwork, the importance that context,

environment, and timing have in the recruitment process, as well as how easily we, as researcher, can be blind to the subtleties of the moment because of our eagerness to reach our research goals.

Six women [...] were sitting in the particularly warm room, with no mask on, putting on face creams and fixing their makeup. I believe I saw a bottle of red wine open and sitting on the desk on the left. They clearly all knew each other and seemed very friendly with one another. They all seemed open and comfortable with having us sit with them on the tiny stools. [...] One by one, they all confirmed laughing that they were all eligible for the project! They either had a work visa or a business visa which allowed them to be employed in Korea. Only one of them was undocumented. We managed to book interviews with three of them (two hours long, one hour plus one hour) on the spot, and agreed to call the others in a few weeks to schedule meetings. (Field diary, entry 2022.03.15)

It turns out that three out of five of the women who gave us their phone numbers either blocked us or did not follow up. [...] It all felt very disheartening but at the same time, it made sense. The women probably felt like they had to accept the interview invitation as we were there, in person, and their friend/business partner [and Tsende's friend] was in the room also. They were looking away and chatting while we were trying to collect the phone numbers – a body language and attitude that showed their true feelings. And I get it! It is difficult and uncomfortable to say 'no', especially in front of other people, one of whom you feel obliged to be nice to because they are your friend. [...] It was very human of them to say yes in the moment and then ghost us later on, when we were no longer in that intimate room, but just numbers on a smartphone's screen. (Field diary, entry 2022.03.22)

Another insightful episode from the recruitment phase took place in Mongol Town tower and highlighted how often potential interviewees and gatekeepers see very little interest or value in their own stories. After having conducted an interview at the tower, I suggested we talk with one of the restaurant owners, since I had previously noticed that there were several women working in the kitchens. Once we got there, I sensed that the owner might be open to helping us out since he seemed

welcoming, friendly, and cheerful. Yet, when Tsende introduced the project, he shut her down quickly. Unlike the other women who had either told us off or ignored us, he told us that we should interview someone else completely. Here's the extract from my field diary:

> *He said he was the owner of the restaurant, and that he had lived here for almost 20 years. That the women here work under contract with him, but that their stories weren't probably going to be interesting. "Same old same old": come to Korea, make money, return to Mongolia. He suggested we talk with other migrant women, like undocumented or business owners, as their stories would be more interesting and different from this "same old same old" pattern.* (Field diary, entry 2022.03.24)

Similar iterations of that interaction had taken place already. Some labour migrant women were so surprised that we could find their life stories interesting, they would nervously laugh and ask us how any of it could be helpful. But going back to the excerpt above, I would like to point out that for some people, reducing the complexities and hardships of fellow migrants into a simple, much more digestible story such as "they come to Korea, they make money, and they return to Mongolia", makes sense. It must be difficult to see people (friends, colleagues) come and go over the span of 20 years. There is the possibility that by oversimplifying the stories of his employees, the restaurant owner created his own coping mechanism to deal with the disappointment of seeing colleagues and acquaintances leave. To deal with the "same old same old" repeating itself over and over again. Two truths can co-exist: on the one hand, gatekeepers and potential interviewees might be oversimplifying their experiences as a way to make life a little bit less difficult and emotionally draining; on the other hand, deeply important and helpful insights exist and can be drawn from interviews with anyone.

3.2.3. The interviewing process

Having discussed the recruitment process and all the challenges it entailed, I want to focus on the interviewing itself, and how I justified the project and the use of interviews to my interviewees and gatekeepers. I decided to conduct detailed life story interviews, especially since I could not rely on additional ethnographic methods to collect rich data:

"A life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another.... A life story is a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 8).

As such, the life story interview is not to be read as an historically accurate record of someone's entire life or of a particular historical event. Rather, the point is to identify the speaker's subjective reality and first, understand what makes certain events more relevant than others in relation to the theme of the project, and second, examine the ways they present this information and what their choice of words, stories, and emotions says about how they see themselves now (Atkinson, 2007; Rogaly, 2015). Additionally, this type of interview allows for flexibility in scope:

"it is logically impossible to collect a complete life-story. [...] The collection of in-depth portions of life-stories rather than a superficial overview of an entire life is therefore perfectly acceptable, and even desirable" (M. Miles & Crush, 1993, p. 90).

I chose to use this method also because the interactive and interpretative nature of the life story interviews allows for individuals' personal accounts to potentially question and subvert dominant and sanitised narratives about specific social processes and phenomena like migration (Ni Laoire, 2007, p. 380). For example, there exists a widespread narrative among the Mongolian diaspora and Mongolian society according to which anyone will be able to make money fast in Korea. The experience of both marriage and labour migrant women challenged this simplistic, essentialised, and economical idea of migration to South Korea, but in their personal lives, they still struggled to be heard and be believed by their family and friends in Mongolia.

Having chosen the qualitative method most appropriate and effective for my project, I designed an interview schedule which included contextual questions about the respondents' lives before coming to Korea (e.g. place of birth; family relations in Mongolia; migration rationales), and themes about the present day and recent experiences (e.g. migration status; type of residence; job

experience). The interview schedule evolved whenever certain themes (e.g. thoughts and opinions about Ulaanbaatar and Seoul; remittances) became less relevant, whilst others (e.g. gendered expectations in Mongolia and Korea; labour relations in Korea) caught the interviewees' attention and encouraged them to talk more. Obviously, some themes were more relevant for the marriage migrants than for the labour migrant women, and vice versa; depending on the interviewee, I would focus on specific themes more than others to maximise the time they had given us. Before the first interviews, I sent the interview schedule to both Tsende and Undraa, so that they could familiarise themselves with it.

In the end, I organised the questions according to the following themes (which I later used to code the interviews; more on this later in the chapter): adaptation; migration rationales; visa application; labour; relationships; success; remittances; final remarks; emotions. The interview followed the same structure every time: brief introduction to the research project; explanation of the informed consent form; demographic information (i.e. name, age, place of birth, visa status, length of stay in Korea); interview questions; wrap-up. At the beginning of the interview, I would explain to the interviewee why I was using my phone and a notepad - that is, to help me keep track of their answers (I did not want them to think I was 'minding my own business' on my phone). During the interview, I would use my phone to keep track of the interview schedule and 'tick off' questions, one by one. I would also write notes down in my notepad (see Figure 3-3 below for a picture of my notepad, picked randomly). In the final 'wrap-up' stage of the interview, the interviewees would often ask me questions about why I was doing research on Mongolian women, and the marriage migrant women, in particular, would express hope that the project could help advocate for their rights.
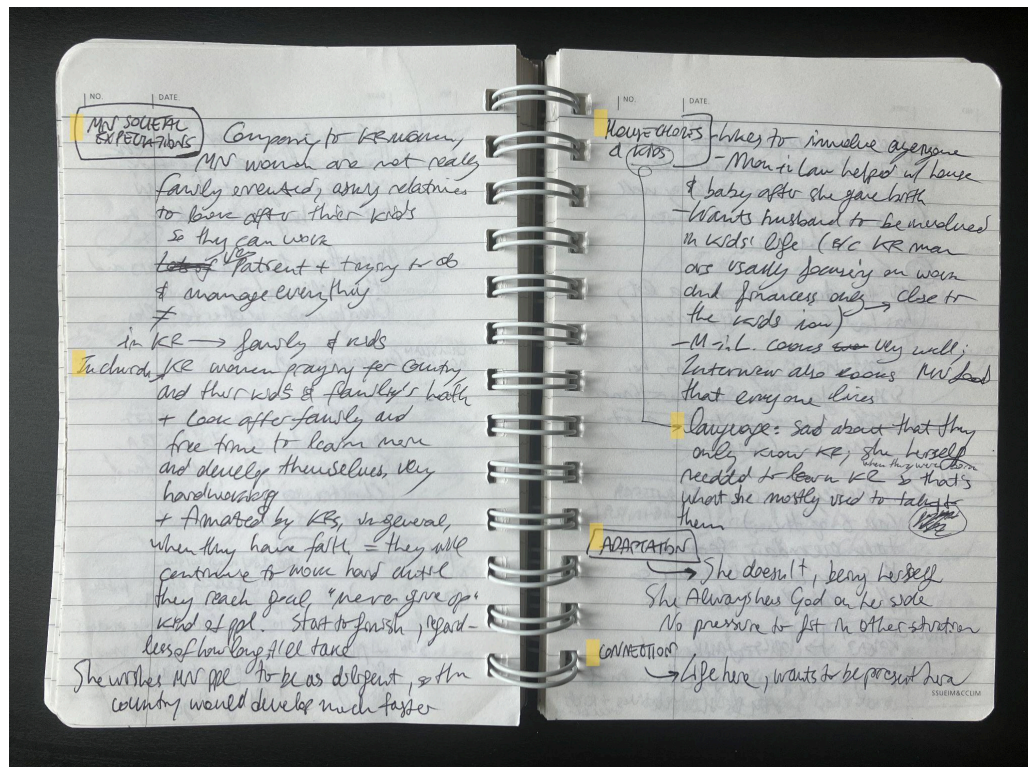
Figure 3-3: A picture of the field diary. During the interview, I would write down the theme of the question, according to the interview schedule. Doing so helped me keep track of the theme during both the interviewing and transcribing stages. Examples of themes and sub-themes, as seen in the picture, include Mongolian societal expectations (of women); house chores and kids; language skills; adaptation (to Korean society); connection (with Mongolia and Mongolians).

In terms of the locations of the interviews, most of them were conducted either at cafes near the interviewees' home or workplace, or on Zoom. The preferred location was a direct result of the respondents' personal circumstances and migration status. In-person interviews at cafes were the most common option for the marriage migrants, who managed to find and allocate several hours for our meeting (up to five consecutive hours). The duration of the interviews with the labour migrant women was considerably shorter and ranged between one and two hours, at the most. The reasons for this change in duration was that their work did not allow them the same degree of flexibility that the marriage migrants had. Suggesting a longer interview period might also disincentive them to participate in the interview in the first place, thus making the recruitment process even more arduous. Additionally, I had realised that one and a half hours was, on average, enough to cover at least the 'core' themes from the interview schedule. Interviews on Zoom also provided interviewees with more

flexibility. I used Zoom with a couple of marriage migrants whose caring responsibilities prevented them from being away from home, but also with most of the labour migrant women, who would talk to us during their breaks at work or during the weekend. Interviews were conducted with the camera turned off, as requested by the participants; in doing so, a private and confidential, convenient and time-saving setting was achieved and allowed for more transparency and openness from both parties (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020). Zoom, unlike phone calls, also allowed us to easily record the interview and whenever possible, create automatic transcripts (at least for the parts in English).

In total, I conducted 29 life story interviews, 15 with labour migrant women and 14 with marriage migrant women. Besides their very different visa status, these two groups differed also in terms of their place of birth and length of stay in Korea. I learned during fieldwork that a Mongolian's place of birth is often associated with their socio-economic status and social prestige. In practice, Ulaanbaatar's (UB) residents tend to frown upon other Mongolians who have moved to UB from smaller settlements from the rural areas of Mongolia. UB newcomers and former herders, especially, are viewed as backward and unsophisticated. Length of stay is also an important factor that puts migrant women's experiences into context. My interviewees' lived experiences, achievements, and hardships differed depending on whether they had lived in Korea for just a couple of years or two decades. To recap, the marriage migrants I interviewed predominantly came from Ulaanbaatar and had lived in Korea for an average of 15 years, whereas only half of the labour migrants were born in Ulaanbaatar, with the other half coming from various counties (Soum) and provinces (Aimag) in Mongolia. On average, the labour migrant women had lived in Korea for an average of eight years. Additionally, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with representatives and employees of local organisations, including a Multicultural Family Center, the Mongol School, the Mongolian Women's Federation, a women's rights organisation, an NGO working with undocumented migrants, and a government-approved helpline call centre for migrant women facing domestic violence.

All interviewees were equally anonymised according to the informed consent form I presented them. On the question of anonymity, Laoire (2007) explains that researchers need to find a

balance giving their respondents' fair credit to their stories, with creating a safe space, and recognising the power dynamics between the researcher and the interviewee. In my project, I had to follow the LSE research ethics guidelines, which encourage anonymisation of participants, whilst protecting the respondents' privacy and minimising the potential risk of being recognised by other members of their community. I used pseudonyms that started with the first letter of their real given name, followed by a 'code number' comprising their migrant status, age, and length of their stay in Korea at the time of the interview:

- MM for marriage migrants.

- MMK for marriage migrants with Korean citizenship.

- LM for labour migrants.

- ULM for undocumented labour migrants

- Example: Arban (MM.39.7) → Arban (pseudonym) is a 39-year-old marriage migrant who has lived in Korea for seven years.

I use this (rather unusual) coding system to remind the reader of the rigid technicalities of migration and the legal precarity and criteria that the Korean immigration system uses to control migrants. Tables 3-1 and 3-2 summarise the interviewees' codes and provide contextual information about their place of birth and date of the interview. Table 3-3 lists the interviews with local organisations.

Labour migrant women	Place of birth	Date of interview
Amgalan (LM.27.3)	UB	26/03/2022
Ankhtsetseg (LM.28.5)	Arvaikheer Soum, Uvurkhangai Aimag	09/04/2022
Badamlyanhua (ULM.38.4)	Chuluunkhoroot Soum, Dornod Aimag	25/04/2022
Battsetseg (ULM.45.14)	Darkhan Aimag	17/05/2022
Bayalag (ULM.49.6)	Dornod Aimag	01/05/2022
Enkhtuya (LM.27.10)	Erdenet[8]	27/03/2022
Gereltsetseg (LM.36.15)	UB	18/04/2022
Khaltmaa (LMB.48.7)	Jargalsaikhan Soum, Khentii Aimag	26/04/2022
Mandakh (LMB.37.7)	Dornod Aimag	03/04/2022
Munkhbayar (LM.35.10)	UB	24/03/2022
Orghana (ULM.48.4)	UB	03/05/2022
Ochir (LM.42.12)	UB	29/04/2022
Saikhanbayar (LM.29.5)	UB	16/04/2022
Soyolmaa (LM.29.2)	UB	13/05/2022
Yagaan (LMB.33.15)	Numrug Soum, Zavkhan Aimag	20/04/2022

Table 3-1: A list of my interviewees (labour migrant women), including their individual codes, place of birth, and date of the interview.

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[8] Erdenet is the second-largest city in Mongolia, with a little over 90,000 inhabitants. It is known for its mining and copper industry.

Marriage migrant women	Place of birth	Date of interview
Amarjargal (MM.39.7)	UB	11/12/2021
Ariun (MMK.36.14)	UB	08/01/2022
Bolormaa (MMK.51.21)	UB	23/12/2021
Baatar (MM.31.5)	Darkhan Aimag	05/12/2021
Bayartsetseg (MMK.33.14)	UB	28/12/2021
Delbee (MMK.50.21)	UB	01/04/2022
Kheshigmaa (MMK.33.11)	UB	12/12/2021
Khongorzul (MMK.39.17)	UB	27/12/2021
Narantuya (MMK.45.25)	UB	30/12/2021
Odval (MMK.33.12)	UB	18/12/2021
Sarnai (MMK.38.16)	UB	06/01/2022
Uugan (MM.48.24)	UB	10/12/2021
Urantögs (MMK.32.7)	UB	20/12/2021
Yargui (MMK.44.18)	UB	19/12/2021

Table 3-2: A list of my interviewees (marriage migrant women) including their individual codes, place of birth, and date of the interview.

Name of organisation	Organisation's focus	Date of interview
Multicultural Family Center	Marriage migrant women	16/03/2022
Mongol School	Mongolian marriage migrants, labour migrants, migrant youth	31/03/2022
Mongolian Women Federation in Korea	Mongolian marriage migrant women	05/04/2022
Women's Human Right Organization	Marriage migrant women	20/04/2022
Migrant NGO	Mongolian undocumented migrants	02/05/2022
Helpline call centre	Marriage migrant women	04/05/2022

Table 3-3. A list of the local organisations I interviewed.

3.2.4. Introducing the research project to the interviewees

There is another important aspect that shaped both the recruitment and interview process, which is the purpose of my research. Gatekeepers and interviewees had questions about the objective of the research, as well as expectations, doubts, and concerns. This became evident in three particular instances, that is, when interacting with the Multicultural Family Centers; with Mongolian marriage migrants, especially those with young children; with documented Mongolian labour migrant women. Firstly, one of the Multicultural Family Centers based in central Seoul made it clear that they did not want to potentially risk introducing their members to projects which could have ulterior motives and hidden agendas (e.g., religious recruitment). During our introductory meeting, they wanted to be given specific explanations of how the project would 'help' the people involved, and also requested I share the dissertation with the centre and that I advertised the centre with the local Italian community (which I didn't even know existed and had personally never met). At the time, I found the tone of the Multicultural Family Center's employees to be quite harsh and imposing, and I struggled to understand why. Looking back, it is clear to me now that it was my responsibility to create trust and show the value, scope, and objectives of my research. In my field diary, I reflected on my position as the outsider researcher, who had to earn the employee's trust and be transparent about my research objectives and assumptions, instead of feeling entitled to her time and help. In my field diary, I wrote:

> *Later, Tsende [said] that [the employee] was rude for the first part of the interview, but that maybe because the woman herself had been a married migrant, she sympathised with the aim of the project. The woman had mentioned how foreign wives would get tricked and abused, and could not even leave the house on their own, and that in recent years, the situation had improved and foreign women married to Koreans are more free, that the culture is changing. Tsende suspects that the woman had maybe gone through that experience of hardship and abuse, either directly or indirectly, and maybe that is why she softened after my reply [about how the project viewed marriage migrants, and how it aimed to advocate for their rights].*
> (Field diary, entry 2021.12.01)

At a different centre, I also encountered resistances from the employees, who emphasised how sharing information and insights about the centre could potentially jeopardise their hard work, especially given the political climate at the time, when the newly elected Korean president was threatening to dismantle the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs (McCurry, 2022). Indeed, when dealing with governmental institutions, especially those based in Seoul, it became clear that there were multiple tensions and power dynamics at play. Interestingly, I only found this resistance in Seoul. A Mongolian representative from a Multicultural Family Center in a city outside the capital (but still within the official boundaries of the city's metropolitan government) did not have any issues talking with us and sharing their insights with working with Mongolian women or their MFC's programmes. My hypothesis is that the centres in the capital have probably received more attention over the years, because of their size, scope (i.e. working with several nationalities), and location. Centres outside the capital have probably received fewer interview requests and the administrators might not have any formal policy against them. But back in the field, I mostly felt perplexed by these apparently politically driven rejections.

> *The [person] Tsende and I first met at the Multicultural Family Center in* redacted *said that she was not going to give an interview. Other researchers had asked to do interviews and 'things got political' after findings got published. Therefore, the centre was not allowing any more interviews, either bluntly or subtly. I am still trying to wrap my head around this situation.* (Field diary, entry 2022.04.15; location edited for confidentiality)

Secondly, migrant women also had thoughts and feelings about the research project and its purpose. Their opinions likely stemmed from their own personal circumstances and needs as migrant women. Consequently, I catered to their specific priorities and situations when explaining the purpose of my research and how it related to them. For example, especially at the end of the interview, several marriage migrant women expressed gratitude and hope towards the project. For them, participating in the research meant having their voices heard and, ideally, getting closer to having a chance to influence existing migration policies for themselves and their children. Hence, when recruiting and

interviewing marriage migrant women, I actively centred the purpose of my research on this hope and expectation - an expectation that genuinely aligns with my personal interest in policy-oriented research. Similarly, undocumented migrant women mentioned the cathartic release they felt after the interview, and some even suggested policy changes regarding police raids against undocumented migrants.

Thirdly and finally, labour migrant women, who perceived their needs and hardships in Korea as temporary, did not have the same expectations or hopes for policy change. Presenting the purpose of my research as rooted in migration advocacy, was encountered by overall disinterest and indifference. What caught the attention of the labour migrant women was highlighting their entrepreneurial and professional skills and *savoir-faire*. Hence, I tended to introduce the project to them through the focus on labour, arguing how labour migration to East Asia predominantly focuses on male contract workers, thus overlooking female foreign workers and their own challenges and achievements. To position the project in this light allowed me to both discuss my research objectives and show genuine interest and appreciation for the potential interviewees' experience and skills. In conclusion, I strategically highlighted specific aspects of my research to cater to the needs, concerns, and circumstances of my interlocutors. But to discuss how I positioned my project in relation to the interviewees would only be half of the story; my positionality as a researcher needs further examination, which I detail in Section 3.3.

3.2.5. Methodological limitations and mitigations

There are three main methodological limitations which need to be addressed: the lack of triangulation with other qualitative, particularly participatory, methods; the limited range of types of interviewees; and the limited analysis of the labour market in Seoul. As I discuss these limitations, I will also explain what I did to mitigate them. First, due to social distancing measures, it was not possible for me to triangulate my interview data with other participatory methods. Initially, I had planned to conduct participant observations in Mongol Town and other key sites (e.g., Multicultural Family Centers, and other Mongolian migrant women's organisations and places of gathering). The goal of

these observations was to find out how my interviewees behaved with each other and with Koreans outside of the interview space. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was no longer an option: smaller organisations closed their offices, and events moved online. Since I was a complete newcomer and outsider upon arriving in Korea in Autumn 2021, and had considerable time constraints to deal with, I realised that I would not be able to enter these organisations' offices nor participate in online events for marriage migrant women only. Organising in-person focus groups was no longer feasible, and the prospect of holding focus groups online became problematic, mostly because it was already difficult enough to get interviewees to give me time for an interview. Whilst online events and group calls on Zoom had become normal during the pandemic, I was also unfamiliar with the practical and ethical implications of an online focus group. Therefore, as a result of these pandemic-related limitations, I relied on life story interviews only.

The second limitation of this study is the limited range of interviewees. Due to time constraints, I was unable to establish more personal and reliable connections and entry points and find a wider range of respondents, including marriage migrant women who had met their Korean husbands through marriage brokers (a practice more common among Mongolian women in their 40s and 50s), undocumented migrants (I only got to interview four), and Korean state officials. I was able to interview a broad range of documented labour migrant women and non-governmental organisations. The lack of interviews with Korean state officials working in immigration service and other Korean organisations, was particularly hard to accept and mitigate. Due to my lack of connections with state stakeholders, I was unable to find spokespeople who could speak on migration trends in Korea without repeating what their institutional websites already discussed. I mitigated this lack of institutional and official interviews by relying on the materials and documents provided by official state websites, especially in Chapter 4.

The third and final methodological limitation of this study affects Chapter 5, specifically, and the lack of detailed data on the organisations and services, and particular characteristics of the labour market of Seoul. Whilst I drew from existing literature discussing wider trends in the labour market in

Korea, which arguably also applies to Seoul, I did not collect any primary data on and with, for instance, Seoul-based recruitment agencies and foreign workers' organisations to find out what makes Seoul's labour market different compared to other Korean cities. As the focus of the project at the beginning of fieldwork was much different and primarily focused on remittances (see Section 3.1 of this chapter), I only asked my interviewees about their personal job experiences and job satisfaction, rather than their thoughts and opinions about the migrant labour market of Seoul, in general. Hence, Chapter 5 does not provide original insights about the city-specific meso-level institutions that feature in the labour market of the capital. In addition, it should also be noted that, in this thesis, my research site comprised the wider Seoul Metropolitan Area, meaning that the types of jobs that migrants could access are likely to be varied as this area encompasses financial districts, commercial and residential areas, factories, and more. As a consequence of this missing data, I am aware that I may have reproduced a national-local binary in my analysis, in the sense that I mostly addressed the national (e.g., Korean national immigration and labour policies) and the local (Brickell & Datta, 2016; Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013; e.g., the embodied lived experiences of migrant women; Sayer, 1991). Additional research would be needed to fill in this data gap.

In summary, I explained how I had to adjust my plans to secure access to gatekeepers and potential interviewees, since the institutions and organisations I planned to contact never got back to me. With the help of a SNUAC visiting scholar from Mongolia, I eventually succeeded in hiring two Mongolian research assistants, Tsende and Undra. Together, we employed a series of recruitment strategies (e.g., in-person introductory meetings, Facebook posts, asking personal contacts, emailing or calling organisations) - some were more successful than others. Given the COVID-19-related constraints, we carried out a total of 29 life story interviews, which were conducted either in person or on Zoom. An interview schedule was used to keep track of the main themes of the project. Finally, I also explained how I presented the purpose of my project to each group of Mongolian migrant women, in order to cater to their needs and interests, and how I mitigated some of the methodological limitations I encountered during and after fieldwork.

3.3. Working with research assistants and multiple positionalities in the field

My positionality - as well as that of my research assistants - certainly influenced the data collection phase of this project. By positionality, I am referring to "the fact that a researcher's characteristics affect both substantive and practical aspects of the research process—from the nature of questions that are asked, through data collection, analysis and writing, to how findings are received" (Carling et al., 2014, p. 37). In the past, methodological nationalism[9] caused discussion on positionality to be superficial and assume that national distinctions were the primary boundary to consider. This bias resulted in a simplistic and dualistic discussion that viewed positionality as a question of insider or outsider status (Carling et al., 2014; Shinozaki, 2012; Andreassen & Myong, 2017, p. 98). So, rather than uncritically adopting the 'outsider' status on the basis of the nationality difference between me and my interviewees, I want to adapt and unpack a more nuanced stance - that of the 'explicit third party' (Carling et al., 2014, pp. 49-50) - and examine it in relation to my respondents, and my research assistants.

A researcher assumes an explicit third party when they can be clearly recognised as a member of neither the researched group nor the majority population, hence experiencing an initial dissociation from both the insider and outsider groups (Carling et al., 2014, 49). This dissociation can provide more flexibility when other features and characteristics are present or are shared with the respondents. For example, my being Italian created a sense of separation from both Mongolian and Korean society. As a complete outsider, I believe I was perceived as less threatening, as someone who would be more impartial either way. In other words, it is likely that I was perceived as someone who would not 'take sides' with any specific view or discourse from either Mongolia or Korea. Additionally, as a third-party researcher, there were other features and social relations that shaped my interactions with Mongolian women. The most notable ones include gender, class (including my international student status), and nationality. Being a woman doing research on migrant women probably made most informants comfortable with the idea of sharing their personal stories and struggles as foreign women,

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[9] The tendency or mindset according to which someone's nationality alone captures the whole of that individual's identity.

as wives in international marriages, and as mothers of multinational children (Kusek & Smiley, 2014, p. 160).

Actively reflecting upon my positionality through the lenses of gender and nationality was essential in bringing to my awareness and consciousness "known (seen), unknown (unseen), and unanticipated (unforeseen) issues, perspectives, epistemologies, and positions" (Milner, 2007, p. 395). Firstly, although I do not have a migrant background myself (my family never left Italy), I was also a foreigner in Korea. So, to some extent, I believe that while not being Mongolian, my foreignness granted me a partial insider status among my respondents (Carling et al. 2014). For example, during the interviews, I could genuinely relate to some of my interviewees' frustrations with the Korean immigration system, or Korean society's expectations of acceptability and prestige. Secondly, by addressing my positionality critically, I was also able to identify how nationality (and colourism) played a role in how I was perceived by Mongolian women (Udor & Yoon, 2022). It is likely respondents perceived my whiteness in several, interconnected, and shifting ways, but always starting with my body and phenotypic traits: for instance, my fair skin, double eyelids, and wavy hair were likely perceived as the markers of desirable gendered beauty standards in Korea, but also as the physical representation of an inherited racial and socio-economic privileged position stemming from my being a 'Westerner' (Camenisch, 2022; H. Lu & Hodge, 2019). Thirdly and finally, my whiteness and Euro-centric, binary understanding of race and racialisation have also informed my initial analysis and assumption about racial relations in Korea, and caused me to adopt, incorrectly and inaccurately, a 'neutral' stance on the basis of my outsider observer status (Andreassen & Myong, 2017, p. 102; Koh & Sin, 2022).

My multifaceted and intersectional foreignness resulted in various privileges, but also in specific challenges that I needed to address, specifically in terms of the lack of language skills, my student status, and my data analysis. I realised early on in the field that my credibility as a researcher was at risk. On the one hand, I did not speak Mongolian, so there was a significant linguistic and interpersonal barrier between me and Mongolian women. On the other hand, as a young student, I

feared I would not be taken as seriously by both interviewees and other gatekeepers and institutions (Andreassen & Myong, 2017). So, whenever appropriate, I would reveal personal information concerning my previous research in Mongolia and Ulaanbaatar, in an attempt to both show academic experience and a genuine connection with the migrant group (Carling et al., 2014). Hiring research assistants like Tsende and Undraa was essential. As previously mentioned, I met Tsende through an acquaintance at the SNU Asia Research Centre; she later introduced me to Undraa. They are both Mongolian women, respectively in their early 30s and late 20s, who had been studying and working in Korea for a few years. When vetting potential interpreters, it was essential that their positionality aligned with the migrant groups' as much as possible (Edwards, 2013).

I can confidently say that if I had hired a Korean person to conduct interviews in Korean, the interviews would have not yielded the same kind of data and insights. Tsende and Undraa's gender, migration experiences in Korea, age, and direct connection with Mongolian culture and society, granted them an insider status. This status did not mean that any personal belief or difference between them and the interviewee was automatically resolved. For example, during the final in-person meeting with Tsende and Undraa, I wrote in my field diary how Tsende had expressed surprise and slight confusion at marriage migrants changing their citizenship because of what she saw as mere 'bullying', thus implying how she saw her decision as extreme and almost unnecessary. Another time, Tsende was bothered by an interviewee's constant mention of God and her church because she felt it was not useful for the project. On a different occasion, Undraa had mentioned feeling frustrated after an interviewee spent several minutes talking about her passion for jogging and running marathons when asked about her free time. Undraa did not have any particular interest or appreciation for this sport, and she saw that answer as irrelevant and even outside the scope of the research. On all of these occasions, I took on the responsibility to validate their feelings and clarify their doubts about the interviews and what counts as a 'correct' answer, so that they could also adjust their expectations towards the interviewees.

It should be noted that just as there were important positionality-based dynamics and challenges between my interpreters and the interviewees, so there were between my interpreters and myself. Before we started working together, I provided them a disclaimer form detailing the terms and conditions for the position (e.g. agreed salary of 15,000 KRW per hour with possible increase over time; hired research assistants cannot use the collected data for their own publications and other forms of knowledge dissemination). A variety of relational issues emerged nonetheless, although their nature and gravity changed over time. As Edwards (1998) argues:

> "Virtually all social research poses ethical dilemmas of some sort, is never value-free, and is shot through with disparities of power operating at different contextual levels. Working with interpreters is no exception" (Edwards, 1998, p. 206).

For instance, when I knew Tsende for only a couple of weeks, it was hard for me to chime in during interviews or conversations. There were two specific instances where I noticed she was either going on a tangent or forgetting to translate altogether. The first episode took place at one of the Seoul-based Multicultural Family Center, where Tsende got in a seemingly heated discussion with the employee and there was a constant back-and-forth. The second episode occurred in Mongol Town tower, when we were trying to recruit some of her friend's acquaintances. I included extracts from my field diary, respectively, below.

> *[...] [Tsende] needs to translate more often, so that I am also in the loop, because if I had been, I myself could have told her what to reply to help improve the situation. After the meeting, I stressed to her the fact that I am responsible for the project and that she does not have to carry on her shoulder such responsibilities like, for instance, explaining and defending the methodology of the project or justifying the relevance of the project. I understand that she was being proactive and that her intentions were good, and that in the heat of the moment, when someone is being hostile, it is hard to stop and translate. But I need to remind myself that I am the researcher.* (Field diary, entry 2021.12.01)

Tsende spoke as fast as she ever did, barely making a pause between sentences. After a minute or two, which felt longer, I got the impression that the women were starting to lose interest or that their attention was going away with every new bit of information Tsende was disclosing about the project. I did not stop her though, because I felt that the close, intimate environment would have made it virtually impossible to interrupt her without making it too noticeable or catching her off guard. (Field diary, entry 2022.03.15)

Finding a balance between trusting the interpreter's skills and abilities to handle social situations, as well as the translation and transcribing process, and ensuring the purpose of the project as well as my role as the researcher are presented accurately, was certainly a challenge. In both instances, I perceived a temporary loss of power and authority because of the language barrier ('*But I need to remind myself that I am the researcher*', I told myself later). In those moments, Tsende was in charge, and my anxieties and concerns (*what is she saying? What is happening?*) were further exacerbated by the circumstances; the fact that I was a guest, and a relatively young student, made me feel like I did not have a right to interrupt or chime in (Bergen, 2018, p. 8).

Over time, my research assistants and I developed a more personal relationship based on trust and honesty. This was possible through informal gathering and conversations before and after the interviews (ibid., p. 9). The same happened with Undraa. We would chat about our lives, relationships, plans for the future, at cafes or in the subway train on the way home. Through these informal conversations, I was also able to familiarise the interpreters with the research aims and questions, and my role and expectations, and develop a clear and shared understanding of how I would conduct the interviews and what all of our expectations were (Adamson & Donovan, 2002; Liamputtong, 2008). Other challenges stemming from working with research assistants included the three-way production of data, the interpreter's selective translation, the reliability of their interpretation, their impartiality, and other issues of confidentiality (Murray & Wynne, 2001). In order to preventively deal with these challenges, I audio recorded the interviews and tasked both Tsende and Undraa with transcribing the Mongolian parts. Doing so allowed them and me to be open about the

difficulties of immediate translating, so the Mongolian transcripts also served as a back-up source of data in case they had missed or mistranslated anything during the interview itself. In terms of confidentiality, at the end of data collection, I explained to Tsende and Undraa that they should not contact the respondents again for other people's research project (at the time, they were being offered a job as interpreters for a US professor) or for any other reason.

To recap, I framed my positionality with my interviewees and research assistants as a third-party outsider - that is, as a member of neither Mongolian nor Korean society. Whilst this status arguably helped me come across as a rather neutral interlocutor, my gender, age, nationality, and whiteness likely had a positive influence on Mongolian women's perception of me. This perception probably also informed their decision to participate in the project or not. I also discussed the need to hire research assistants whose own positionality would be positively welcomed by interviewees. Finally, I described some practical challenges of working with interpreters, especially when dealing with the language barrier and their personal beliefs and experiences of and during the interviews.

3.4. Leaving the field: guilt and 'post-research ethics' in the data analysis and writing-up

Once fieldwork ended and I left Seoul, I was faced with a new set of ethical and methodological challenges related to my positionality. My positionality and the resulting assumptions I had developed by interacting with my respondents deeply influenced the initial data analysis. In practice, life story interviews should be analysed and interpreted as interactive texts that do not provide uncontaminated recounts of the past (M. Miles & Crush, 1993; G. Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004), as a text which is the product of a complex and dynamic collaboration between the narrator, the researcher, and, in my case, my interpreter (Kazmierska, 2004, p. 186). Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal (2004) propose a six step analytical method to unveil and examine each layer of a biographical life-story interview: 1) familiarise yourself with the biographical data (e.g. the main events) from the interview text; 2) conduct a first round of thematic analysis using recurrent codes and themes to identify the narrator's self-representation, i.e. the narrator's contemporary image and self-image in the community

(Miles & Crush, 1993, 91); 3) organise the data in chronological order ('life as lived'); 4) carry out

detailed analysis of each individual sections from the text; 5) contrast 'the life story as narrated' (i.e.

the self-representation) with 'life as lived' (i.e. the chronological events); 6) organise the findings by

type (G. Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004, pp. 360-361).

I started by analysing the parts in English of the interview, which I personally transcribed, and

compared them with the parts in Mongolian, which I translated using online tools in order to minimise

any potential translation-related issues, such as missing parts or mistranslations (Miles & Crush, 1993,

p. 88). In so doing, I retrieved as much data as possible to develop a more rounded depiction of the

narrator's cultural reality and insights, record the biographical meaning of the interview (i.e. what the

interviewee says and decides to shares), and interpret the manner in which it was presented (see also

Kazmierska, 2004; i.e. how the interviewee talks about a specific event or experience, and what

purpose that story serves in their eyes; G. Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004, pp. 362-363)

(Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004, 362-363; see also Kazmierska, 2004). Kazmierska (2004, pp.

188-89) argues in favour of interpreting the narratives emerging from the transcript in groups of

researchers with the goal of clarifying any dilemmas (others have suggested carrying out the analysis

stage with the help of their research assistants, see Temple & Young, 2004). In my case, it was not

possible to organise a group discussion with my research assistants, due to practical, logistical, and

financial obstacles. After carrying out the various steps of biographical life-story data analysis, I was

the sole researcher responsible for the interpretation of the interviewees' narratives. Thankfully,

additional comments and further analyses emerged from my supervisors' feedback, although this was

limited to the specific interview extracts I included in earlier drafts of this thesis.

As the sole researcher in charge of analysing the data, my positionality has greatly influenced

the first rounds of interpretation. As I mentioned in the previous section, it can be argued that my

foreignness - my being a foreigner in Korea like my respondents - made me a sort of insider-by-proxy

(Carling et al., 2014). But after leaving the field, this status and experience also led to the following

interconnected challenges. First, l realised that I had been carrying a sense of guilt after leaving the

field. This guilt stemmed from both the arguably exploitative nature of qualitative research methods, which often translated in one-way exchanges of deeply sensitive personal stories, and the fact I was leaving Seoul without a plan to return anytime soon (Huisman, 2008). Second, I felt the urgent responsibility to help influence some sort of policy change through my research, since so many of my respondents (the marriage migrant and the undocumented migrant women, especially) had been vocal about their need for change. Some of them expressed that their decision to participate in the interviews was informed by that hope or expectation. Third and finally, at times, one group of migrant women might be perceived as more 'successful' or 'resilient' than the other. Hence, the risk of inadvertently pitting one group of migrant women against each other, or creating some sort of value-based hierarchy, troubled me. The three interconnected challenges influenced my initial data interpretation and resulted in me 'taking sides'. Since these women had shared their stories with me, I felt that I had to validate their feelings and opinions to prove the need for policy change by putting them and their views on a pedestal 'out of respect' for their time. In reality, this internalised guilt resulted in me taking their accounts at face value. My initial interpretations lacked depth, and my respondents, and Korean society through their interviews, ended up coming across as essentialised caricatures.

Whilst research ethics predominantly focus on ethical challenges before and during fieldwork (J. J. Zhang, 2017, p. 148), it is still essential to be sensitive of the aftermath of interviews and "leave narrators feeling cared for, respected and that they have contributed to something that encompasses, but it also much larger, than their individual narratives" (Pascoe Leahy, 2022, p. 791). In my own research, my change in approach was informed by a deeper understanding of 'post-research ethics', which Zhang (2017, p. 152) describes as:

> "ethics of care that are rendered even after the completion of a research. Such acts of care need not necessarily fit into abstract notions of social activism or justice, but are nevertheless reflective of the compassion for and commitment to the researched community. Humble but

practical ways to reciprocate help and support in turn contribute to an ethically sensitive geography."

Coming to terms with an initially flawed and essentialising interpretation of my data, I had to go back to my interviews and revisit my analysis by compassionately unveiling *and* critically examining the meanings and functions of my interviewees' stories, and the reasons and circumstances that informed why they shared them. Whilst policy-oriented research and policy impact are still at the forefront of my personal and professional priorities, my application of 'post-research ethics' primarily takes the form of a compassionate and critically constructive analysis of my interviewees' voices.

To recap, my positionality also informed my analysis of the interviews and the first drafts of my empirical chapters. More specifically, I explained that I felt a sense of responsibility towards my respondents and their hope for significant policy change. Whilst rooted in good intentions, this feeling ultimately translated into a sense of guilt which in turn, pushed me to take my interviewees' stories and opinion at face value. In so doing, I figuratively put their accounts on a pedestal in the hope that by shedding light on their hardships, I could prove the urgent need for policy change. Once I realised that I was doing my interviewees a disservice by being uncritical about their experiences, I revisited my initial interpretations of my data and approached writing with both compassion for my respondents' stories and a more critical lens. This approach, rooted in a focus on 'post-research ethics', allowed me to humanise Mongolian migrant women, instead of essentialising them into victims of their circumstances.

3.5. Conclusion: final reflections on the challenges of doing fieldwork

In this chapter, I reflected upon my experience preparing for, conducting, and finalising fieldwork. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in specific practical and methodological barriers for my project, each phase of my fieldwork came with its own unforeseen set of challenges. Drawing from my field diary was particularly helpful in remembering and unpacking the privileges and challenges I

encountered in the field. I first discussed the issue of access and the uncertainty that I faced when the local organisations I had planned to build relationships with never responded to my emails. Relying on new (especially at the Seoul National University Asia Research Centre) and existing contacts (e.g., marriage migrants I met during past visits) was essential in gaining access to potential interviewees and local institutions. Finding skilled and qualified interpreters/research assistants, Tsende and Undraa, was a key turning point for my fieldwork, as they were able to contact and recruit interviewees through Facebook posts, personal contacts, and other organisations. I explained that not all recruitment strategies were successful. For example, attempts to recruit Mongolian labour migrant women employed in Mongol Town tower during work hours failed either immediately or resulted in no actual interviews. Once meetings were set, I conducted life story interviews about Mongolian migrant women's own perceptions of and narratives about their migration rationales and various lived experiences in Korea. As explained, this qualitative method is meant to provide insights about the interviewee's personal interpretation of their life decision, rather than an historically accurate record of their life.

Although specific practical changes (e.g., in terms of duration and location of the interview) were made in order to accommodate the needs of the different groups of migrant women, the interviewing process was, in general, smooth. During the actual interview, most of which were conducted in Mongolian-English, I used an interview schedule to keep track of the main themes and questions asked. I also addressed some of the methodological limitations that I encountered during and after fieldwork, and how I mitigated them. Another important theme that I discussed in this chapter concerns positionality, both mine and my research assistants'. I explained that my foreignness gave me a 'third-party status', where I was seen as an external party to both Mongolian and Korean culture. Whilst this status gave me an apparent aura of neutrality, I also reflected on how my whiteness, gender, age, and nationality put me in a privileged position where I was received warmly and positively by almost all interviewees. In terms of the analysis and writing-up stages of fieldwork,

I carried out multiple rounds of data analysis after realising I had taken my respondents' answers at face value, turning them and their opinions into uncritical generalisations.

At the end of this chapter, I addressed how some particular challenges continue to be present even after the formal end of fieldwork. The question of 'post-research ethics' might not be at the forefront of existing literature on the ethical challenges of qualitative research (Pascoe Leahy, 2022; J. J. Zhang, 2017), but it still needs to be taken seriously. Whilst my original hope was to be able to directly influence Korean immigration policies - as my respondents have wished, too - I accepted that this outcome will be unlikely within the scope of this thesis. On a personal and professional level, I feel the urgent need to engage with migration advocacy more actively, in response to not only my experiences in the field, but also the undeniable politicisation of migration in Korea, but also in my own home country and across the world. Within the scope of this thesis, I employed 'post-research ethics' by prioritising a compassionate and constructively critical lens of analysis to my interpretations of the interview data. Outside of this project's methodology, I am also aware that policy briefs, executive summaries of my research, and policy-oriented academic publications are needed to create the opportunity for policy impact. Either way, the aftermath of fieldwork and the lessons that I learned throughout it continue to influence and guide me towards a policy-oriented, positionality-aware approach that puts migrants' voice first.

Chapter 4 - Citizenship-making and the social reproduction of Life's Work as legal precarity

4.1. Introduction

As I explained in Section 2.2 of this thesis, the concept of Life's Work captures the idea that the precarity, oppression, and exploitation usually associated with "life at work" have actually become a normal and deeply rooted aspect of "life outside of work", too. In this chapter, I focus on the legal-institutional space of Korea's migration system to illustrate how the empirical process of citizenship-making reproduces Life's Work in the form of legal precarity. By legal precarity, I am referring to migrants' conditional access to citizenship rights, the condition being that Mongolian marriage migrant women and labour migrant women should, respectively, culturally assimilate into Korean society, and only temporarily settle in Korea (E. A. Chung, 2020a; Hong, 2018; D. Y. Kim, 2017; H.-M. Kim et al., 2017). I use the lens of gender to explain the specific socio-cultural norms, relations, and expectations that inform the process of citizenship-making, and the resulting diverse experiences of legal precarity for these two groups of Mongolian migrant women. Therefore, the main question this chapter asks is, *how does the process of citizenship-making contribute to the social reproduction of Life's Work?* The chapter asks the following sub-questions: *how do Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women experience the process of citizenship-making and the resulting legal precarity within the Korean immigration system? How does the social structure of gender shape this process and its outcome? And how do different migrant women navigate and negotiate them?* These questions allow a broader focus of analysis to address how immigration incorporation and citizenship-making processes result in different experiences of legal precarity for different groups of migrants (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017; Clarke et al., 2014; Ho, 2008; Ong, 2006; Yuva-Davis, 1991).

The argument at the core of this chapter is that the empirical process of citizenship-making, which is deeply informed by gendered norms and expectations determining migrant women's value in Korea's visa system, contributes to the social reproduction of Life's Work in the form of legal

precarity. Citizenship-making is a nonlinear, uncertain, and continuous process of 'being-made' and 'self-making' (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017; E. A. Chung, 2017, p. 432, 2021; Clarke et al., 2014), resulting in different forms of legal precarity depending on the visa status of the migrant women. Indeed, the lens of citizenship-making is helpful to explain how citizenship rights (i.e., civil, political, and social rights and responsibilities; Yuval-Davis, 1991, p. 59) are allocated differently to migrants, depending on factors like gender. On the one hand, Mongolian marriage migrant women experience legal precarity as a result of marriage migration policies and naturalisation pathways. On the other hand, Mongolian labour migrant women outside of the Employment Permit System face legal precarity because their presence in Korea is actively made as temporary as possible in an attempt to 'safeguard' Korea's ethnic homogeneity.

In this Chapter, I also argue that, albeit in different ways, both groups of Mongolian migrant women navigate the process of citizenship-making, whereby they are simultaneously 'being-made' and 'self-making' themselves into desirable contributors to Korean society in order to mitigate their legal precarity. As a result of this selective allocation of rights and freedoms, the process of citizenship-making can either become static (i.e., when a migrant is stuck with a non-renewable or non-changeable visa) or subject to reversal (i.e., when a migrant can no longer fulfil their visa requirements; E. A. Chung, 2021, p. 295). For example, by proactively working towards meeting the criteria for their next visa, Mongolian labour migrant women acquire new skills and qualifications that make them more desirable in the eyes of the Korean immigration system, and consequently, Korean society, too. In the case of Mongolian marriage migrant women, they decide to mitigate their legal precarity by pursuing Korean naturalisation and becoming socially and culturally assimilated Korean citizens. By also highlighting their different and visa-specific agentic responses to mitigate legal precarity, I demonstrate that both groups of migrant women are not passive victims of Life's Work, but are actively entangled in the empirical process (i.e., citizenship-making) reproducing it.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The next section provides technical and contextual information about the Korean immigration system. It is divided into two subsections. The first

subsection provides a descriptive overview of my interviewees' migration rationales. The focus is on their subjective perceptions of Korea as a desirable destination country. The second subsection presents the various types of visas my interviewees have applied for as a result of their migration rationales; here I present Korean immigration policies and mission statements and explain technical terms and visa application processes. The following section is where the core argument of this chapter is evidenced and based on my interviewees' subjective experiences of the Korean immigration system and the legal precarity resulting from the process of citizenship-making. The section explains how this process works in practice, what legal precarity looks like for different groups of Mongolian migrant women, and how each group employs their agency to mitigate said specific iterations of precarity. Finally, the chapter ends with concluding remarks about the social reproduction of Mongolian migrant women's legal precarity, and the complex entanglement between citizenship-making, Life's work, and migrant agency.

4.2. Migration rationales and Korea's visa system: a technical overview

4.2.1. Key trends in migration rationales among Mongolian women

Content-wise, the migration rationales of my interviewees were consistently the same, and the only difference between the marriage and labour migrant women was the scope or breadth of their rationales. On the one hand, the marriage migrant women originally considered several interconnected factors in their decision to move to Korea, namely family reasons (i.e., in the form of advice from family members and/or responsibility towards family members, especially their children), educational opportunities, financial prospects, and romantic relationships. The popularity of Korean entertainment - with its romanticised portrayal of Korean society and relationships in popular K-dramas - and geographic proximity also informed some of my interviewees' migration rationales. In summary, there were not one or two specific factors, but a plethora of motivations that seemingly held equal importance to them. On the other hand, labour migrant women's migration rationales stood out very clearly. My interviewees' decision to move to Korea was predominantly informed by their desire and

need to firstly, provide for their family (especially in terms of improving their children's education and living standards), and secondly, access better economic opportunities. These two rationales were closely associated with one another. Circumstantial factors such as similar language and culture, and geographic proximity also motivated a couple of my interviewees to move to Korea, rather than going to Western countries like the US.

I have provided a graph below (see Figure 4.1) to visualise and compare the migration rationales of both groups; the data used in the graph consists of how many factors each respondent mentioned during their interview. For example, ten labour migrant women talked about family; five marriage migrant women mentioned love and romantic relationships as a reason to move to Korea. The graph clearly shows how multiple, interconnected rationales motivated marriage migrant women's decisions, whereas labour migrants consistently and primarily referred to two factors (family advice/responsibility, and economic opportunities). Overall, family-related reasons, economic incentives, education, and Korean entertainment are the four most relevant migration rationales for both groups of migrant women, so I will elaborate on them further and explain what different meanings each group gave them.
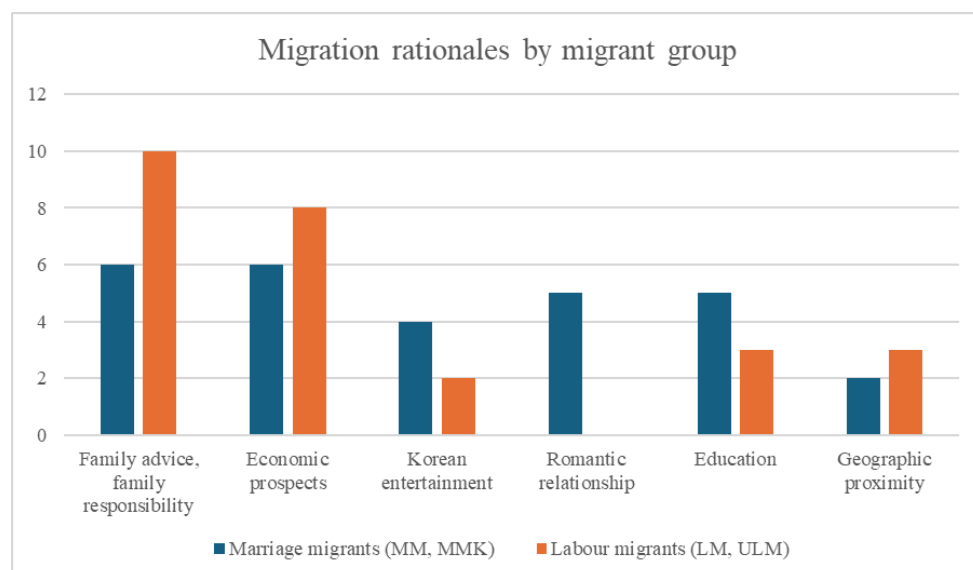
Figure 4-1: Migration rationales by migrant group.

Firstly, family-related migration rationales generally entailed close relatives' advice about working and living in Korea. For marriage migrant women, including Amarjargal (MM.39.7), Odval (MMK.33.12), and Sarnai (MMK.38.16), their close relatives' advice about and first-hand experience of life in Korea greatly incentivised and encouraged them to move to Korea for study or work. Labour migrant women also followed their parents and siblings' guidance and knowledge, and picked Korea as a destination country. For example, it was Munkhbayar's (LM.35.10) uncle who urged her to leave Mongolia and seek better opportunities in Korea; she recalls her uncle telling her, "If you stay in Mongolia, your life won't improve; you need to go to Korea to make some money, it's such a different country there". Such a strong plea came as a surprise to her, but she decided to quit her job as a hairdresser and start over in Seoul. Similar advice was also given to and factored in by Saikhanbayar (LM.29.5) and Enkhtuya (LM.27.10). Family's migration advice and insights, and other forms of knowledge transfers from trustworthy actors (such as close relatives), indeed play an important role in migrants' decisions to seek better opportunities in familiar destination countries (Ball et al., 2021; Baldassar & Pyke, 2014; Williams, 2007).

Additionally, family-related migration rationales were based upon migrant women's responsibility and commitment to providing a better life for their children. In other words, the decision to migrate to Korea stemmed from my respondents' need and desire to access better opportunities for their children. This rationale was especially common among Mongolian labour migrant women. Khaltmaa (LMB.48.7) and Bayalag (ULM.49.6) were very open about the need to migrate for their family and children's sake. Khaltmaa explains that whilst she was conducting business between Mongolia and Korea, she decided to work to prioritise her children's education and thus, find a job and a visa in Korea that would allow her to improve her children's wellbeing for the foreseeable future. Similarly, Bayalag echoes that sentiment:

"I came here to raise my three children in a safe and healthy environment. Foreign products are widely used in Mongolia, but food safety is not guaranteed. Children are not guaranteed to

live and grow up healthy. It is almost impossible to walk around safely between school and home [in Ulaanbaatar]."

Having previously worked as a contract worker in Korea, Bayalag already knew the country well enough to be sure it could be a safe environment for her children to grow up in. Orghana (ULM.48.4) also decided to stay in Korea to earn a living after visiting it so that her daughter could receive specific medical treatments. When the doctors said her daughter's skin condition could only be treated but not cured, Orghana decided to stay in Korea with her children so she could collect more money and spend it on their future education.

Secondly, alongside family advice and family responsibility, the prospect of better economic opportunities (especially in terms of making a higher wage compared to what they could make in Mongolia) is another predominant factor often mentioned by all my respondents. But whilst both marriage and labour migrant women had a rather positive perception of the Korean economy, they were not taking these opportunities for granted, especially upon moving to Korea. They were very much aware that, firstly, these economic opportunities still required them to engage in demanding hard work and, secondly, they would not automatically make them wealthy. For example, Bolormaa (MMK.51.21) first heard of Korea when Seoul hosted the 1988 Olympics. Seeing the pictures of the local infrastructures and the modern appeal of the capital, she perceived the country to be more developed than Mongolia. After diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in 1993, she felt compelled to migrate to Korea and escape the rampant economic crisis that followed the collapse of the USSR and the democratisation of Mongolia (Rossabi, 2005; Sneath, 2018). Upon settling in Seoul as an undocumented migrant[10] (A. E. Kim, 2012; W.-B. Kim, 2004), Bolormaa had to accept the contradictory reality that, whilst she could make a better wage now, her lifestyle was not going to automatically improve and that modern infrastructures were not necessarily going to be accessible to all.

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[10] After overstaying her tourist visa and being undocumented for approximately eight years, Bolormaa met and married her Korean husband. She was able to apply for a marriage visa and later receive Korean citizenship, hence the 'MMK' code.

"In 1990, after the democratic shift, people could not find jobs and had no money. I heard that Koreans earn more money and that you can earn more by going abroad. So, I came [to Korea] to earn money like everyone else. I thought that it was possible to work here, that it was a place to earn money. [...] but when I was in Seoul, I used to go outside to use the outdoor toilet, which wasn't so different from what is common in Mongolia."

Similarly, Bayalag, who was still undocumented at the time of our interview, was vocal about how migrant women like her do not romanticise the Korean economy and its potential perks. She explains that if she could have, she would have preferred to remain in Mongolia, and that regardless of one's competences or experience, Mongolian women like her (with children and a family to support) need to be prepared to face and deal with many difficulties. She believes that "Not everyone can make money when they have children. There are a lot of difficulties. It's not like everyone thinks they're going to get rich here."

Thirdly, education was another migration rationale that was somewhat relevant for both groups of migrant women. It should be noted that whilst the intention of pursuing a degree was mentioned by both marriage and labour migrants, it had different connotations. Marriage migrant women like Bayartsetseg (MMK.33.14), Kheshigmaa (MMK.33.11), and Narantuya (MMK.45.25) already had a personal or professional interest in studying the Korean language, in particular. Bayartsetseg explains that her parents' first-hand experiences in Korea and with Koreans deeply fascinated and motivated her to become a student there. For example, she recalls Koreans coming to her mother's office (the Mongolian and Korean branches of the company had an exchange programme agreement), teaching language classes which she attended. She grew closer to her teacher and thought fondly of the language. Eventually, she came to Korea on a student visa. On a similar note, Kheshigmaa always wanted to become a Korean language teacher in Mongolia. She appreciated the language and enrolled in a dual program in Korea, a master to PhD track; this would give her the opportunity to obtain the degrees necessary to apply for teaching jobs in Mongolia. Like Kheshigmaa, Narantuya also chose Korea for the educational opportunities it promised. Although she initially

wanted to pursue a degree in Japanese, she settled for a program in Korea because of the easier visa application system. Conversely, the labour migrant women I interviewed only mentioned education as a secondary migration rationale, that is, as a way to enter the country and earn money legally. The main intention was to work part-time as a student, rather than to pursue a degree, *per se*. The different approach to higher education between marriage and labour migrant women hints at their class differences, with the former group viewing education as a personal interest and formative experience, and the latter as an asset or tool to secure a better work visa.

Fourthly and finally, Korean entertainment had a significant influence on both marriage and labour migrant women's perceptions of Korea as a desirable, safe, and modern host society. Existing literature has already addressed the influence of K-dramas and other forms of entertainment on international consumers, often resulting in romanticised ideas of Korean society, Korean manhood and dating attitudes (K. Y. Chung, 2019; K. Yoon, 2022). Indeed, marriage migrants like Amarjargal and Yargui (MMK.44.18) had a very positive perception of Korean men because of K-dramas, and viewed them as kinder and more considerate than Mongolian men. The soft power-like influences of Korean entertainment, especially among younger generations, was also felt among labour migrant women, like Ankhtsetseg (LM.28.5) and Gereltsetseg (LM.36.15). Being more familiar with Korea, the society and culture thanks to a wide array of entertainment programmes and content, gave most interviewees a sense of reassurance. They knew, more or less, what to expect regarding safety, environment, and economic opportunities. Gereltsetseg explains that when the time came to pick between Korea and Japan, she chose the former because of K-dramas and K-pop's influence on her.

In summary, the four most relevant migration rationales for both marriage and labour migrant women include family advice and family responsibility, economic opportunities, education, and Korean entertainment. I explained how getting advice from trustworthy close relatives about moving to Korea was a common and important factor influencing my interviewees' decision. In addition to that knowledge exchange, labour migrant women also expressed the need to migrate because of their family responsibilities - that is, to improve the living standards of their young children. The real and

imagined economic opportunities that my interviewees associated with Korea also motivated their migration decision. Whilst they knew wages in Korea were going to be higher than in Mongolia, they were also aware that they would not automatically become wealthy and would have to endure demanding work. Educational opportunities were also important factors that marriage migrant women also considered in their decisions, whereas enrolling in higher education served a different purpose for labour migrant women (i.e., to enter and work in Korea legally, rather than to pursue a degree). Finally, I explained that Korean entertainment had a significantly positive influence on both marriage and labour migrant women's perception of Korean society and Korean manhood, especially for the marriage migrants who later pursued relationships and married their now Korean husband.

4.2.2. Korea's visa system as the legal-institutional space of legal precarity

My interviewees' migration rationales did not always automatically translate into their corresponding visas. By that, I mean, for example, that labour migrant women entered the country with a student visa instead of a work visa, even though their main migration rationale was to find employment in Korea. Indeed, the Korean visa system is complex, rigid, and highly selective, and made up of several different visa types (e.g., E-7; D-8; F-2) and more than 170 subcategories (e.g., E-7-4; D-8-2; F-2-3; OECD, 2019a, p. 57). Additionally, whilst migrants might have educational qualifications, and work competences acquired whilst studying and working in their home country, these do not always translate into long-term visas and appropriate job offers. It is common for migrants in Korea to be overqualified workers enduring deskilling with the hope of making enough money before returning to their home country (E. A. Chung, 2020a; S. Seo, 2019). I believe that this deskilling is somewhat on purpose. Korea already has a highly educated young population but also high levels of vacancies in less skilled occupations and low-quality jobs that do not meet the employment expectations of the national labourforce (OECD, 2019b, pp. 38-41; Stokes, 2024). Skilled work visas even require Korean employers to hire skilled foreign workers only on the condition that the foreign national possesses ad hoc, uncommon skills (e.g., language proficiency in a Southeast Asia language) within a predetermined range of sectors to ensure (D.-S. Cha, 2023a; Korean Immigration Service, 2023).

Hence, such strict and selective visa criteria could be seen as a tool to screen and deskill foreign workers to redirect them towards those less skilled occupations; in doing so, the Korean state could address those labour shortages without the risk of 'jeopardising' the employment opportunities of the national labour force or upsetting the public opinion by 'giving Korean jobs away to migrants' (E. Lee, 2023; OECD, 2019b; Stokes, 2024).

Let us unpack Korean immigration policies and draw attention to the Korean Immigration Service and its official 'Commissioner's message' (see Figure 4.2 below). This message - or mission statement, rather - states that Korea's immigration policies are proactive responses to address and deal with recent demographic changes, including ageing population and low birth rates, and competition for international 'talents'. In other words, Korean immigration policies are meant to solve national issues (i.e. the population decline), whilst also improving Korea's international status, for instance, attracting skilled professional migrants (A. E. Kim, 2012; W.-B. Kim, 2004; Torneo, 2016). What also emerges from the Commissioner's message is the intention to ensure migration flows are controlled and managed in an 'orderly' fashion, public consensus is prioritised, and social cohesion is achieved "by promoting our common values." This last point - the promotion of Korean values - has resulted in some degree of dissonance between what Korean migration policies entail on paper and in practice.

> ❝ Our mission is to lead economic growth and social harmony with non-nationals in the country by winning public support of this mission. ❞

Welcome to Korea Immmigration Service website.

The significance of immigration policy is gaining traction as we are likely to face a risk of population decline due to ageing and low birth rates and as an increasing number of countries are jumping into the race of attracting talented individuals.

We, the Korea Immigration Service, will not spare effort to proactively respond to such change by securing our national growth engine by opening our border in an orderly fashion that wins support by the general public and also to encourage social cohesion that allows all members of our society to pursue a fulfilling and successful life by promoting our common values.

We kindly ask for your continued support.

Lee, Jae-Yoo
Commissioner
Korea Immigration Service
Ministry of Justice

Figure 4-2: The commissioner's message from the Korea Immigration Service[11].

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[11] This Figure is a screenshot taken from the Korean Immigration Service website, in the 'About Us' section, which can be accessed here: https://www.immigration.go.kr/immigration_eng/1846/subview.do. The screenshot was taken on November 21st, 2023.

On the one hand, the Korean state does not adopt an assimilationist rhetoric in its English-translated texts and has instead pushed for the language of 'multiculturalism' (i.e., different cultures living together). It should be noted that Korean 'multicultural' policies solely focus on specific segments of the migrant population, namely marriage migrants and multicultural families (E. A. Chung, 2020f; A. E. Kim, 2012; Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, n/a). The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, which is the governmental body responsible for establishing a master plan for acts and policies on multicultural families every five years (J. Lee, 2023a), states that the objectives of the Multicultural Family Support Act[12] are to provide:

> "Support for early adaption and stable settlement of multicultural family. To promote sound international marriage and to enhance Korean society's receptivity to multiple cultures" (see also J. Lee, 2023a, 2023b; Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, n/a).

Labour migration is not included in these multicultural policies and is managed in stricter ways in regards to work visas' duration, which is often short-term, meaning between one and three years, although some visas can be extended (Korean Immigration Service, 2023). On the other hand, these policies, albeit labelled 'multicultural', have been widely criticised for their assimilationist implications[13] by scholars in the field of migration, who point out how, in practice, marriage migrant women are expected, both at home and in Multicultural Family Centers, and by public opinion, to assimilate linguistically and culturally (Ahn, 2013; E. A. Chung, 2020f; H.-M. Kim et al., 2017). Jang (2022, p. 638) argues that "Rather than promoting cultural diversity, Korean multicultural policies are aiming to restore a patriarchal version of traditional culture that many young Korean women are rejecting" by pushing migrant women to repress their native language and culture. In practice, there is little to no expectation that Korean husbands and in-laws should adapt to marriage migrants' linguistic

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[12] A comprehensive list of all the articles under the Multicultural Families Support Act (in English) can be found here: https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=29049&lang=ENG. This website was accessed last on 15th February 2024.
[13] Korea is certainly not the only immigration country with assimilationist immigration policies; consider, for example, France and the Netherlands, or Japan as similar cases where migrants are expected to assimilate and comply with national cultural norms.

and cultural backgrounds, so 'multiculturalism' is not consistently and equally implemented by all parties involved.

In the following pages, I will explain in more detail a wide range of visas and technical terms to highlight their core differences and rationales. In addition to describing the visa requirement and application processes, when appropriate, I also discuss any relevant national policies the Korean state has implemented. I believe that a technical overview and discussion of the Korean immigration system and visa types is essential to better understand the institutional and legal requirements and obstacles that my interviewees have faced ever since they decided to move to and settle in Korea. I will discuss each visa type and related policy in the following order: the D-2 and D-4 student visas; the F-6 marriage visa; Korean naturalisation; the E-9 and E-7 work visa and the D-10 job seeking visa; the business D-8 and D-9 business visa; the F-2 and F-5 residence permits.

D-2 and D-4 student visas

There are two main types of student visa. International students pursuing a formal degree at an educational institution in higher education apply for a D-2 visa, whereas people receiving training at university-affiliated language institutes or private language schools apply for a D-4 visa (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 9). Several of my interviewees - both marriage and labour migrants - first entered Korea through either one of these visas. The main perk of a D-2 or D-4 visa is that anyone who has resided in Korea for at least six months and has enough Korean proficiency, is eligible for simple part-time employment, excluding specialised fields such as, to name a few, "food service assistant, office assistant, tour guide assistant, duty-free sales assistant, etc." (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 13; National Institute for International Education, 2020, pp. 74-76). The possibility of working part-time was particularly attractive for labour migrants who were later able to mobilise their resources and acquire new skills and apply for full-time work and business visas. In the case of marriage migrants, once they became spouses of Korean nationals, they switched to the F-6 marriage visa.

F-6 marriage visa

The F6 (Spouse of Korean national) visa requirements change depending on whether the application is made in Korea or through overseas consulates (immikorea, 2023). In most cases, applicants have to opt for the latter option, since applying for a F-6 visa in Korea is only possible if the foreign spouse already has a long-term visa or has a short-term visa but is pregnant or already has children with the Korean national. If the application is done inside the country, applicants are expected to submit 12 documents, but if done overseas (which was the case for most of my interviewees), the application requires 16 documents in total (immikorea, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). From criminal records, invitation letters, and bank statements, to medical tests and documents providing residency requirements – these are a series of certificates that serve as background checks for the applicant and the couple. Below, Figure 4.3 summarises the official list of all essential documents needed to apply for the F-6 visa.

There are no limitations in terms of type of employment allowed for a F-6 visa holder. Foreigners on a F-6 visa are also eligible for a shorter probationary period to be eligible for Korean naturalisation (three years instead of five; see next subsection, *Korean naturalisation*). The Korean state has created the Multicultural Family Centres exactly for the purpose of supporting the integration of foreign spouses by providing courses on Korean language and social etiquette. Mongolian marriage migrant women used these centres to access language classes and at times, find job opportunities as multicultural educators (i.e., as teachers talking about the Mongolian culture in integrated multicultural primary schools). These centres are an example of meso-level actors and institutions (E. A. Chung, 2020b, p. 6) that are actively involved in the process of making Korean citizens out of migrant women (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017, p. 853). They also host other events that Korean partners can attend to learn more about challenges of raising multicultural children and such (Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, n/a). Additionally, "A Korean national who intends to marry a foreign national spouse, or a Korean national (already married) who wants to sponsor his/her foreign national spouse" from the following countries (China, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Mongolia, Uzbekistan,

Thailand) is required to participate in the International Marriage Guidance Program, which aims to "to promote a balanced perspective and healthy marriage" (Ministry of Justice, 2024).

The legitimacy of the relationship between the foreign spouse and Korean national is checked both during the application process and after the issuance of the visa. Meaning that the applicant must provide evidence that the relationship is real, by including pictures, letters, online communication with their Korean partner in their application, and be ready to potentially receive unannounced investigations at the domicile address of the couple (D.-S. Cha, 2023b). This exercise of power from the state over foreign spouses is argued to be a result of a "deep-seated suspicion that marriage migration is an illicit pathway to gain entry into the nation-state, resulting in sham marriages with local men in order to take advantage of the resources, opportunities, and social rights available in host society" (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021, p. 883). Laws to "protect Korean men from sham marriages" were first established in the late 1990s (Petcharamesree & Capaldi, 2023, p. 81). Nowadays, the F-6 visa must be renewed every three years (sometimes two, depending on the length of the marriage or how long the visa holder has lived in Korea for), and official documents (i.e., not just the renewal application, but contracts and leases, in general) need to be co-signed by the Korean spouse (immikorea, 2023). In the literature, the visa renewal requirement and limited citizenship rights have been widely criticised for perpetuating the subordination and dependence of visa holders, who are predominantly women, to their sponsors - that is, the Korean national (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021; E. A. Chung, 2020e; G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016; Yeung & Mu, 2020).

결혼이민 비자 신청 시 구비서류 안내 (주영한국대사관2021.1.4.기준)

번호	서류종류	비고	발급받는 곳
1. 기본서류			
1-1	비자 신청서(사증발급 신청서)		대사관 및 하이코리아 홈페이지
1-2	여권용 사진 1매	신청서에 부착	
1-3	신청인(외국인 배우자) 여권 원본	잔여 유효기간 6개월 이상	필리핀 외교부
1-4	신청인 여권 사본 1부	인적사항면 복사	
1-5	비자 신청 수수료		
작성하는 서류 (반드시 정해진 양식에 맞춰 빠짐없이 작성하시기 바랍니다)			
1-6	외국인 배우자 초청장	한국인 배우자가 한글로 작성	대사관 및 하이코리아 홈페이지
1-7	신원보증서		
1-8	외국인 배우자의 결혼배경진술서	외국인 배우자가 영어로 작성	
한국인 배우자가 준비해야 하는 기본 서류			
1-9	한국인 배우자 여권 사본 1부	인적사항면 복사	
1-10	기본증명서(상세)	한글본 각 1부씩 발급일로부터 3개월 이내	주민센터 방문 또는 민원24 홈페이지
1-11	혼인관계증명서(상세)		
1-12	가족관계증명서(상세)		
1-13	주민등록등본 원본		
외국인 배우자가 준비해야 하는 기본 서류			
1-16	결혼증명서 원본 (Marriage Certificate)	한국 외 다른 국가에서 혼인한 경우에 한함. 원본을 돌려받고자 할 경우 사본 반드시 첨부	(발급기관)

Figure 4-3: F-6 Visa guideline (documents to prepare) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).[14]

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[14] Translation: 1-1 visa application form; 1-2 passport photo; 1-3 original passport (foreign spouse); 1-4 copies of the applicant's passport; 1-5 visa application fees; 1-6 invitation letters; 1-7 certificate of the guarantor; 1-8 marriage certificate; 1-9 copy of Korean spouse's passport; 1-10 personal details form; 1-11 marriage invitation letter; 1-12 family relationship form of Korean spouse; 1-13 original copy of resident registration; 1-16 original marriage certificate. Please note that the website from which I downloaded these guidelines also includes 'proof of communication and language proficiency' and 'proof of income capability in the list of documents to prepare' (16 documents in total).

Mongolian marriage migrants felt particularly incentivised to apply for Korean naturalisation in order to secure their civil and parental rights permanently, even if it meant losing their Mongolian citizenship. There are five pathways to naturalisation which are organised according to general, simplified, or special requirements and conditions. General naturalisation requires that a foreigner i) must have had a domicile address in Korea for more than five consecutive years; ii) must have permanent residency status in Korea; iii) must be of legal age; iv) must not have a criminal record; v) must be financially independent or be a dependent member of a family who is able to maintain them financially; vi) must have basic knowledge of Korean language, customs and culture; vii) and is not a potential risk to national security, public order and public welfare (Hi Korea, n/a).

Moving on, there are three types of simplified naturalisation, which apply to very specific pockets of Korea's migrant population, namely co-ethnics (i.e., someone whose either parent has been a Korean national, e.g., Korean Americans or Korean Chinese), spouses of Korean citizens (e.g., marriage migrants), and former spouses of Korean citizens. The requirements and conditions from the general naturalisation procedure apply to these three simplified subcategories, too, and each has their own additional requirements. For instance, a co-ethnic must be born in Korea and have either parent also born in Korea. Marriage migrants must have maintained marriage status for at least the past three years. Widowers and divorcees count as 'former spouses' on the conditions that they can prove that the end of the marriage was not the fault of the applicant, and that they have an under-age child/children (through the marriage) of a Korean national to look after (Hi Korea, n/a). Finally, special naturalisation only applies to foreigners who have performed meritorious deeds for Korea (e.g., participating in the independence movements of Korea) as described by the 'Law Related to the Honorable Treatment of Those Involved in Independence Movement' and the 'Law Related to the Honorable Treatment and Support of Those Involved in Meritorious Deeds for Korea' (ibid.).

The simplified naturalisation procedure for F-6 visa holders consists of four key elements: documents submission; proving Korean language proficiency (a TOPIK score); a written exam or

in-person interview showing the applicant's knowledge of Korean history and culture; payment of a fee equal to 300,000 KRW, which rounds up to about US$270 (Hi Korea, n/a). From start to finish, the naturalisation process can take from three to six years; for marriage migrants, this means that they have to continuously renew their F6 visa with their husband's approval or risk losing their right to stay in Korea (E. A. Chung, 2020e, p. 155).

E-9, E-7, and D-10 work visas

There are several types of visas under which employment is permitted. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (KOTRA, 2019, p. 35) has listed them as follows:

> "Short-term employment (C-4), university professor (E-1), foreign language/conversation instructor (E-2), research (E-3), technology transfer (E-4), professional employment (E-5), arts & performances (E-6), special occupation (E-7), nonprofessional employment (E-9), vessel crew (E-10), working visit (H-2)."

My respondents had either the E-9 or E-7 visas. These two work visas greatly differ, both in terms of the migrants' skill requirements and application process. The E-9 visa is managed under the Employment Permit System (EPS), which was implemented in 2004 when it replaced the highly criticised Industrial and Technical Trainee Program (ITTP). The ITTP was established in 1991 and created a sort of 'rotation system' for migrant workers who were given little to no labour protections and rights (E. A. Chung, 2020a; Torneo, 2016). The EPS allowed employers to hire foreign workers as actual 'employees' rather than as 'trainees' for up to three years, usually in the manufacturing, construction, agriculture, livestock, fishery, and service industries (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 26; Torneo, 2016, p. 141). Under the EPS, a citizen from one of the 16 sending countries (Mongolia included) in accordance with the Act On The Employment Of Foreign Workers first must apply in their home country via their Korean embassy or a designated agency; if selected, a Korean employer will hire them to engage in manual labour such as manufacturing (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 7). Labour migrants with an E-9 non-professional work visa are recognised more rights than before but cannot leave their employment unless their Korean employers formally agree to this transfer.

Thus, Korean employers still have the upper hand and have the potential to abuse their powers (Amnesty International UK, 2006; E. Lee, 2023). Forced overtime, poor living conditions, and even restriction of workers' mobility have been commonly reported over the years by migrant workers in the EPS (S.-H. Choi & Kim, 2015; S. Seo, 2019).

The E-7 work visa, also known as the "foreign national of special ability" or "skilled worker" visa, is a visa granted to foreigners with expertise or appropriate technical skills in a certain field when they are employed in Korea. In other words, foreigners are hired directly by Korean employers on the basis of their 'special skills' that Korean domestic workers might lack (e.g., language skills). The hiring Korean company must be able to justify the employment of a foreigner over a domestic worker for specific typologies of employment (D.-S. Cha, 2023a). Hence, like the E-9 visa, the E-7 must be sponsored by a Korean employer and lasts three years (with possibility of extension). Foreign nationals on a D-2 or D-4 visa can change to an E-7, at least in theory, whereas "[i]n principle, E-9 [...] status holders are restricted from changing their status to E-7, but changing status to E-7-4 (Skilled Worker Point system) is allowed as an exception" if they have worked in Korea for more than five consecutive years, and meet the requirements to complete the Korean Immigration and Integration Program[15] (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 27, n/ab). It should be noted that the three-year long E-9 visa can only be extended once and for 22 additional months, meaning that holders of a non-professional work visa are systematically less likely to ever meet the time requirements needed to change to a E-7 visa. Migration scholars have been critical of this limitation and have argued that it is a deliberate choice to prevent 'unskilled' workers from settling in Korea (S.-H. Choi & Kim, 2015; Hong, 2018; A. E. Kim, 2012). Only two of my interviewees were currently employed under the E-7 visa, and both already had master's degrees, Korean language proficiency, and a few years of work experience in Korea.

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[15] Korea Immigration & Integration Program (KIIP) "aims to support foreigners acquire basic knowledge and information (Korean language and culture) so that they can become self-reliant members of Korean society" (Korean Immigration Service, n/ab).

Finally, the D-10 job seeking visa is for "Persons engaging in job-seeking activities for employment, preparing a start-up, or doing internship in high-tech field at a company meeting the relevant requirements" (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 7). It is common for students and language trainees on a D-2 or D-4 visa, respectively, to apply for this visa after graduation (ibid., p. 11). It lasts up to one year and can be extended by six months, upon the condition that the holder can prove that they have been actively looking for a job without success. Many of the labour migrant women I interviewed held, at some point during their stay in Korea, the D-10 job-seeking visas. Some of them also explained that they would search and apply for formal jobs in order to gather evidence that they were using their visa appropriately, but that they would turn down these jobs because of their low pay, and instead opted for full-time informal employment.

D-8 and D-9 business visas

Three of the labour migrant women I interviewed had the D-8 or D-9, which are respectively the corporate investment visa and the international trade visas; the D-8 has six different subcategories, and the D-9 four (KOREA VISA PORTAL, n/a; KOTRA, 2019). Eligibility for the D-8 foreign investor visa is the following:

> "A person who has invested in a Korean corporation. A person who has established or prepares a venture business. A person who has invested in a company run by a Korean citizen. A technology entrepreneur with a bachelor's degree or higher from abroad (domestic associate's degree or higher)" (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 14).

The D-8 visa lasts five years and can be extended. The D-9 international trade visa lasts two years and can also be extended; eligibility criteria include:

> "A trader who has been issued a trade business number. A person who installs, operates, and repairs export facilities (machinery). A person who supervises ship building and equipment production. Company management and commercial business. International students who become trade managers" (ibid.).

The eligibility criteria for D-8 and D-9 visas are very specific and require a particular educational background and job competencies that are not available to most foreign workers. Applicants are expected to complete training, obtain educational qualifications, and a high level of Korean language proficiency to earn points according to their visa point system, and thus, receive their visa; 80 points out of 180 is the minimum to be eligible (Korean Immigration Service, 2023; KOTRA, 2019). It can be argued that the demand for evidence of higher-quality skills stems from the Korean Immigration Service's pursuit of 'foreign talent' who possess knowledge and abilities and can bring profit and value to the Korean business partners and the Korean economy, more broadly (see Figure 4.1 at the beginning of Section 4.2.2).

F-2 and F-5 residence permits

Labour migrant women who were seriously considering relocating to Korea for the foreseeable future hoped to apply for a residence permit so as not to lose their Mongolian citizenship.[16] The F-2 resident permit is open to "long-term residents, persons recognized as refugees, or investors meeting certain requirements, and whose livelihood is based in Korea", whereas the F-5 permanent resident is for "Persons staying in Korea for the purpose of permanent residency who receive treatment similar to that of a Korean national" (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 7). The former lasts for five years and entails partial restrictions on employment, whereas the latter, as the name suggests, is permanent and poses no restriction of the holder's employment. Throughout the official 'Visa Navigator 2023' - a document issued by the Korean Immigration Service of the Ministry of Justice - there are instructions and explanations on how specific visa holders can 'move up' and eventually become eligible for these resident permits (Korean Immigration Service, 2023). Figure 4.4 is an example of a customised flow chart illustrating the pathways to these permits; this specific example shows how students and professionals can apply for a F-2 and then, the F-5.

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[16] The Mongolian state does not allow dual-citizenship.
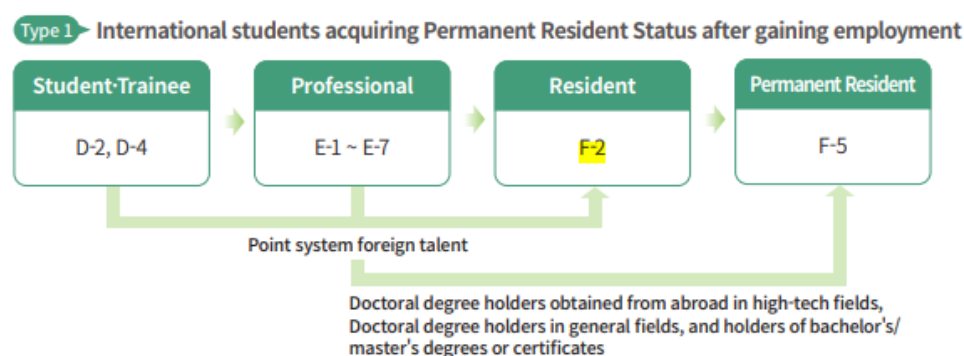
Figure 4-4: A step-by-step "simple explanation of eligibility" taken from the Korean Immigration Service's Visa Navigator (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 9).

In summary, in Section 4.2.2, I explained that the Korean visa system is complex. Each visa category has several subcategories, which also come with a myriad of particular and rigid requirements and conditions. Drawing from the official documents and mission statement issued by the Korean Immigration Service, it can be argued that Korea's migration policies are proactively trying to resolve a wide array of needs, shortages, and priorities at the national and international level. What is also evident is that the more desirable visas (E-7, D-8, D-9, F-2, F-5) are not accessible to the majority of foreign workers who cannot organically meet the particularly specific eligibility criteria designed by the Korean Immigration System. It is also clear that the system itself is conditionally open to providing desirable migrants with long-term residence permits, as long as they continue to comply with their visa requirements and acquire desirable competencies that the Korean economy and society can benefit from. Below, I explain what happens when Mongolian migrant women can or cannot meet these eligibility standards, and how they negotiate the resulting legal precarity characterising their position in the Korean immigration system.

4.3. Citizenship-making and the social reproduction and mitigation of legal precarity

The legal-institutional space of the Korean visa system is complex, selective, and exclusionary by design, and it is actively experienced and negotiated by Mongolian migrant women through a nonlinear, conditional, and uncertain process of citizenship-making, of 'being made' and

'self-making' into what the host state deems an acceptable and desirable migrant woman. Here, it should be noted that there is no easy way out of the precarity which the legal-institutional space of the visa system, and the process of citizenship-making, reproduce. Additionally, both the process of citizenship-making and its outcome are dependent on the women's visa status and gender relations, and are therefore inherently different for marriage and labour migrant women. For marriage migrant women, becoming proficient in Korean and applying for naturalisation means partaking in their own cultural and linguistic assimilation into Korean society as a way to mitigate - without ever fully overcoming - their legal precarity and gendered subordination to their Korean husbands and children. Similarly, by establishing their own companies and acquiring higher educational qualifications, Mongolian labour migrant women with business and study visas actively mould themselves into the desirable economic contributors that the Korean state wants, in the hope of extending their legal stay in Korea. Below, I explain the different iterations of legal precarity Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women encounter in the Korean immigration system.

4.3.1. Legal precarity under the F-6 marriage visa and the naturalisation of marriage migrant women

For Mongolian marriage migrant women, the citizenship-making process entails a constant and conditional negotiation of their rights and freedoms within the legal-institutional space of the Korean visa system. Throughout this process, the Korean state expects them to assimilate both legally and culturally through naturalisation. There are two main examples of the legal precarity that strongly incentivise marriage migrant women to assimilate: the first has to do with the F-6 marriage visa renewal process; the second concerns the limited legal citizenship rights F-6 visa holders are entitled to. As I explained in Section 4.2.2, the Korean state actively tests the legitimacy of the relationship upon which the F-6 marriage visa is based to discover and root out any potential sham marriages. This practice of testing the legitimacy of the relationship has been linked to the widespread assumption that women from less developed countries might establish romantic relationships with Korean nationals as a strategy to escape poverty and settle in Korea (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021; E. A. Chung, 2020e; G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016). This gendered bias is arguably loaded with problematic ideas and prejudices against

women from developing countries, especially.[17] It also establishes conditions that reproduce and exacerbate the legal precarity of marriage migrant women. As I will explain, both legal limitations are rooted in the assumption that the foreign spouse is 'guilty until proven innocent' - that is, she has to prove she is not pursuing a sham marriage by using a Korean national to enter the country legally with no real intention of maintaining the relationship (G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016; Ministry of Justice, 2024; Petcharamesree & Capaldi, 2023).

Throughout the process of citizenship-making, marriage migrant women are given conditional and limited rights, resulting in their legal precarity and in feelings of exclusion, othering, and frustration. In order to mitigate this condition of Life's Work, Mongolian marriage migrant women pursue Korean naturalisation to make themselves into the kind of legal and social subject that the Korean state wants - that is, marriage migrant women who will abide to Korean gender norms and be carers for their citizen-husbands and children. In practice, my interviewees decided to legally assimilate into Korean society to secure the citizenship rights that the F-6 visa did not offer, and to create a sense of emotional stability and safety in their lives. This process of becoming Korean citizens is a deeply gendered and emotional one, as it pushes Mongolian marriage migrant women to renegotiate their personal needs and identities both subjectively and in relation to their Korean husbands and in-laws. Additionally, as part of the nonlinear, precarious, and conditional process of citizenship-making, marriage migrant women attempt to mitigate not just legal precarity, but also the social vulnerabilities and discrimination they and their children face. Below, I examine in detail two key examples of legal precarity that marriage migrants experience under the F-6 visa in Korea. Then, I explain how feelings of frustration and exclusion motivate foreign spouses to assimilate, legally and culturally, by pursuing Korean naturalisation. At the end of this subsection, I present and examine additional quotes from my interviewees to illustrate how emotionally layered these internal renegotiations can be, and why.

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[17] It is important to remember that visa applications are checked by individual immigration officers. It is likely that immigration officers reviewing F-6 application processes might be more sceptical of applications from, for example, Mongolian or Vietnamese women, than of European or US women, and be more prone to see them as potential sham marriages.

Firstly, all my respondents mentioned having to renew their F-6 visa every two to three years. Whilst they viewed the initial application procedure as rather simple and straightforward, the renewal process was a different story. In addition to practical inconveniences (e.g. having to submit the same documents every few years, interacting with the immigration officers), renewing the marriage visa created a sense of legal precarity - of uncertainty, expendability, unfairness and othering - among my interviewees. Odval, for example, was concerned about her future in Korea and her life with her daughter when she realised her marital problems would jeopardise her visa renewal and her right to live in Korea. In her own words, she explains that:

> "I had a bad relationship with my husband because his family didn't accept me because I was a foreigner; we had big cultural differences. But under a F6 visa, I couldn't have taken my child with me if we split. In addition, my visa would not be extended."

This sense of precarity and uncertainty about the future is often accompanied by complex feelings of othering in most of my interviewees. Khongorzul (MMK.39.17), who went through the process of Korean naturalisation over 15 years ago to avoid the insecurities and inconveniences of the F-6 visa, emphasises that "those who had to renew their visas every year always felt like a foreigner in a foreign country." Similarly, Kheshigmaa shares that the legal precarity that characterises the F-6 renewal process, with all its caveats, had made her feel like a foreigner who was conditionally tolerated, rather than as an active member of Korean society. She says that:

> "Even when we live on F6 visas, we are always treated as foreigners. [...] Even if you are living on a married visa, your visa is not extended immediately. The visa extension period is determined depending on how many years you have been married and your financial security, and how many children you have together."

Secondly, in spite of being wives and mothers to Korean nationals, marriage migrant women experience legal precarity in the form of limited citizenship rights. By citizenship rights, I am referring to not just the right to vote or stay in Korea indefinitely, but also broader freedoms such as being able to apply for, request, and receive public and private services (e.g., buying a car, requesting

a bank loan, enrolling your children at a local school). Under the F6 visa, a marriage migrant cannot sign any formal contract or documents without her husband's signature, including their children's enrolment at a local school, a lease to purchase a car, or a phone contract. This practice - limiting the citizenship rights of foreign spouses - has been widely referred to as 'familial citizenship', which is the legal-institutional condition where decision-making powers and other rights are given to the husband-citizen to ensure the daily supervision and subordination of female marriage migrants (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021; H.-K. Lee, 2008; Piper & Lee, 2016; Yeoh et al., 2013). The consequences on the daily lives of migrant women are evident. Kheshigmaa shares examples and how upsetting and belittling these legal limitations have felt to her:

> "We are always treated as foreigners and when we need documents, we always need the husband's signature. My husband always goes to kindergarten and school with our children and I have no right to be an independent mother until I become a Korean citizen myself. I'm living on a temporary visa, and I'm a foreigner, and no matter how many Koreans I marry or become the mother of, I don't have the right to sign documents or anything like that."

This sense of othering and frustration is echoed by many other participants, and it shows how the F-6 marriage visa reproduces a type of legal precarity that in turn results in deep feelings of exclusion from and subordination to other citizens (Hong, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 1991).

In the face of this institutional and systematic reproduction of legal precarity under the F-6 visa, Mongolian migrant women negotiate and attempt to mitigate this legal and emotional condition by applying for Korean naturalisation. Between the existing Multicultural Family Support Acts, the Multicultural Family Centers, and the simplified naturalisation process for F-6 visa holders, it can be argued that the Korean state actively tries to assimilate legally and culturally foreign spouses and make socially compliant Korean citizens out of marriage migrant women. But rather than presenting my respondents as either victims of or free political agents in this citizenship-making process, I want to highlight how their pursuit of Korean naturalisation pathways is a more nuanced and layered act of agency (Favell, 2022; Yeung and Mu, 2020) aimed to achieve better rights for themselves and their

children. Through this process of citizenship-making, of being-made and self-making (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017; Favell, 2022), the Korean state gets naturalised and culturally trained Korean citizens out of marriage migrants, whereas marriage migrant women get permanent access to better citizenship rights out of state-approved naturalisation pathways.

What exactly motivates Mongolian marriage migrant women to pursue Korean naturalisation? In general, overcoming legal precarity by getting rid of the F-6 marriage visa and all its limitations was an important incentive for many interviewees. For example, Bayartsetseg mentions that she expected social and legal rights to be guaranteed for life under the F6 visa but found it difficult to rely on her visa all the time. Delbee (MMK.50.21) explains she never intended to become a Korean citizen but changed her mind after hearing first-hand accounts of the hardships of being a foreigner in Korea. Urantögs always felt patriotic and proud to be Mongolian, but getting Korean citizenship meant she could be legally independent of her husband. She is now able to seek more fulfilling employment opportunities and, at the time of the interview, had recently signed a car leasing contract, meaning she could drive and be more independent. From requesting her children's passports to opening a bank account or registering a phone contract, Urantögs no longer needs her husband's signature. Indeed, migrant women can actively instrumentalise the path to citizenship as an agentic strategy to gain stronger and stabler social, civil, and political rights for themselves.

However, the citizenship-making process Mongolian marriage migrant women partake in is considerably emotionally taxing (Ho, 2008; A. E. Kim, 2012). On the one hand, most of my interviewees decided to naturalise to protect their children. They naturalised so that their children would not be ostracised in public spaces for having a foreign mother whose original nationality comes attached with negative prejudices and preconceptions about her country of origin, language skills, and worth (E. A. Chung, 2021; G.-W. Shin, 2006; K. Yoon, 2022). Some of my interviewees even changed their names[18] to stand out less at school in the hope that their children would not be bullied for having

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[18] Mongolian names and surnames are particularly long, regardless of whether they are transcribed in the Latin or Korean alphabet. After changing their citizenship, many of my interviewees chose new Korean names, taking inspiration from their husband's side of the family or relying on fortune tellers and astrology.

a parent from a developing country. Bullism of 'mixed-blood' children is still a prevalent issue in most schools, as both scholars and journalists have pointed out (Ahn, 2014; Herskovitz, 2006; C. S. Lee, 2017, 2021; Shim, 2018). Here, it is worth remembering that Mongolian women can already 'pass' as Korean due to their phenotypic features; 'passing' becomes even easier once they become fluent in Korean and go through the process of naturalisation and name change.

On the other hand, whilst these decisions (changing their citizenship and name) were intentional, they certainly were not easy, especially for Ariun (MMK.36.14), Narantuya, Kheshigmaa and Khongorzul. Complying with the expectation to fully naturalise entailed a deeply emotional process of renegotiation of their own identity and sense of belonging. For example, my interviewees felt that by 'cancelling' their Mongolian nationality, they were being erased from their country, which led to a sense of uncertainty and sadness about their future relationship with their homeland (e.g., could they ever go back home as easily as they used to?). Ariun explains that she was sure that going through the process of simplified naturalisation would have helped her safeguard her children, but she also says that as a result of her decision, she now feels like a foreigner in both Korea and Mongolia. In her own words, Ariun shares that:

> "I am excluded from being a Mongolian when I go to Mongolia because I got married to a
> foreigner. And I am excluded from being a pure Mongolian as if I betrayed my country just
> because my children are *erliiz*[19] [hybrid]. So, as soon as I got citizenship in Korea, I became a
> foreigner in Mongolia and I still am [a foreigner] in Korea, too."

Odval echoes that reasoning behind her decision to apply for Korean citizenship, and explains that she actively negotiated and, in a way, sacrificed her identity for the sake of her daughter's wellbeing at the cost of losing her sense of national belonging to Mongolia. She says that:

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[19] Simply put, *erliiz* or hybrid is a political, cultural, and social term commonly used in contemporary Mongolia to define anyone of 'ambiguous' heritage, such as Inner Mongolians and mixed-blood children.

"Changing my citizenship and my name was difficult because I am a patriot. But then my daughter started to go to school. I thought that if my daughter were recognised as the daughter of a foreigner, she would be discriminated against. And I was afraid of that."

Ariun and Odval's perspectives illustrate the complex and emotional toll that the process of citizenship-making takes on marriage migrant women, as they attempt to navigate the processes and social relations that keep them vulnerable and precarious within the legal-institutional space of Korea's immigration system.

To recap, the F-6 marriage visa is informed by negative gendered prejudices that view foreign spouses as potential scammers pursuing sham marriage to enter Korea legally with no real intention of maintaining a relationship with a Korean national. I argued that, as a result of those assumptions, F-6 visa holders experience a significant degree of legal precarity in the forms of a continuous visa renewal process and limited citizenship rights, both of which render them legally dependent upon their Korean husbands. These limitations result in feelings of frustration with the administrative procedure of renewing their F-6 visa, but also with deeper feelings of othering and exclusion, of always feeling like they are being treated as unwanted foreigners. I argued that this legal precarity is on purpose, and probably a strategic tool for the Korean state to incentivise marriage migrants to assimilate legally and culturally and thus becoming submissive wives and carers to the Korean nationals in their lives. Throughout this complex and emotional process of being made and making themselves into desirable citizens, I showed that Mongolian marriage migrant women are actively entangled in this process and thus strategically pursue naturalisation for two main reasons. First, to overcome their legal precarity under the F-6 visa and its inconvenient renewal process, and second, to minimise the risk of ostracisation of their mixed children.

4.3.2. Legal precarity, visa reconfiguration, and the making of labour migrant women into desirable economic subjects

Since legal precarity and the citizenship-making process are dependent on the rules and norms of the legal-institutional space of Korea's visa system, the power imbalances that Mongolian labour migrant

women experience are different from those of marriage migrant women. In their case, it is the Korean state's resistance to naturalise foreign workers and manual labourers that shape their legal precarity (Cawley, 2016; H.-R. Kim & Oh, 2011; Seol & Skrentny, 2009; Stokes, 2024). As discussed in Section 4.2.2, Korean immigration policies aim at the temporary employment of low-skilled or de-skilled foreign workers whilst actively preventing them from accessing residence permits (unless they have specific skills the Korean national labourforce lacks), and offer no simplified naturalisation pathways (E. A. Chung, 2020d; A. E. Kim, 2012; Seol, 2012; Torneo, 2016). Here, Ong's (2006) concept of flexible citizenship is helpful in understanding the rationale behind these labour migration-related policies. Flexible citizenship can be understood as a result of states adjusting immigration laws to favour highly desirable and skilled elite migrants; the other side of the coin is that migrants who do not fit these requirements of desirability face exclusionary immigration law (Hong, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 1991). Additionally, when low-skilled migration is needed, its temporariness "minimise[s] challenges to the fragile imaginary of the nation-state in the making, by rendering migrants as transient sojourners whose place in host societies is to sell their labour but make no claims on the receiving nation-state" (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021, p. 880; Yeoh, Goh, et al., 2020).

Yet, female foreign workers do find ways to enter and work in Korea legally and for more than just three years (i.e., the duration of the E-9 non-professional work visa). In the case of my interviewees, Mongolian labour migrant women who did not want to be hired through the EPS system under the E-9 non-professional visa, were not able to enter Korea with a E-7 skilled worker visa right away. That was because of lack of desirable skills and competition with the Korean national labourforce (see Section 4.2.2). So, they overcame the initial institutional barriers within the legal-institutional space of Korea's immigration system by entering the country with a student visa instead (e.g., the D-2 student visa or the D-4 language trainee visa), which still allowed them to work part-time (Korean Immigration Service, 2023; National Institute for International Education, 2020). Whilst working part-time under these student visas, they invested their time and resources to actively reconfigure their skills, acquire qualifications, and pursue specific professions that would enable them

to become eligible for long-term and better remunerated work and business visas (i.e., E-7 skilled worker, D-8 corporate investment, D-9 international trade). Not having mixed children to care for also meant that they were not interested in Korean naturalisation at all and would rather apply for a F-2 or F-5 residence permits, instead, so as not to give up their Mongolian nationality.

It should be noted that for my respondents the objective of this skill reconfiguration is not to develop a desirable resumé or explore professional interests *per se*, although that helps with future visa applications. Rather, the goal is twofold: to become desirable economic subjects with better citizenship rights (instead of naturalised gendered citizens), and extend their legal stay in Korea for as long as possible, so they can keep working and sustaining their families and children. I argue that this continual skills reconfiguration is in and of itself part of a conditional and precarious process of citizenship-making, where labour migrant women reconfigure themselves until they become desirable, skilled professionals in the eyes of the Korean immigration system. An example of this skill-visa reconfiguration process is Mandakh (LMB.37.7), who held the following visas, in this order: D-4 language trainee, D-2 student visa, D-10 job-seeking visa, and D-9 international trade visa. After graduating, she had the option to either keep studying and applying for a second D-2 visa or get a D-10 visa. She was not interested in paying more tuition fees, so she opted for the latter. She explains that, under the job-seeking visa, she would send job applications but never accept jobs; that was her strategy to prove to the Immigration Office that she was using her visa 'correctly' (i.e., by seeking jobs) while actually pursuing more profitable and convenient informal work. At the end of the D-10 visa period, she had to choose again between a student visa (this time for a PhD) or a business visa. She applied for the D-9 international trade visa.

From the outset, it is evident that Mongolian labour migrant women's experience of the Korean visa system profoundly differs to that of marriage migrants. The main difference is that labour migration in Korea is managed through flexible citizenship policies whereby only desirable skilled workers can enter the country and *eventually* get a residence permit (E. A. Chung, 2020a; Hong, 2018; A. E. Kim, 2012; Ong, 2006). These policies and attitudes result in the legal precarity of all foreign

workers who do not immediately meet skilled work and business visas' standards. Labour migrant women also experience a different form of legal precarity. Whilst this skill reconfiguration process seems linear and straightforward (i.e., you go from a good visa to a better one), it entails a great deal of legal precarity and thus, uncertainty and exploitation in the present and foreseeable future. My interviewees did not always know if or how long they were going to be able to maintain the student or business visa they applied for (i.e., to keep up with their visa requirements). In other cases, financial needs and caring responsibilities meant some labour migrant women needed full-time work urgently and could not apply for yet another student visa with part-time work (this is the case of Mandakh from the paragraph above). The legal precarity Mongolian labour migrant women experience results from institutional conditions within the Korean visa system that actively hinder their ability to extend their legal stay in Korea, unless they manage to reconfigure their skills and qualifications and continue 'jumping' from one short-term visa to another. In short, their citizenship-making process is just as nonlinear, conditional, and precarious as those of marriage migrants, but in a different way.

Additionally, unlike Mongolian marriage migrant women whose involvement with citizenship pathways is actively facilitated by state policies through Multicultural Family Centers and simplified naturalisation (E. A. Chung, 2020d; Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, n/a), labour migrant women rely on different legal-institutional channels, strategies, and opportunities, and with different consequences and objectives. For example, in order to be eligible for business visas, my interviewees needed to complete certain qualifications, such as the Korean Immigration & Integration Program (KIIP). This public programme "aims to support foreigners to acquire basic knowledge and information (Korean language and culture) so that they can become self-reliant members of Korean society" (Korean Immigration Service, n/aa). Hence, Mongolian labour migrant women proactively abide by the legal terms and conditions of their visas (e.g., complete the KIIP), and in doing so, by learning about Korean culture, they mould themselves into self-reliant members of Korean society. In other words, by pursuing profitable and high-skilled work and business visas, they simultaneously turn themselves into desirable, long-term but not naturalised, specialised socio-economic contributors

of Korean society, which is arguably the kind of foreign workers the Korean state prefers (Hong, 2018; Hundt et al., 2019).

Now, I want to present and discuss some of my interviewees' visa reconfiguration processes that exemplify labour migrant women's conditional and precarious citizenship-making journeys. Here, I would like to re-emphasise that I conceptualise citizenship as not just a legal status with attached rights, but as a process of 'self-making' and 'being-made' (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017; E. A. Chung, 2017). Therefore, by conditional and precarious citizenship-making, I am referring to the process through which Mongolian labour migrant women reconfigure their skills and subjectivities through job experience and professional training, to become desirable economic subjects and temporary residents with *better* citizenship rights than they had when they first arrived. In practice, as I already mentioned at the beginning of this subsection, Mongolian labour migrant women often use temporary student visas as strategic stepping stones to better visas. With a D-2 student or D-4 language trainee visa, they can easily find part-time employment on the condition that they have a TOPIK score[20] high enough (National Institute for International Education, 2020, pp. 74-76). Additionally, acquiring a Korean university degree can also be helpful later on. That is why most interviewees have had or have extended their D-4 and D-2 student visas. Amgalan (LM.27.3) explains that it was easy to get her current job with a student visa, which helps her take care of herself and her young daughter, whom she has with her Mongolian partner. She describes the process of finding a part-time job whilst on the D-2 visa as straightforward:

> "First, I saw a job ad on Facebook and went to the job interview. I signed a contract and got permission [to work] from the director of the company branch. Then I got permission from the school's foreign student office and even handed over my documents [the contract and school's permission to work] to the immigration office."

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[20] TOPIK stands for 'Test of Proficiency in Korean' and has six levels (1 is complete beginner, 6 is fluent). Student visa holders are usually expected to have a score of 4 or higher to engage in simple part-time labour (National Institute for International Education, 2020, p. 75).

Amgalan tells me that her hope is to stay in Korea and receive a long-term residence permit. She adds that, after visiting Mongolia the past few summers, she has felt increasingly apprehensive and concerned that if she moved back home, she and her family's living conditions would worsen due to poor working, services, and infrastructure conditions.

Clearly, among Mongolian migrant women, there exists the tendency to use certain temporary visas (especially the D-2 student and D-4 language trainee visas) as a stepping stone for more profitable and stabler visas like the E-7 skilled worker, and D-8 and D-9 business visas. Examples of this strategy are Ankhtsetseg and Yagaan. Ankhtsetseg, who was on a D-2 visa at the time of the interview, views her current student visa as part of her strategy to extend her stay and continue working in Korea. She already plans to apply for a D-10 or E-7 visa or a long-term residence visa like the F-2. Yagaan says she first entered Korea with a travel visa, which she then converted into a D-2 student visa and finally to a D-8 corporate investment, which is the visa she held when I met her. She explains that already having some knowledge and experience about corporate investment and trading made the switch to the business visa more feasible. In other words, she did not have to start from scratch completely. She says:

> "When I was a student, I worked in a freight forwarding company and started learning about import and export very well. As it seemed possible, we officially changed our visas, got the certificate, and started our activities."

Although they can lead to more financial gains and independence from Korean employers and sponsors, these business visas require a great deal of time and resources not only to be issued, but to be maintained and extended. For example, let us consider the experience of Khaltmaa, who first had a tourist visa, followed by a D-2 student visa, a D-10 job-seeking visa, and finally, a D-9 trade visa. She explains that to receive the D-9, there is a points system, where a score of 80 out of 180 is the minimum to 'pass', which determines who is eligible for the visa (National Institute for International Education, 2020, p. 77). The more requirements you meet, the more points you receive (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 12). These requirements include possessing a TOPIK level 6,

completing the Korea Immigration & Integration Program (KIIP) up to level 3 or higher (there are six levels in total), and holding a Korean university degree. Here, by complying with the legal requirements and application procedure of her business visa, and thus learning the Korean language and obtaining a Korean university degree, she also underwent a process of social and cultural assimilation. The goal is as long-term as that of most Mongolian marriage migrant women, but does not involve naturalisation. Khaltmaa explains that after complying with the requirements of the trade visa point system, and meeting the visa's financial criteria, running a profitable international business company is mostly an expedient to earn a resident permit. She says that:

"The D-9 can be extended to up to three years. The main requirement is to have, per year, at least 100 million won [US$ 75,000] of trading [exporting] completed to any country. It can be to any country, but I must reach *at least* 100 million won[21]. Then, you need to pay the corresponding taxes. They want to see how beneficial you are, how much you are making and paying to the government through taxes. But the main goal of the D-9 visa is to change it to an F-2 visa, which is a long-term residence permit. My main goal is that, too."

However, this type of visa journey is not available to all. The undocumented Mongolian migrant women I interviewed had to go through a completely different experience. Whilst they shared the same migration rationales as the other labour migrants (i.e., to make a better salary than in Mongolia so as to support their family, especially their children's wellbeing and education), they did not share the same initial financial and educational resources. They did not have the time, money, prior job experiences, and connections needed to apply for multiple student visas whilst working only part-time with the hope of, eventually, getting a Korean sponsor to support their application of a E-7 skilled worker visa or be eligible for a business visa. Instead, all my undocumented interviewees entered Korea with their children with a tourist visa, which they overstayed together. Their undocumented status caused stress in my interviewees, as well as concerns and worries for their

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[21] This information can also be found in the 'Visa Navigator' document issued by the Korean Immigration Service (Korean Immigration Service, 2023, p. 12), where it is stated that "A person who has obtained or is expecting a master's degree or higher in Korea and invested more than 100 million won to manage a company in Korea" is eligible for permanent resident status.

children's educational prospects. But they were also aware that current regularisation procedures for undocumented children rarely consider parents' desire to also receive a long-term visa (B. Y. Lee, 2023).

Hence, for some of the undocumented migrant women I interviewed, the prospect of remaining undocumented indefinitely has been and continues to be far more attractive than seeking to regularise their status, since regularising their and their children's status comes with the risk of having their application rejected and facing deportation. In other words, they know that whilst they might be able to get their teenage children a student visa to reside in Korea legally, they will most likely not be given a long-term visa and will be asked to leave Korea soon after. This was actually the experience of Bayalag. She went through the regularisation process but later found out that the Immigration office would only give D-4 trainee visas to the children and no visa to the parents. Realising that the authorities now had their address and personal information, and fearing deportation, Baylag and her family moved out of Seoul and only returned to the city when they felt safe and comfortable to do so, so that she could find more informal work again.

To recap, the Korean Immigration Service manages labour migration through flexible citizenship policies, so that only desirable skilled workers can enter the country and *eventually* get a residence permit. Mongolian labour migrant women can at times bypass this institutional barrier by entering the country with student visas and subsequently, reconfigure their skills and acquire the qualifications needed to keep on changing their visas for better ones. I argued that this constant visa reconfiguration is part of a deeply conditional and nonlinear citizenship-making process where the ultimate goal for labour migrant women is to gain and extend their access to better citizenship rights and become more settled 'emotionally'. Yet, labour migrant women experience systematic legal precarity throughout this process. This precarity is exemplified by the uncertainty of not knowing which visa to get next, whether they are going to get it, and whether they will be able to continuously meet their visa criteria. Even if and when they get better work or business visas, they are still in a disadvantaged and subordinate position within the legal-institutional space of Korea's visa system.

Finally, I pointed out that visa reconfiguration as an agentic strategy and practice in the citizenship-making process is only available to labour migrant women who already experienced a somewhat higher socio-economic status in Mongolia. Other labour migrant women who do not have the same resources are more likely to have entered Korea on tourist visas, which they then overstayed, thus becoming undocumented.

4.4. Conclusion: citizenship-making and the social reproduction of Life's Work

In this chapter, I argued that citizenship-making is a nonlinear, precarious, and continuous process of 'self-making' and 'being made' (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017), which Mongolian migrant women are deeply entangled in, and actively negotiate as a way to mitigate the legal precarity they face within the legal-institutional space of Korea's immigration system. This legal precarity takes different forms and implications for each group of Mongolian migrant women. For those under the F-6 marriage visa, it looks like a continuous, frustrating, and othering process of visa renewal, accompanied by limited citizenship rights and legal dependency upon their Korean husbands. For those migrant women working under student visas, skilled worker visas, or business visas, legal precarity entails a lingering sense of uncertainty about their future in Korea, especially in terms of what visa they will be able to receive next, when, and how long they will be able to keep it. Undocumented migrant women also experience a significant degree of uncertainty, which is further exacerbated by their concerns for the children's future and fear of deportation.

Whilst Korean immigration policies encourage the legal and cultural assimilation of marriage migrant women, and aim at the transformation of labour migrant women into temporary, skilled economic subjects, both groups of migrant women act in accordance with their visa requirements and eligibility criteria in order to overcome their specific iterations of legal precarity. For example, Mongolian marriage migrants pursued Korean naturalisation to safeguard theirs and their children's citizenship rights and emotional safety, whereas Mongolian labour migrant women pursued new skills, public training programmes, and qualifications to become eligible for long-term visas and thus,

achieve stability by extending their legal right to stay in Korea. Therefore, this chapter showed that both groups of migrant women actively participate in the citizenship-making process that simultaneously reproduces and conditionally negotiates their legal precarity. It also illustrated that whilst there are ways in which both marriage and (some) labour migrant women mitigate their legal precarity, even when they do, said precarity persists. For Mongolian marriage migrant women, although they have citizenship status and rights, they are still pressured to abide by gendered social norms and family hierarchies. For Mongolian labour migrant women, even though some of them manage to be granted more profitable work and business visas, they continue to deal with protracted precarity and a permanent sense of uncertainty about their future and their right to stay in Korea. In conclusion, whilst intentional and relational agentic responses can still be exerted in and throughout the process of citizenship-making, Life's Work in the form of legal precarity continues to be the norm for a wide range of Mongolian migrant women in the legal-institutional space of Korea's visa system.

Chapter 5 - Labour differentiation and the social reproduction of Life's Work as labour precarity

5.1. Introduction

In this thesis, I use the concept of Life's Work to highlight the ubiquitous processes and experiences of precarity, exploitation, and oppression in all spheres of life of Mongolian migrant women in Seoul. The strength of the concept of Life's Work is exactly its ability to show the ubiquity of precarity beyond the workplace injustices and exploitative labour relations of capitalism. However, it is still essential to pay attention to this specific space - that of labour relations - to understand how different social processes of precarity exacerbate each other and instrumentalise gendered structures to reproduce the precarity of women and migrant women. Hence, in this chapter, I focus on the legal-institutional and mundane space of labour relations, and examine the social process of labour differentiation. Labour differentiation - i.e., the social process of dividing and organising specific tasks and jobs into segments or categories in an hierarchical manner determined by skill and social relations - has been widely discussed in both the literature on Social Reproduction Theory (Federici, 2004; Norton & Katz, 2017; Katz, 2001b; Strauss, 2018; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021) and migration studies (Herrera 2020; Kofman & Raghuram, 2020; Lee & Piper, 2016; Yeoh et al., 2020). Scholars have specifically explored the question of labour differentiation (and the division of labour in the household, in particular) from the standpoint of gender, to explain how gender identities, relations, and structures have been instrumental in normalising women's expected engagement with unwaged care labour in the household, and in devaluing their market value and employability in the workspace.

Drawing on this existing literature, Chapter 5 asks the overarching question, *how does the process of labour differentiation contribute to the social reproduction of Life's Work?* The sub-questions are as follows: *how do Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women experience labour differentiation and the resulting labour precarity within the Korean labour market? How does the social structure of gender shape this process and its outcome? And how do different groups of*

Mongolian migrant women navigate and negotiate their labour precarity throughout the process of labour differentiation? These questions call for a comprehensive analysis of gender and precarity that goes beyond an issue of care work alone and explicitly engages with the ideas of Life's Work and Social Reproduction Theory (Kofman, 2014). In other words, viewing gender and precarity as solely an issue of women's oppression as (un)waged care workers under capitalism offers a narrow analysis. Instead, by identifying and examining the labour relations of migrant women within the conceptual framework of Life's Work, this chapter is set out to paint a bigger picture on how different groups of migrant women fit within the space of labour relations, and how the process of labour differentiation is exacerbated by other processes of precarity in nationalistic, patriarchal, capitalist societies (Katz et al., 2015; Strauss, 2018; Strauss & Meehan, 2015).

Therefore, the argument at the core of the chapter is that pre-existing material structural barriers (e.g., unwelcoming work culture, lack of public childcare, a highly competitive and segmented labour market), stemming from the social structure and relations of gender, reproduce the devaluation of migrant women's market value, which in turns results in migrant women's labour precarity. This precarity entails their conditional access to a limited pool of highly segmented, insecure, and precarious jobs, and is further exacerbated by the legal precarity resulting from the process of citizenship-making (see Chapter 4). Under these circumstances of structural disadvantage, migrant women actively deploy their agency by mobilising their competencies and skills in order to deal with and mitigate their labour precarity. Whilst the chapter illustrates how they are far from being passive victims of the material and social structures resulting from the process of labour differentiation, it also shows that both Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women attempt to 'get by' in the face of precarity and institutional oppression through different job trajectories, but without changing the institutions reproducing these inequalities (Katz, 2004; MacLeavy et al., 2021). In other words, I show that both groups of migrant women, in their own specific ways, exert their agency to navigate and mitigate labour precarity. Yet, the outcome tends to be partial and dependent upon their pre-existing financial means and connections, and access to new work opportunities.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The following section on women and labour explains the relationship between gender and labour differentiation, and is divided into two subsections. The first subsection explains Mongolia and Korea's current labour markets, which are equally characterised by systematically low female labour participation rates, and widespread gender discrimination, wage inequality, and job insecurity. The second subsection presents and discusses the specific societal expectations in terms of what kind of labour women should engage in both Mongolia and Korea; extracts from my interviewees are included to illustrate how they view and make sense of these pressures. Building on this analysis of labour differentiation and gender, the rest of Chapter 5 details my interviewees' experiences in the Korean labour market, including how their employment opportunities have changed over time since leaving Mongolia, and their relationship with their employers and colleagues. This section of Chapter 5 demonstrates that Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women's job pools in Korea are simultaneously segregated, devalued, and precarious because of their embodied gender. The section also explains that marriage and labour migrant women also respond to labour precarity in different ways, depending on their specific resources and the legal precarity they deal with as a result of the process of citizenship-making. Chapter 5 ends with concluding reflections about the agency potential of different groups of migrant women, and the structural barriers they face as a result of the process of labour differentiation. It also reflects on the way the social processes of Life's Work discussed so far (i.e. citizenship-making and labour differentiation) are deeply intertwined, and actively exacerbating each other.

5.2. Women and labour: unpacking the material structures of gender discrimination at work

5.2.1. The current state of the Mongolian and Korean labour markets

This subsection sheds light on the widespread structural constraints and recurrent issues - including gender discrimination, exclusionary hiring practices, and lack of public childcare - that shape what kind of jobs are available to Mongolian and Korean women in their respective countries. I will first describe the current state of the labour market in Mongolia. Before delving into this discussion, it is

important to point out that the labour market is experienced differently by women depending on their socio-economic status and financial means. In general, despite higher levels of education among Mongolian women (Weller, 2020), the labour market remains highly segmented and openly discriminatory towards them, resulting in high rates of unemployment, wage inequality, and unsustainable work/life balance for most Mongolian women, who tend to be of rural and/or lower socio-economic background. These material barrier to fair and secure employment are arguably the result of both exploitative and exclusionary gender norms, and lack of public services:

> "Both cultural norms, such as prevailing views on gender roles with respect to marriage, household duties, and suitable career choices, and deficiencies in the political environment and in available services and programs are important forces underlying the gender disparities in Mongolia's labor market" (Begzsuren et al., 2022; see also Daley et al., 2018, p. 12; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018, p. 19).

The sharp reduction in public childcare provision and facilities has further constrained participation in the labour force of Mongolian women in Mongolia whose financial means were already limited to begin with (Begzsuren et al., 2022, p. 4; Burn & Oyuntsetseg, 2001, p. 12). Therefore, when Mongolian women enter the Mongolian labour market, in spite of their generally higher educational achievements compared to men, most of them "are highly concentrated in lower-earning sectors, such as social services, health, food production, and trade" (Daley et al., 2018, p. 11). Job security, potential for promotions, and liveable wages tend to be lacking in these private and informal sectors. Even among Mongolian women who enjoy a higher socio-economic status, it is generally uncommon to gain managerial and top positions in businesses or the government, as these roles are predominantly given to men (Schmillen & Sandig, 2018; Weller, 2020).

It is evident that gender discrimination in the unfair hiring process, highly segmented work sectors, wage inequality, and lack of public childcare services stemming from underlying gendered norms and expectations, have all made the labour market a deeply unwelcoming space for most Mongolian women. Under these constraining circumstances, Mongolian women are still expected to

act as primary caregivers (Begzsuren et al., 2022; Benwell, 2006), whilst oftentimes being the household's breadwinner when their partners are facing unemployment. Indeed, Mongolian women reportedly engage in a much larger share of unpaid care and domestic work than men:

> "For adults aged 25–39[22], men spend 84% of working hours in paid work compared to women who spend 46% of their working hours doing paid work and the majority (54%) in unpaid work. Furthermore, women aged 25-39 spend 3.3 times more than their male counterparts in unpaid domestic and care work" (Daley et al., 2018, p. 9).

As a result of this uneven division of labour at home, it has become common practice among Mongolian employers to deem young and older women unemployable because they believe the former will have children soon, whilst the latter already has childcare duties to fulfil (Burn & Oyuntsetseg, 2001, p. 39; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018, p. 21). Consequently, in 2021, Mongolian labour participation rates were 51.1% for women and 66.6% for men (The World Bank, 2023).

The Korean labour market is characterised by similar underlying issues stemming from gender role attitudes and expectations, gender discrimination in the recruitment and promotion decision-making process, lack of affordable childcare, and wage inequality - all factors perpetuating lower female labour participation rates (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; C.-H. Kim & Oh, 2022; H. Kwon & Doellgast, 2018; H. Yang, 2021). For reference, in Korea, in 2021, the male labour force participation rate was 72.7%, whereas the female labour force participation rate was 53% (The World Bank, 2023). Cultural norms such as an excessive work culture emphasising and rewarding long work hours, and parenting culture reproducing gender essentialism (i.e., the belief that men and women are born with distinctively different natures, which are biologically predetermined; e.g., men are leaders, and women are caregivers 'by nature'), are still significantly widespread (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023, pp. 208-210; Um, 2023, pp. 1686-1687). The excessive work culture and gender essentialism coexist but are unsustainable for many Korean women who either have to quit their full-time jobs or work

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[22] On average, my interviewees fit within this age range.

part-time if they want to have children. This trend has resulted in the infamous "M-curve", which illustrates:

> "a relatively high labor-force participation rate in [women's] 20s, dipping in the 30s and early 40s with family formations and childbirths, and a return to the labor force after the completion of children's education" (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; C.-H. Kim & Oh, 2022, p. 2; see also H. Kwon & Doellgast, 2018, pp. 223-225).

Employers' discriminatory attitudes towards potential female hires further contribute to lower female labour participation rates. Kim and Oh (2022) show in their research that Korean employers do not necessarily believe that women should not be hired because their skills are inferior to men. Rather, in spite of existing equal opportunity (EO) policies, local employers tend to hire fewer women and working mothers as they associate their gender with an expected lower degree of commitment to salaried work and ultimately, a higher turnover rate for female workers (C.-H. Kim & Oh, 2022; Patterson & Walcutt, 2014, p. 35; Um, 2023). Consequently, Korean women are overrepresented in the contingent workforce, and often lack access to regular full-time jobs (H. Kwon & Doellgast, 2018, p. 229). Part-time jobs are significantly more common among Korean women who did not have the financial means to pursue higher education and additional school training growing up, especially in the hospitality and food service sector, the healthcare and social service sector, and the wholesale and retail sectors. There, they encounter lower wages, poor working conditions, lower job security, and significantly limited working hours (ibid., p. 232).

On top of waged labour, Korean women are also expected to be the family's primary caregiver. The lack of public, affordable childcare facilities and non-transferable paternal leave policies (Patterson & Walcutt, 2014; Y. Seo & Toh, 2023; H. Yang, 2021) put great pressure on women to fulfil the role of caregivers alone. It follows that, since it is already difficult for a Korean woman to get hired for a long-term, full-time job, "[w]omen in regular employment have to think twice before starting a family, and often postpone parenthood, sometimes indefinitely" (OECD, 2019c). But even though maternal and parental leave policies do exist in Korea, "important categories

of workers are excluded, including self-employed workers who are not covered by the legislation on parental leave, and employees who work less than 60 hours a month who cannot get parental leave benefits paid from the employment insurance because the Employment Insurance Act does not apply to them" (ibid.). Indeed, while some progress has been made in terms of gender essentialism and gender role attitudes (Patterson & Walcutt, 2014, p. 23; H. Yang, 2021; S.-Y. Yoon, 2023), Kim and Oh (2022, p. 3) report in their study that "the proportion of respondents who agree that the male-breadwinner-female-homemaker model is an ideal work arrangement for a family was 37.3% in Korea [...]. When a preschooler is present, only 9.2% of Korean respondents agreed that women can work full-time, and 86.7% answered that women should not work or work only part-time" (H. Yang, 2021; see also S.-Y. Yoon, 2023). Like in Mongolia, it is evident that Korean society expects women to be the family's primary caregiver and homemaker.

Having discussed the current state of the Mongolian and Korean labour markets from the standpoint of their respective female citizens, it is important to reflect on the experiences of migrant women. Put simply, Mongolian migrant women in Korea also experience these gender-based structural inequalities, which are further exacerbated by their migrant status. When discussing job opportunities in Seoul, my research assistants Tsende and Undraa encountered the same difficulties that Korean women face, but Undraa explicitly pointed out that if it was already challenging for a Korean woman to find a job, it was even harder for a migrant woman. My interviewees' university degrees and past work experience were often disregarded and deemed of insufficient quality according to Korean educational and professional standards. So, even though almost all of my interviewees (regardless of their visa status) had bachelor's and even master's degrees from Mongolian and Korean universities, and most of them had previous job experience, their resumes could hardly meet the competitive requirements of Korean employers, neither for corporate nor for factory jobs. This sort of nationality-based devaluation of foreign workers' competences is not a new phenomenon in Korea nor across the world. In general, "[d]ue to stereotyping and discrimination in which characteristics of docility and aptitude for certain tasks are imputed to migrant and ethnic minority women [...] [they]

not only suffer from an ethnic penalty, but also from gender-specific difficulties such as lower appreciation of their [human] capital" (Kofman et al., 2009, p. 65). As a result of a mixture of statistical and taste-based discriminations,[23] migrant women worldwide tend to be clustered in the less skilled sectors where they work jobs they are technically overqualified for (Igarashi & Mugiyama, 2023; Kofman et al., 2009; S. Lee & Piper, 2013; Piper & Withers, 2018; Seol & Skrentny, 2009). As I will explain later in Section 5.3., the legal precarity resulting from the process of citizenship-making further disadvantages migrant women, whose legal status is leveraged against them and pushes them into even more precarious segments of the labour market.

In short, I explained that, in both Mongolia and Korea, the female labour participation rate is lower than the male (Schmillen & Sandig, 2018; H. Yang, 2021). Women are expected to engage in both waged labour and unwaged domestic and care work. However, the material structures and policies needed for all women to engage in both types of labour in a financially, physically, and emotionally sustainable way, are lacking or poorly implemented. In practice, the most common scenario, especially for individuals with limited financial means and qualifications, is one where Mongolian and Korean women alike are expected to prioritise unpaid domestic and care work, whilst trying to hold onto part-time jobs in highly segmented and unstable sectors that offer little to no job security and benefits. I already hinted that in the Korean labour market, migrant women navigate a double-burden, whereby their qualifications and skills are devalued on the basis of both their gender and their migrant status. The result is further devaluation of their human capital and consequently, an even more constrained pool of job opportunities (more on this in Section 5.3).

5.2.2. Unpacking gendered expectations of work in Mongolia and Korea

As the previous subsection illustrated, gender has significantly and deeply shaped both the Mongolian and Korean labour markets. This considerable influence calls for a targeted discussion of what these gender norms and expectations entail. As I already discussed in Section 2.3 of this thesis, gender

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[23]According to Igarashi and Mugiyama (2023, pp. 3367-3368), "statistical discrimination assumes that employers obtain imperfect information about applicants and use their beliefs (or stereotypes) about an ethnic group to infer the productivity of its group members", whereas "taste-based discrimination is based on prejudice and preferences against ethnic groups."

expectations are deeply time and place contingent (McDowell, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2015), and although they are abstract ideas, they can have serious consequences for various aspects of migrant women's lives, including their experiences of labour and labour markets. In Mongolia, contemporary gendered expectations of women stem from a particular mixture of pastoral traditions, socialist beliefs, and recent democratisation policies. The romanticised revival of nomadic attitudes and ideals such as strong work ethic, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency (Diener & Hagen, 2013b; Myadar & Rae, 2014) has been combined with the socialist tradition of (gender) equality and the importance of family and child-bearing as a political tool to sustain a stable and collective society (Benwell, 2006; Rossabi, 2005). This time and place-contingent mixture of traditions and ideals has continued to evolve during the democratic transition of the 1990s, where a free market economy, privatisation policies, and welfare cuts created additional burdens and pressures for Mongolian women to engage in care work alone (Burn & Oyuntsetseg, 2001).

Many of my respondents reported having experienced the pressure to engage with both care and paid labour, and emphasised how normalised it is to push women to achieve as many accomplishments as possible. Kheshigmaa (MMK.33.11), for example, is very aware of these gendered norms. In her own words, she explains that Mongolian women are expected to be good at everything and in every aspect of their life:

> "Expectations of a woman in Mongolia are that they have to excel in every aspect of life, like education. They have to be well-educated, have a career, and take care of the family. They have to excel in every aspect of life. In the past, women were expected to take care of the family and be stay-at-home moms. But in recent years, women in Mongolia have been very well educated. So, they are becoming more and more active in social settings, more active and having a career and a good education. Also, while taking care of the family… Women are expected to be good at everything."

It should be noted that Mongolia has what has been labelled a 'reversed' education gender gap. Historically, especially in rural areas, families would encourage sons to engage in herding-related

manual labour, and daughters to stay in school (Daley et al., 2018; Weller, 2020). Undraa and Tsende (my research assistants) commented that this practice - pushing Mongolian girls to pursue education - originated from the beliefs that girls were not strong enough to work in herding, and the only way they could 'survive' was to get an education and find a job in the service industry. It can also be argued that in the context of Ulaanbaatar, pursuing an education is viewed as a question of social prestige and economic wealth (C. A. Johnson, 2008), and not just as a survival strategy. In other words, depending on their socio-economic background, different Mongolian women may feel the pressure to 'be good at everything' for different reasons - to maintain or gain social prestige, and/or as a survival strategy in an unwelcoming labour market (Begzsuren et al., 2022; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018). For example, in the case of Kheshigmaa, who was born and raised in Ulaanbaatar, pursued a masters' degree in Korea, and originally planned to become a Korean language teacher in Mongolia, the pressure to 'do it all' - the education, job, and family - was probably influenced by her socio-economic background and experiences prior to migrating to Korea.

During our interview, I was curious to find out from whom these expectations came, and how Kheshigmaa, like many other of my interviewees, made sense of them. Kheshigmaa explains that no-one - not her parents nor her peers - had ever told her directly that it was her responsibility or duty as a woman to achieve so much, to meet all these standards. Rather, she explains that this unspoken pressure came from her environment, that is, from looking at people in her life: "I feel this rush, and I compare myself to people living in Mongolia", she tells me. Whilst trying to make sense of what has caused these gendered trends to become normal, Kheshigmaa brings forward her own hypothesis: "maybe it is because the average life expectancy in Mongolia is not particularly high, 60 to 70-year-old, that people start their career and family life very early. People my age [early 30s] and friends in Mongolia are already at the peaks of their careers while also having a family." On a similar note, Khongorzul (MMK.39.17) explains that this pressure never explicitly came from her parents, but that it had been a common aspect of Mongolian society that deeply affected her, especially when she still lived in Mongolia. For context, her parents were educated civil service workers, so the pressure to

achieve higher education and a high-paying job might have been implicit there. But Khongorzul says that these expectations must have originated from Mongolian cultural beliefs:

> "As a culture, Mongolians are very demanding and always want to improve. But my parents are good in that respect [good at not pressuring her]. On the contrary, I set expectations for myself. Now that I have adapted to Korean society and realised that I can live in any situation, I have calmed down. In the past, I used to run out of breath trying to complete the next tasks."

I think that Khongorzul's quotation raises two important points. On the one hand, the tension between the pressure to comply with 'the norm' and the desire to find a more balanced lifestyle. On the other hand, the role that the migration experience has played in her questioning what is 'the norm'. In other words, whilst they still somewhat internalise them, Mongolian migrant women like Khongorzul (but also Munkhbayar, LM.35.10, Ankhtsetseg, LM.28.5, and Amgalan, LM.27.3) do not just take these gendered ideals of womanhood at face value (Bastia, 2011; H.-C. Chang, 2020; Yeoh, Somaiah, et al., 2020), and do question the many burdens that are placed onto them before and during their migration journeys.

Another example of this dynamic is Munkhbayar. She is critical of how these gendered beliefs have become normalised to a point where even the Mongolian legal system considers them facts. She tells me that she had seen these norms in action during her divorce trial, when she was fighting for sole custody of the child she shared with her now Mongolian ex-husband. She recalls that "Mongolian family law is not very flexible. During the trial, the judges always give custody of the children to the mothers because they are women, because that's what Mongolian women do: they are good mothers and work hard." Munkhbayar's experience in the Mongolian legal system is another example of the tension described above: she feels critical of the assumptions judges make, but at the same time, she acted upon them and claimed in court that it was her (not her ex-husband or his future wife's) duty and responsibility to raise their child. On this note, it is also interesting to observe that Munkhbayar never expected her ex-husband to take on those caring responsibilities. This observation hints at the role Mongolian society places on men. During a later interview with Amgalan (LM.27.3), it was

clarified to me that "expectations for Mongolian men are different. Men are not expected to be married or care about children. They only care about where they work and how much money they earn." Here, it is evident that Mongolian gender expectations for men have not moved away from the widespread stereotype of the male 'breadwinner'. Whilst Mongolian men are not pressured to engage in care labour, the expectations of being the household's breadwinner - and the feeling of having 'failed' to be one - is in and of itself an oppressive reality to accomplish and embody in and outside the home (hooks, 2005). Sadly, high rates of alcoholism and alcoholism-related gender-based violence have been recorded among Mongolian men who experience unemployment for long periods of time (Burn & Oyuntsetseg, 2001; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018). Even though the focus of this thesis is on Mongolian migrant women and their often invisibilised experiences in Korea's labour market, addressing the gendered oppressions experienced by Mongolian men is important to ensure that no gendered group is villainised, and to illustrate how destructive and exploitative patriarchal gender binaries are for all.

In Korea, gendered expectations of women and labour share much in common with Mongolia's, even though the two countries have undergone distinctive economic, political, and social transitions and transformations (see Section 1.4). Depending on their socio-economic background, Korean women deal with the normalised pressure to simultaneously have an income-generating job and raise children (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; Y. J. Seo et al., 2020). Yet, the underlying gender discourse is that, although a woman can and should strive for educational and professional accomplishments, her fulfilment should and will derive from making a family (Abelmann, 2002, p. 27) and being "[women] who [are] submissive, obedient, and [embody] the practice of filial piety" (OECD, 2019c). As Choi (2009, p. 22) argues, mainstream patriarchal discourses around womanhood in Korea still "emphasiz[e] the sacred role of educated mothers in the modern scientific training of children as future citizens and the crucial duty of educated wives in assisting their husbands". The norm is still that women "should take primary responsibility in caretaking" and "live up to the ideal of being a good mother" (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023, p. 210) and a good wife (Y. J. Seo et al., 2020). This belief was

well-known to my interviewees, too, like Bolormaa (MMK.51.21) who reiterates that "a mother's role is considered very important for Korean society. It is through her education and caring responsibilities that children will one day become well-educated and well-behaved people."

So, whilst progress towards gender egalitarianism has been made, and the idea of dual earner couples has become desirable in the face of increasing financial insecurity and recurrent cost-of-living crisis under capitalism (Chea, 2023; M. Kim, 2023), gender essentialism and emphasis of Korean women's role as housewives and homemakers are still predominant and widespread beliefs, even among younger generations (see also Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; OECD, 2019c; S.-Y. Yoon, 2023, pp. 90-91). In practice, although career development is generally prioritised and valued by Korean society, Korean women often find themselves having to choose between fulfilling one gendered norm or the other. This trade-off is perceived as a common and well-known reality also by some of my interviewees, like Kheshigmaa who believes that "Korean women have two choices. If Korean women choose a career, then they won't have a family life, and if they choose family, then having a career is not an option anymore… they don't really get to have both." Reality is more ambiguous, and while some women choose to postpone having a family because of professional and financial preferences, others quit and later start working part-time jobs instead (Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; Stansbury et al., 2023; H. Yang, 2021); I discussed this already in the previous subsection, 5.2.1.

As Mongolian migrant women, my interviewees tend to perceive Korea's gender role attitudes as more stifling than Mongolia's because of the emphasis on women's duty towards domestic and care work, and strict Korean family hierarchies. When asked about these norms, my interviewees' answers ranged from subjective prejudices towards Korean gender expectations, to genuine self-doubt and reflections about these ideals of womanhood. For example, Ariun (MMK.36.14) believes that the Korean parenting style is too overbearing and can actually have a negative effect on the child's ability to become independent and self-sufficient. She is also openly critical of the education system in Korea, and of the widespread practice of sending children to *hagwon* (private institutes for extra-curricular classes and activities) in the hope they will score better grades at school, network, and

have better chances of getting into a top university (C. Lee, 2021; Lett, 1998). In sharing her thoughts, she presents the Mongolian parenting style as the better one and does not hold back from making sweeping generalisations about Korean parents and children. She proudly says that "Korean children, for example, a 23, 24-year-old adult has never washed a cup or made a cup of coffee. The parents do everything without the child ever doing anything in terms of housework. My Mongolian sisters and I want to raise the child in a Mongolian way." Here, it can be argued that when Ariun juxtaposes her positive judgement of Mongolian values (e.g., Mongolians raise self-reliant and independent children) with a pejorative generalisation about the Korean parenting style, she is acting upon a subjective prejudice towards Korean society and the 'luxuries' that most Mongolian children (and adults) do not have (Begzsuren et al., 2022; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018; Sneath, 2018).

Another example of how Mongolian marriage migrant women can negatively generalise Korean gender norms comes from my interview with Amarjargal (MM.39.7). She tells me of a proverb she has heard over the years - *the man is the sky and the woman is the earth* - and how in her opinion, it encapsulates Korean society's belief about men's superiority over women. The proverb itself is more likely to imply how men and women are supposed to complement each other, and that each can bring fortune and prosperity to family life in their own particular ways, through essentialised gender roles like 'the breadwinner' and 'the homemaker' (H. Kwon & Doellgast, 2018; Y. J. Seo et al., 2020; S.-Y. Yoon, 2023). The reason Amarjargal emphasises the downside of the proverb (i.e., the stifling gender hierarchy within the family unit) probably comes from her own experience navigating Korean family hierarchies. On multiple occasions, especially at the beginning of her married life in Korea, she had to endure critiques and pressures to assimilate and act 'more Korean' (i.e., by carrying out more domestic care work in the house) from her colleagues and in-laws, in particular. She explains her feelings of frustration with this gender binary mindset:

> "My husband is a perfect man, but in Korean society, they don't accept women as being [equal]. In the tradition, the man is the sky, and the woman is the earth, and this [mindset] is everywhere. [...] It is a real issue. It is not financial, but [an issue of] human rights, as a

woman and as a man. In Korea, I always felt, wow, is this really a democratic country? Is this right? [she laughs nervously] The younger generations are getting better, and the proverb, *the man is the sky and the woman is the earth*, is more common among the older generations."

Conversely, Khongorzul (MMK.39.17) does not fully generalise nor take for granted Korea's gender norms and expectations of women's role in society and family life. She still holds Mongolian women in higher regard, but she also experiences genuine self-doubt about how her parenting style is being perceived by the Korean majority, and what impact their perceptions as well as her parental decisions might have on her child's school life and interactions with Korean students, parents and teachers. She shares that, in her opinion, "foreign women are very dynamic. They pay more attention to social life and work [outside the home]. [When children are] in elementary school, Korean mothers generally stay home and do not work. For Korean parents, it seems that I am not taking care of my child, that I am raising them in a different way, and that will cause problems." Khongorzul is aware she is not meeting societal norms and expectations the way she perceives Korean women do. She is also grappling with the potential consequences of prioritising waged labour over care work, and how her work/life choices will affect her Mongolian-Korean child's prospects at and outside school.

In this subsection, I presented and discussed Mongolian migrant women's understandings of gendered expectations of women and labour in both Mongolia and Korea. I explained that women's societal worth and acceptance, and personal fulfilment in both countries, is often expected to be achieved by meeting separate and at times clashing goals, like having a full-time career and engaging in full-time caring responsibilities (Benwell, 2006; Burn & Oyuntsetseg, 2001; Y. Cha & Kim, 2023; Rossabi, 2005; S.-Y. Yoon, 2023). Although each country's gendered attitudes have their specific characteristics and origins, they share the following idea at their core: women should be 'good at everything' (education, paid employment), but they should prioritise being 'good mothers and good wives'. Among my interviewees, I observed a tension between the pressure and desire to fit in with these gendered expectations, and their will to find a more personally balanced lifestyle. Once they started to interact and experience the Korean gendered norms, most of my interviewees were prone to

hold Mongolian standards in higher regard and reproduce negative prejudices about Korean women and domestic work. These pejorative views often originated from the migrant women's personal struggles with strict Korean family hierarchies and gender roles, but also from uncritical overgeneralizations that exposed their inclination to assert their moral superiority above Korean society.

5.3. Labour differentiation and migrant women's agentic responses to labour precarity

Having discussed the significant role of gender in shaping the Mongolian and Korean labour markets, in this section, I will delve into the process of labour differentiation, and explain how Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women navigate it differently. However, before examining the differences between the two groups, I would like to highlight one important shared aspect, which is the interconnectedness between social processes of Life's Work. More specifically, I am referring to the fact that the labour of both marriage and labour migrant women is differentiated, and thus devalued, not only because of gendered norms, relations, and structures, but also as a continuation of the process of citizenship-making (see Chapter 4). Indeed, whilst my interviewees hold a plethora of different visas, they all navigate the labour market as *migrant* women. As I will explain in the subsections below, the legal precarity they experience in the Korean immigration system also affects the types of jobs they are eligible for, and the types of jobs they will pursue as a strategy to hold onto their visas. I emphasise this shared commonality now as a reminder that Life's Work and the various forms of precarity it entails, do not operate independently from one another (Katz, 2004, 2001b. Rather, precarity in one sphere of life exacerbates precarity in another, and so on, so that this condition of oppression and exploitation (i.e. Life's Work) is socially reproduced and maintained over time, and normalised across various aspects and spaces of life (Katz, 2008).

To further understand the relationship between the processes of citizenship-making and labour differentiation, consider the following. Mongolian women's status as migrants entails structural and individual challenges and uneven power dynamics. It should be noted that the baseline for migrant

women's job options is conditional on Korean employers' willingness to hire *foreign* women; this can be viewed as legal precarity, or the uncertainty and uneven relation between the visa holder and the visa sponsor. This legal precarity is influenced by and influences employers' preferences, which are influenced by pre-existing gender and nationality-based prejudices and attitudes, and the language barrier, resulting in the devaluation of the abilities and competencies of foreign workers from countries which are generally perceived as 'underdeveloped' (Ahn, 2013; G.-W. Shin, 2012; Yu, 2023). Here, it is already possible to see how one form of precarity (legal precarity) bleeds into another process of Life's Work (labour differentiation), thus intensifying the outcome of said process (labour precarity).

Another labour-related challenge stemming from the process of citizenship-making is that, with the exception of marriage migrants (both naturalised and not), work visas and the right to stay hinge on migrants' work performance, which is evaluated by a Korean employer and/or the Korean Immigration System. This power dynamic means that, on the one hand, Korean employers can leverage their sponsorship to extract additional labour and obedience from their foreign workers - an issue that has been widely reported on (Amnesty International UK, 2006; see for example E. Lee, 2023; J. Shin, 2021) and that I also address in Section 5.3.1. On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter 4, labour migrant women have to find the right job and business opportunities to meet rigorous and taxing visa requirements designed to mould them into desirable 'citizens' - or at the least, desirable economic subjects. In other words, the intentional practice of seeking and relying on multiple jobs simultaneously allows Mongolian labour migrant women to reconfigure their skills to comply with the legal requirements of the Korean immigration system, and allows both groups of Mongolian migrant women to 'get by' on the day-to-day and make a liveable wage. In both cases, the agentic strategies of survival in the face of legal and labour precarity are not meant to necessarily bring about change in the Korean labour market.

Before presenting and analysing my interviewees' experiences of and responses to labour differentiation in the Korean labour market, it is important to contextualise their decision to work in

such difficult and unwelcoming work environments. As I mentioned in Section 5.2.1, gender biases and discrimination are common issues in the Mongolian labour market, which is highly centralised and located in UB, where small-scale businesses and companies have not succeeded in creating enough jobs for the growing Mongolian labour force (Betcherman et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2013). Hence, it is fair to assume that, whilst the Korean labour market devalues their labour, Mongolian women are still more likely to find a job in Korea that offers more security and a higher salary than any other jobs in Mongolia. There are also additional reasons why Mongolian women would decide to continue working in the Korean labour market. On the one hand, for Mongolian marriage migrant women, Korea offers more opportunities not just for them, but also for their children and Korean husbands, who would probably not feel so inclined to leave behind the infrastructure, services, and amenities of Seoul. On the other hand, for Mongolian labour migrant women, migrating to Korea has been part of a long-term, financially and emotionally demanding investment. Some of my interviewees' livelihoods depend on their ability to continue running their transnational businesses from Korea. Below, I provide more detailed examples of my interviewees' different responses to labour precarity and labour differentiation. I include additional insights about my interviewees' relations with their Korean colleagues and employers to highlight the mundane ways gender is instrumentalised in the segmentation and devaluation of migrant women's labour.

5.3.1. Labour migrant women's 3Ds jobs and transnational businesses

The Korean labour market is segmented - that is, divided - into distinct segments or categories based on various factors such as skills, education, experience, employment status, wages, and working conditions. These divisions or boundaries are hard to cross for Korean women, but for migrant women, their visa status becomes an additional hurdle hindering their job and salary opportunities (H. Kwon & Doellgast, 2018; Stansbury et al., 2023). On the one hand, the market offers an already constrained and poorly paid pool of jobs to women with limited professional skills which tend to be further devalued on the basis of nationality (Hough, 2022; K.-E. Yang, 2017). On the other hand, labour migrant women have to worry not only about making a liveable wage, but also find ways to

keep switching visas and maintain their legal right to stay in Korea. Despite these structural barriers and hurdles rooted in gender discrimination and the process of citizenship-making, Mongolian labour migrant women are not passive victims of this heightened labour precarity. In practice, they rely on a range of 'side hustles.' Depending on their pre-existing skills, the majority of my interviewees who had student (D-2, D-4)[24] and job-seeking (D-10) visas worked a combination of 3Ds jobs where language proficiency was not needed. Working as dish-washers and waitpersons in restaurants was particularly common among my undocumented interviewees. Amgalan, for example, summarises her work experience prior to her current service job in Mongol Town by stating that "I worked every kind of job, in hotels, restaurants, factories, fruit picking, phone shop, and even nursing". Although the exception to the rule, for Amgalan and for Munkhbayar, too, relying on various part-time jobs supported them long enough to find a more stable form of employment under a Korean sponsor and thus, receive an E-7 visa.[25]

For some of my interviewees, working as a self-employed business owner under the D-8 or D-9 business visa[26] is an agentic response to both legal precarity (i.e, to comply with legal requirements in order to gain a long-term visa, see Chapter 4), and labour precarity. Their skills reconfiguration is aimed to access better paid jobs without having to depend on a Korean employer's visa sponsorship. It should be noted that becoming and remaining self-employed under this type of business visa is an option only available to those migrant women with prior trading or investing experience, with enough time to attend formal training programmes, and enough savings to prove their financial stability and 'trustworthiness' as business owners. These requirements applied to Khaltmaa (LMB.48.7), Yagaan (LMB.33.15), and Mandakh (LMB.37.7), who, in the past, worked for freight companies whilst on their student visas or had experience reselling, trading, and shipping goods between Mongolia and Korea. Acquiring these competencies and participating in

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[24] D-2 is the full-time degree/exchange programme visa, usually issued to foreigners enrolled in university programmes; D-4 is the general studies visa, which is for foreigners enrolled in Korean language institutes.
[25] The E-7 is a skilled-work visa which has its own separate recruitment process, and requires official sponsorship from a public or private Korean employer (D.-S. Cha, 2023a).
[26] The D-8 and D-9 business visas are the corporate foreign investor visa, and the international trade business visa, respectively (Korean Immigration Service, 2023).

government-approved training made it possible over time to become self-employed under the D-8 and D-9 visas.

Whilst owning and/or running a private business offers a greater degree of financial, legal, and interpersonal freedom compared to working under a Korean sponsor, power struggles with Korean customers and partners still take place. For example, Khaltmaa shares her frustration from being treated with less respect during business meetings, emphasising how her competencies are devalued on the basis of her gender and nationality. Her presence as a migrant woman in what she defines as a male-dominated sector further exacerbates the biases she has to deal with. She says that:

> "I get treated differently when going to meetings with my Korean business partner. When I go alone and talk about business, I get treated as a foreigner, a woman, and a person from a poor country. Especially with new customers or old people. There was a lot of difference in attitudes and body language. Women in [this] business are very rare and uncommon, and then the relationship changes."

Evidently, Khaltmaa's experiences at work differ depending on who she is interacting with, and whether she is on her own or her presence is validated by a Korean business partner. Either way, it is clear that biases and power dynamics based on gender are at play, and will mitigate (e.g., having a Korean business partner gives a Mongolian woman more credibility) or exacerbate (e.g., the male-dominated sector views a Mongolian woman as less skilled and capable) the treatment she will receive in problematic ways. In the end, whilst self-employment allows for more daily financial and legal stability in the face of legal and labour precarity, it does not cancel out the structural power dynamics that made the Korean labour market segmented and discriminatory towards women and migrants, in the first place (Katz, 2004; Um, 2023; K.-E. Yang, 2017).

It should be noted that reconfiguring their skills and working multiple 'side hustles' in the form of 3Ds jobs until new skills (and ideally, better jobs) and better visas are acquired, is not possible for undocumented Mongolian women. Their irregular status and the language barrier greatly reduce the types of jobs they can apply for (Gonzales et al., 2019; Krause, 2008), and because of the nature of

these jobs (i.e., long shifts, physical exhaustion, little to no interactions with the public), they tend to get even fewer chances to improve their language skills and access new work opportunities. It follows that for Mongolian undocumented migrant women, it can be even more challenging and time-consuming to acquire the competencies needed to mitigate labour precarity - and even if they did, their irregular status comes attached with a great deal of uncertainty about the future and the need to be cautious about who they seek employment from (C. Kim et al., 2022; Scott, 2023). For example, Bayalag (ULM.49.6) shares that "currently I'm doing all the jobs that Koreans don't like to do.[27] Subway cleaning, toilet cleaning, etc., even cleaning police bus toilets." She is well aware of how her legal precarity shapes her labour differentiation, and determines the type and quality of her job opportunities, as well as the types of work environments and employers she will have to deal with. As Anderson (2010) explains, precarious and irregular labour markets exist in a sort of vacuum and operate according to separate rules and expectations of and for undocumented workers. In Bayalag's own words:

> "There are other people without a visa working at this cleaning company. People with visas are not interested in cleaning toilets… Because [the cleaning company] are hiding their tax problems, they are doing business outside the law, they don't pay attention to what kind of visa [their employees] have or whether they have the right to work."

Having a Korean employer entails additional challenges and power dynamics for both documented and undocumented migrant women. An example of these dynamics is Munkhbayar and Badamlyanhua (ULM.38.4). The main takeaway of Munkhbayar's experience is that scholars, policymakers, and civil workers should always be critical of the power relation between migrant workers and national sponsors, and pay attention to how pre-existing gender norms can negatively affect the wellbeing of labour migrants, regardless of their visa type. Munkhbayar worked all sorts of 3Ds jobs, from cleaning to waitressing, before eventually finding a full-time job in Mongol Town, in

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[27] Middle-age and elderly Korean women also work these kinds of jobs (Patterson & Walcutt, 2014; H. Yang, 2021). Here, I believe that Bayalag was referring to the tendency among Koreans to look down on these jobs. In other words, there are actual Koreans who do these jobs, but these jobs are viewed as less prestigious.

the Dongdaemun area. Whilst she has a E-7 work visa now, she recognises she is being treated less fairly on the basis of her migrant status, gender, and nationality. During her interview, Munkhbayar points out that such mistreatments (being yelled at, having longer work shifts, being threatened to have her visa taken away) would not happen if she was married to a Korean man who could help her take legal action without jeopardising her right to stay in Korea. In spite of all the mistreatments and exploitation resulting from labour differentiation, Munkhbayar endures the situation in order to not lose her visa. The E-7 visa she has usually lasts up to three years, and can be extended up to five years under special circumstances (D.-S. Cha, 2023a), and since she already received multiple student visas as well as a job-seeking visa, hanging onto her current work is a priority to secure financial and legal stability for herself and her child. On that note, she explains that her employer's abusive behaviour is often accompanied by threats of cancelling his sponsorship:

> "The working hours are long, and I only get 1 day off. I am actually working longer hours than what the law here allows. The shop opens at 7.30am and closes at 8pm. If I complain about the working hours, I will lose my visa. If I want to shorten my shift, I will have my salary reduced. So, I just hold back and endure. The Korean workers arrive at 8am and leave at 5pm, take 2 days off, and rest on National holidays. They also get paid a lot more. Looking at my situation, even hard-working people must have a hard time."

Munkhbayar's story is particularly important for two reasons. First, it highlights the interconnectedness between legal and labour precarity. Second, it shows that labour precarity and the subsequent abuse of power and dangerous work environment that have been reported among non-professional foreign workers who hold the E-9 non-professional work visa (Amnesty International UK, 2006; E. Lee, 2023; J. Shin, 2021), can also affect migrant women who hold professional visas and do not engage in manual labour.

I was expecting to hear similar stories and anecdotes from undocumented Mongolian women, about their employers leveraging and taking advantage of their legal status for their own financial benefit. Instead, this bias was challenged by my interviewees' accounts of their positive relationship

with their Korean bosses, who had shown them much support and understanding. On this note, Badamlyanhua explains that, in her interactions with Korean customers and her employer, misunderstandings and rudeness due to her language barrier (she works as a waitress in a Korean restaurant) were more common than abuse and overt discrimination. In her experience, power struggles can even occur between undocumented migrants. She explains that:

> "More recently, there was another Mongolian woman, also undocumented, who had started working there. She said I should stop bossing her around or else she would have me deported. The boss gave that woman 1 million won [approximately US$700] to shut her up and send her away. So, even undocumented Mongolian women threaten and harass each other. But with Korean customers, there has not been overt discrimination, arguments emerged from language misunderstandings at work."

When Badamlyanhua's boss paid off a recently hired undocumented woman who threatened to report Badamlyanhua, it is likely that he was not only protecting her but himself, too. This incident illustrates the context-specific rules that operate in irregular work environments and how the power balance between undocumented employees and employers is further complicated (Anderson, 2010).

In summary, I explained that Mongolian labour migrant women intentionally pursue part-time 3Ds jobs as well as self-employment as a strategy to endure and mitigate labour precarity in the Korean labour market. They choose to work a wide range of jobs at the same time with the goal of gaining both a consistent income flow and the skills required to apply for long-term visas. I explained that this practice is an agentic response to both labour and legal precarity, and a way to navigate simultaneously the processes of labour differentiation and citizenship-making: by work multiple jobs or becoming self-employed, labour migrant women make a liveable income; by gaining new skills through new jobs and ventures, they apply for long-term visas and extend their right to stay in Korea. The overlap between these processes and my interviewees' responses shows that migrant women's actions and decisions can serve more than a single goal in the face of structural precarity. I also discussed that power struggles with Korean employers, colleagues, and customers affect the everyday

lives and wellbeing of Mongolian labour migrant women, who in turn, might seek self-employment as a strategy to reduce dependency on Korean visa sponsorship. This strategy, however, entails a great deal of resources (financial, linguistic, interpersonal) that not all labour migrant women (especially the undocumented) can access and use to move out of highly precarious and segmented 3Ds job sectors.

5.3.2. Marriage migrant women's multicultural jobs and self-employment

Whilst Mongolian labour migrant women mitigate the outcomes of their labour differentiation by working a wide range of 3Ds jobs or becoming self-employed, Mongolian marriage migrant women do so by seeking jobs where they can apply their first-hand multicultural knowledge. In other words, they 'get by' in the face of labour precarity by working as freelance translators and/or multicultural educators in primary schools. In practice, my interviewees mobilised their language proficiency and experiences as members of multicultural families to get 'niche' multicultural teaching and translating jobs - jobs that are, by definition, not offered to Mongolian labour migrant women. Mongolian marriage migrant women also share similar professional journeys: they became certified registered translators and began working wherever a Mongolian interpreter was needed, for example, in hospitals and medical tourism clinics, or police departments, and at the same time, they also taught as multicultural Mongolian educators in elementary and middle schools. Part-time translating and teaching jobs are by far the most common and sought-after by my interviewees because these side hustles had fewer and less demanding requirements in terms of educational attainments and prior work experience. Relying on a combination of part-time jobs, including cleaning and cosmetic product sales (e.g., selling Amore Pacifico products on a commission-base) is also a common practice.

It should be noted that working these jobs as a way to endure labour precarity is symptomatic of labour differentiation in the Korean labour market. Working as a freelance certified translator often implies limited and inconsistent interactions with Koreans and no regular co-workers. This isolating and ever-changing work environment makes it hard for Mongolian marriage migrant women to develop new interpersonal relationships and professional connections. For example, Ariun has worked

as an interpreter in a medical tourism company[28] for the past few years. In her opinion, with translation jobs, there is a very limited chance of interacting with other Koreans because the sector itself is targeted for foreigners. In her own words, she says that "we don't have the opportunity to meet any Korean people and get to know them. For example, people who work in a factory mostly spend time together with other people in that factory. For us, we always deal with foreigners at the hospital."

Conversely, multicultural educator jobs entail far more frequent interpersonal interactions with Korean co-workers and employers. According to my interviewees, these relationships are generally positive or neutral, but some misunderstandings or even subtle forms of discrimination can occur. Some Mongolian marriage migrant women had to ask their Korean team leader to be explicit and direct about any expectations about their performance at work. For example, Amarjargal, who had to endure much pressure to assimilate and 'act more Korean' from her husband's side of the family, says that she found a similar pressure in her workplace, too. Like at home, she is expected to know already what to do and when to do it without her team leader giving her any instructions beforehand. Like at home, Amarjargal is usually the one initiating conversations about the need to develop clearer lines of communications and adjust expectations. She explains how she navigates these dynamics at her current job:

> "Every year they keep the same teachers, but the team leader always changes and every [new] team leader expects that I work as a Korean, but I am a foreigner. Sometimes we have lots of misunderstandings. So, I have to tell [each new team leader] that I am a foreigner and to please tell me what they expect from me in detail and before any deadlines."

Double-standards, and unspoken high expectations for foreign teachers are reproduced by national institutions, too. Let us consider Narantuya's (MMK.45.25) experience as a certified multicultural educator working for the Ministry of Education. Since the vast majority of foreign spouses are foreign women (E. A. Chung, 2020c; G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016), this position is

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[28] Medical tourism companies usually arrange medical visas, accommodation, and appointments for people wanting to get medical treatment (especially cosmetic surgery) in Korea.

predominantly covered by marriage migrant women. Even though she naturalised almost two decades ago, is fluent in Korean, and is one of 80 multicultural educators approved by the government, Narantuya feels that she is not being treated in the same way as other Korean civil workers. Even though she is a Korean citizen, she and the other official multicultural educators are ranked on the basis of their performance. She wonders about what the ranking system implies and how the Ministry of Education views its multicultural educators:

> "There is serious competition among the 80 certified multicultural teachers approved by the government because they are ranked. We have protested against this ranking system, because it is unethical. We consider ourselves government workers, and yet, we are ranked and treated unlike other civil servants. As such, we feel discriminated against by the system despite having full Korean citizenship."

It could be argued that the rationale for this ranking system is to create conditions whereby naturalised migrant women, who usually take up this job position, are constantly having to prove their worth as government workers in addition to proving their worth as parents of and wives to Korean nationals. The motivations behind this rationale, however, can only be speculated on since I could not interview any representative of the Ministry of Education. In short, what Ariun and Narantuya's anecdotes reveal is that societal pressure and expectation that foreign women should culturally assimilate are also being reproduced in multicultural work settings at various administrative levels. I already discussed in Chapter 4 how this pressure to assimilate is part of the process of citizenship-making, whereby legal precarity is silently leveraged against marriage migrant women to push them into cultural and social assimilation.

Like Mongolian labour migrant women, Mongolian marriage migrant women also sought out self-employment as an agentic strategy to generate consistent and higher salaries, and have fewer negative interactions with Korean employers or colleagues. Unlike the labour migrant women, self-employment as a strategy against labour precarity did not serve a specific purpose in terms of their legal precarity, since most Mongolian marriage migrant women already had Korean citizenship.

However, whilst Korean citizenship sheltered the marriage migrant women from additional forms of labour precarity, it did not erase labour differentiation altogether. Only three of the Mongolian marriage migrants (Yargui MMK.44.18, Uugan MM.48.24, and Amarjargal) I interviewed were self-employed and had their own full-time translating and trading companies. They opened their businesses by leveraging their personal competences and interpersonal connections. In the process, they were able to move away from precarious part-time jobs, and achieve a much higher degree of financial stability and personal fulfilment. Four key resources specific to their migrant status (i.e. being marriage migrants) stood out as the most helpful in the creation of these companies. Firstly, these three women had all lived in Korea for long periods of time, meaning that they possessed essential resources such as: fluency in Mongolian and Korean; familiarity with needs and demands of specific markets and sectors in both countries; and long-term connections with customers and business partners. Secondly, their legal status under the F-6 visa[29] or naturalised Korean citizenship gave them the legal and mental stability needed to take on larger business ventures. Thirdly, these women's husbands were actively involved in their companies, thus providing not only their personal perspective as Korean 'insiders' but also their own Korea-based interpersonal connections. Fourth and finally, Yargui, Uugan, and Amarjargal had no childcare responsibilities in their household as their children were all old and self-sufficient. In short, not having to dedicate time to care work meant more time and space for waged employment and business ventures. These four key resources are arguably very specific to marriage migrant women, and point to the fact that even becoming self-employed entails a very different set of skills and resources from labour migrant women.

For instance, Yargui established a vocational institute training women from Mongolia and Southeast Asian countries on how to become multicultural teachers in Korea. She explains that she later turned this institute into a medical tourism business to adapt to the market and make her company more profitable. Uugan created an education-focused training institute targeting public workers from government institutions and schools based in Mongolia. Her goal is to develop

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[29] The F-6 visa is commonly referred to as the marriage migrant visa (spouse of a Korean national), as discussed in Chapter 4.

innovative new content, inspired by Korean curricula, that is also suitable for Mongolian culture and society. In her own words, "I want to change the decision makers' minds, like school directors or an officer who is responsible for making policies". This business failed due to school closures during the pandemic, but at the time of the interview Uugan was already designing new courses focused on mental health resilience, whilst simultaneously operating her company as a cargo service.

Whilst these business ventures addressed a foreign customer base, it is evident that, although limited, interactions with key Korean points of contact and partners proved very helpful. An example of this emerged from Amarjargal's interview. Amarjargal established several businesses over the years, including, most recently, a translating company with one of her Mongolian friends, and a private academy for children in Mongolia. Here, it should be noted that Amarjargal never had to worry about potentially losing her visa whenever she opened or closed a new business; the same cannot be said for Mongolian labour migrant women. She and her husband also worked as independent sellers, trading Korean goods, and sending them to Mongolia. The trading business was possible thanks to one of her husband's contacts who supported them with importing Korean products. Once they permanently settled in Korea, Amarjargal and her husband closed down their trading enterprise because they did not have a trusted point of contact in Mongolia that could sell the Korean products and send the money back to them. She explains the important role that work relation has played in the past:

> "[One of her Korean] husband's acquaintances helped us import the product, and because the importer was a Korean, we were able to get many products [more than if the importer had been a Mongolian person]. The process was not very difficult… So, when we were living in Mongolia, we could just receive and sell the product ourselves. But when we [moved to] Korea, we didn't have anyone back [in Mongolia] to help us sell the product and send the money back. It was just kind of impossible for us to continue the business while living in Korea."

In summary, like Mongolian labour migrant women, marriage migrants also rely on daily side hustles to endure and get by the labour precarity and segmentation of the Korean labour market. However, I illustrated that this response to labour precarity looks different for marriage migrant women, who mobilise their visa-specific language and cultural proficiency in Korea to access part-time side hustles related to multicultural teaching and translating. The goal of this strategy is to make a liveable income by working multiple freelance jobs. In these jobs, Mongolian migrant women experience some degree of 'othering', both from Korean colleagues and Korean institutions (e.g. the Ministry of Education), in the form of pressures to culturally assimilate to Korean labour expectations and work performance ranking systems. Indeed, this pressure can be viewed as a continuation of the process of citizenship-making, whereby pressures to assimilate continue to exist well after the marriage migrant women acquired Korean citizenship. Finally, I explained that self-employment is also an agentic response to labour precarity and a strategy to avoid part-time segmented multicultural jobs. However, I also discussed that self-employment for Mongolian marriage migrant women is still difficult to achieve because of the structural barriers present in the Korean labour market. Indeed, whilst their legal status shelters them from some aspects of migrant labour precarity, it does not erase all the challenges of labour differentiation.

5.4. Conclusion: labour differentiation and the reproduction of precarious migrant labour

This chapter examined the relationship between gender and the process of labour differentiation, and the resulting labour precarity that deeply characterises both the Mongolian and Korean labour markets. Labour differentiation - that is, the social process resulting in the segmentation, devaluation, and unequal treatment of women's labour - is reproduced by and through the socio-cultural structure of gender. In so doing, the chapter demonstrated that labour precarity is the norm - a fundamental and ongoing, rather than atypical condition - (Coe, 2012; Lier, 2007) for all women navigating deeply unequal, unwelcoming, and highly segmented job pools (Begzsuren et al., 2022; Patterson & Walcutt, 2014; Schmillen & Sandig, 2018; Um, 2023; H. Yang, 2021). Under these precarious circumstances, I

explained that Korean and Mongolian women alike are expected to engage in waged employment and be financially self-sufficient, but are also socially pressured and rewarded if they prioritise unwaged domestic and care work. Yet, the services and policies necessary to make women's work/life balance more financially, physically, and emotionally sustainable are lacking or are poorly implemented. Consequently, low female labour participation rates are common in both Mongolia and Korea, and are further exacerbated by a consistent gender pay gap, gender-based discriminatory practices, and job insecurity, especially for women overrepresented in private and informal service sectors. These structural issues are considerably present in Korea, where Mongolian migrant women experience additional hardships in terms of the type and quality of the waged employment they can find due to nationality-based discrimination that intersects with pre-existing gender-based biases.

Whilst this chapter explained how material and social structures co-produce, mediate, and distribute labour precarity (Strauss, 2018, p. 626, 2020, p. 1215), it also illustrated how Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women navigate and endure the labour precarity that results from the process of labour differentiation. Indeed, albeit in a structurally disadvantaged position, Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women rely their own agentic strategies to mobilise their specific abilities, skills, and work experiences, and find the waged labour they need to make a living. I also highlighted that citizenship-making and the resulting legal precarity shape the process of labour differentiation and the types of jobs different groups of migrant women are realistically going to get, and why they need to get them (i.e. to maintain their visas; to be able to assimilate culturally and socially). Consequently, through different job trajectories that reflect their visa journeys and experiences of legal precarity, I showed that both groups find their own different ways (e.g. through skill reconfiguration, side hustles, and self-employment) in specific segments of the labour market to mitigate their labour precarity. Nevertheless, I illustrated that both Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women rarely find ways out of their highly segmented job sectors.

The emphasis on the short-term effects of these agentic responses to labour (and legal) precarity is not to diminish the resourcefulness, inventiveness, and perseverance of my interviewees.

Rather, it is to show that gender and the interconnected empirical processes of Life's Work, and their social and material outcomes (legal and labour precarity), purposefully put migrant women in disadvantaged and precarious positions in all spheres of their lives. Mongolian marriage migrant women are still facing employment power dynamics and biases, as well as job insecurity from having to rely on freelance, part-time jobs. Mongolian labour migrant women, documented and undocumented, work in precarious sectors that keep them separate from Korean workers, and Korean salaries and work environments. Only those few women who already possess or manage to attain various financial, social, and cultural resources have been able to climb the ladder in the Korean labour market and achieve a higher degree of financial and personal freedoms. However, even for the migrant women who are the exception, their resources or legal statuses do not erase the structural gender-based labour differentiation that characterises the Korean labour market. They mitigate but cannot fully overcome a labour precarity that is so deeply ingrained in their host society's labour market, and is actively exacerbated by the many pressures and stressors of both processes of citizenship-making and labour differentiation.

Chapter 6 - Ethnicisation and the social reproduction of Life's Work as social precarity

6.1. Introduction

Whilst the scholars who developed the concept of Life's Work have pointed at the role that state policies have in reproducing and consolidating the many mechanisms of precarity, they have equally emphasised the importance of the local and the everyday (Katz, 2008, 2004, 2001a; Mitchel et al., 2004). Thus, in this chapter, I pay attention to ethnicisation, in particular, which I define as "the process by which immigrant[s] [...] become classified into 'groups' whose 'ethnicity' is made up of values demonstrating their worth to the nation" (Urciuoli, 2020, p. 112). The result of the process of ethnicisation is arguably a sense of social precarity - a social hierarchisation characterised by potential mistreatment, microaggressions, and discrimination - that is exacerbated by other empirical processes of Life's Work I have discussed, and by the gender relations embodied and experienced by Mongolian women. In short, this chapter shows how Life's Work as social precarity is reproduced and mitigated throughout the process of ethnicisation at the scale of the everyday. Indeed, as Chapters 4 and 5 have already hinted at, nationality and ethnic markers greatly influence the treatment of migrants in formal, legal-institutional spaces like the Korean immigration system and the labour market (Hough 2022; Yu, 2023; S. J. Yoon, 2016; see also Barot & Bird, 2001; Murji & Solomos, 2005). Within these spaces, my interviewees' nationality (and gender) was arguably perceived as a risk factor associated with either undocumented migration or sham international marriages (see Section 4.3); their skills, qualifications, and other forms of human capital were devalued because they are associated with institutions from an 'underdeveloped' country (see Section 5.3). In other words, my interviewees' nationality and ethnic markers were essentialised and classified according to how they could be of value - or not - to Korean society, and in relation to their embodied gender.

Therefore, in this chapter, I show how the empirical process of ethnicisation takes place also in the informal, intimate, and mundane spaces of everyday life and interactions. This chapter asks the

overarching question, *how does the process of ethnicisation contribute to the social reproduction of Life's Work?* I included the following subquestions: *how do Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women experience ethnicisation and the resulting social precarity in the spaces of everyday life? How does the social structure of gender shape this process and its outcome? And how do different groups of Mongolian migrant women navigate and negotiate their social precarity throughout the process of ethnicisation?* These questions require an understanding of migrants' ethnicisation that actively considers how said process is entangled with other social structures (i.e. gender) and power dynamics and processes (e.g. citizenship-making, labour differentiation) operating in the Korean context. It also requires an intentional focus on migrants' mundane experiences of this process, their agentic responses and daily coping mechanisms (Nielsen, 2011; Kubiliene et al., 2015; Barot & Bird, 2001).

The core argument of this chapter is that the everyday process of ethnicisation that Mongolian marriage and migrant women deal with, contributes to the social reproduction of Life's Work by reproducing everyday social precarity. By social precarity, I am referring to the social hierarchisation of Mongolian women on the basis of their nationality and ethnic traits, which are also related to their embodied gender identities and norms. I argue that said precarity is reproduced - i.e., normalised and instrumentalised - to justify the subordination of Mongolian migrant women in various spheres of their lives (i.e., in their everyday lives and interactions in private and public spaces, but also in the Korean immigration system and the labour market). In this chapter, I also demonstrate that neither groups of Mongolian migrant women are passive objects of (gendered) ethnicisation. Like with citizenship-making and labour differentiation, Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women are equally entangled and participating in this social process of Life's Work. More specifically, I demonstrate that Mongolian migrant women resist ethnicisation daily by reproducing negative ethnicised stereotypes about Korea and Koreans, and by re-narrating their own personal identities either internally or during interactions with Koreans. These agentic responses, albeit at times misguided or detrimental to other minority groups (e.g., Southeast Asian migrants, Korean women), attempt to challenge and subvert the social norms and hierarchies at the core of the process of

ethnicisation. In practice, these agentic responses take on different forms and expressions for Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women, depending on the social, linguistic, and financial resources that differentiate the two groups.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The following section introduces the concept of ethnicisation, and is divided into two subsections. In the first, I explain why ethnicisation is better suited, compared to the widely (mis-)used concept of racialisation, to describe the process of essentialisation and othering that Mongolian migrant women experience in Korea. The second subsection provides instances of how Mongolian migrant women are ethnicised by Korean acquaintances and strangers in various spaces of everyday life. Here, I also address the mutual relationship between ethnicisation and space, and how one shapes and reinforces the other, and vice versa. The following section is where the core argument of this chapter is further evidenced, that is, where I discuss Mongolian migrant women's agentic responses in the face of everyday ethnicisation and social precarity. This section illustrates that each group of Mongolian migrant women find their ways and rationales to ethnicise Koreans, and Korean women, in particular. Each group also re-narrate their own personal and visa-specific subjectivities and identities in a more positive light as a challenge to their social precarity. In so doing, Mongolian women actively challenge and resist Korean social hierarchies rooted in gender and narratives around ethnic homogeneity. Additionally, I provide a brief discussion about other forms of discrimination that Mongolian migrant women face in Korea to illustrate that, depending on contextual constraints, different groups of Mongolian women do not always oppose all iterations of social precarity. Finally, in the conclusion of the chapter, I provide reflections on the role of ethnicisation and social precarity in the reproduction of Life's Work, and its relationship with the other previously discussed processes.

6.2. Framing the essentialisation of Mongolian migrant women in Korea

6.2.1. A conceptual challenge: racialisation versus ethnicisation

Finding the concept that best captures inextricable concepts such as ethnicity, race, and nationalism is quite a conceptual challenge, the risk being prioritising and overshadowing one concept over the others. For context, there exists a multitude of conceptual terms to describe processes of racial and ethnic essentialisation and othering: racial formation, racism, nationalism, ethnicity, diversity, to name just a few (Urciuoli, 2020; Anthias, 1992; Eriksen, 2010). In this chapter, I use the concept of ethnicisation to identify and describe the specific experiences of othering and marginalisation experienced by Mongolian migrant women in Korea - a country that has reinvented and historically emphasised its ethnic homogeneity (G.-W. Shin, 2006, 2012; Em, 1999). Ethnicisation entails "the process by which immigrant[s] [...] become classified into 'groups' whose 'ethnicity' is made up of values demonstrating their worth to the nation" (Urciuoli, 2020, p. 112). Through this process, heterogeneous and historically, culturally, and territorially located ethnic traits and resources, such as language, cultural practices, religion, birth-place, and a shared common origin (Anthias, 1992, p. 11; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1993, pp. 3) are essentialised (i.e., ethnicised) and given a moral value by the host state and host society on the basis of how beneficial these traits can be to the development of the nation-state itself. For example, migrants continuing to speak their native language is often seen as an act of defiance and as evidence of migrants' unwillingness to 'integrate' properly, which in turn fuel exclusionary migration policies and state narratives (Arredondo & Bustamante, 2022; Leitner, 2012). In short, ethnicisation is a dynamic, relational, and incremental process of essentialisation and othering that constructs "migrant ethnic groups, refugees and so on, [...] as inferior, but not on the premise of a supposed racial categorization, but as cultural, political or national outsiders and undesirables" (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1993, p. 8).

I consider ethnicisation to be an appropriate and effective concept to capture the everyday process of essentialisation on which the Korean national identity and the Korean ethnie are built (G.-W. Shin, 2006, 2012; Em, 1999). In practice, my interviewees reported being essentialised and

othered on the basis of their nationality and other ethnic markers (e.g. language, cultural practices) to which Korean acquaintances and strangers attached negative and belittling connotations (examples of this can be found in Section 6.2.2 below). In existing Korean migration policies, the official focus and emphasis on co-ethnicity, cultural norms, and language can also be best captured by the motif of ethnicity and ethnicisation (Anthias, 1992, pp.12; Eriksen, 2010; Urciuoli, 2020, p. 112); the relevance of these ideas already points at the interconnectedness between different processes of Life's Work. Nationality is also an important trait at the core of these policies and discourses. From a legal standpoint, nationality pertains to the legal relationship between an individual and a nation-state, but in both Mongolia and Korea, nationality is often conflated with ethnicity and membership of the dominant ethnic group (Bulag, 1998, 2003; G.-W. Shin 2006, 2012). Therefore, in everyday life, Koreans (and Mongolians) tend to equate someone's nationality with their (more or less desirable) ethnic otherness. It follows that, whilst ethnic markers are at the forefront of the essentialisation of Mongolian women in Korea, race and other signifiers (e.g., shared ancestry and bloodline), which are deemed foundational or 'natural' traits of both the Mongolian and Korean ethnie, do not just cease to matter altogether. Rather, they simply are not the traits or constructs that characterise the process of othering affecting Mongolian women in Korea.

My conceptual decision to use ethnicisation arguably contrasts with recent literature, which has widely used the concept of racialisation to explain, describe, and discuss various forms of discrimination and racisms in the Northeast Asian context (Ang et al., 2022; Hough, 2022; Yu, 2023). I do not use the concept of racialisation in my research because firstly, racialisation is a widely contested concept with a complicated history and a variety of ambiguous connotations, and secondly, scholars tend to use racialisation loosely and at face value. As Goldberg (2005, p. 88) puts it:

> "The usage of racialization so broadly in the literature is at the very least ambiguous, and may sometimes be vacuous. One cannot always tell, either explicitly or contextually, whether it is being invoked as a merely descriptive term or with deeper normative, critical thrust".

On the one hand, it can be argued that racialisation is a highly contested term that has taken on a variety of meanings since the nineteenth century (Barot & Bird, 2001, p. 603; see also Murji & Solomos, 2005; Hochman, 2019; Uyan, 2021). It became a prominent topic of discussion in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in the works of Miles (1989) and Fanon (1963), the former defining racialisation as a process of dialectical signification based on constructed biological differences among humans, and the latter as a violent process of othering that is imposed on one's body *and* psyche (see also Barot & Bird, 2001). It should be noted that Miles's definition was soon after critiqued for conflating racialisation with the process of racial formation (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1993, p. 8; Barot & Bird, 2001, p. 613), meaning the concept was perceived as ambiguous from the start. Nonetheless, taken together, Miles and Fanon's works brought forward important contributions in ethnic and racial studies by describing a structural process that has very violent consequences on the bodies and minds of oppressed groups. Most recently, Hochman (2019) has defended the concept and defined it as:

> "the process through which groups come to be understood as major biological entities and human lineages, formed due to reproductive isolation, in which membership is transmitted through biological descent" (Hochman, 2019, p. 1246).

Hochman's definition views racialisation as "at least, a descriptive concept" (ibid., p. 1255) that is not meant to explain who the racialisers are, nor what 'precise action' racialisers do, but rather, describes the *outcome* of this unspecified action. Additionally, he differentiates racialisation from 'racial formation'. Put simply, he argues that "[r]acial formation forms 'races', whereas racialization forms racialized groups" (ibid., p. 1246). In the end, whilst Hochman tries to bring clarity among a plethora of complex concepts and contested terms, the usefulness of his definition is limited. In response to Hochman's paper, Uyan (2021, p. 26) points out that this new iteration of racialisation:

> "cannot, and does not try to, account for a mechanism for the process of racialization. [...] In the absence of locating an agent or mechanism, the concept is tautologized: racialization [...]

offers itself up as the mechanism. This [...] leads to a profound conflation of racialization as both a descriptive and causal concept."

On the other hand, it could be argued that the concept of racialisation has been frequently misused to describe processes and experiences of othering among migrant groups in the context of East Asia and migration. Instances of this trend can be found in the 2022 Special Issue on racialisation beyond the White/non-White binary published in the journal "*Ethnic and Racial Studies*". For context, the introductory paper to the Special Issue borrows Miles's (1989, p. 76) definition of racialisation as "a dialectical process by which meaning is attributed to particular biological features of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons which reproduces itself biologically" (Ang et al., 2022, pp. 586-587). There are two papers, in particular, that explain what racialisation entails in the Korean context: one paper addresses the experiences of North Koreans and ethnic Korean-Chinese (Hough, 2022), the other focuses on the experiences of Southeast and East Asian marriage migrant women (Yu, 2023). The first article defines racialisation as a process of co-ethnic language differentiation, where members of co-ethnic groups are othered on the basis of their accents, which are associated with their not being 'actually' from Korea despite their shared ancestry[30] (Hough, 2022, p. 617); the second defines racialisation as a process of differentiation based on perceived socio-economic status and nationality (Yu, 2023, p. 2096).

Now, I am not arguing that all scholars should abide by one single definition of racialisation. Rather, I argue that there is sometimes a mismatch between the concept and political implications of racialisation, and the way scholars define and use it. Whilst I understand that racialisation is a widely used and 'popular' concept (far more than ethnicisation), it should not be forced upon research

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[30] In the Korean context, the boundaries between ethnic (language, shared culture and ancestry) and racial traits (shared bloodline) are blurry, and the distinction between the two categories is not always clear-cut. According to Korean migration policies (E. A. Chung, 2020a; Y. Lee, 2009), North Koreans and ethnic Korean-Chinese must be able to prove their co-ethnicity by providing evidence of blood ties with past or current Korean nationals. So, whilst these two groups are 'co-ethnics' on paper, in practice they are still marginalised because they speak Korean with the 'wrong' accent or slang, which hints at the fact that they did not grow up in Korea. Here, language functions as a territorially located ethnic marker, and the 'Koreanness' of these two co-ethnic groups is challenged and minimised because they still embody the ethnic traits of another territorially located group (i.e., North Koreans, Korean-Chinese). In other words, they are ethnicised because they were born and raised in another country; their ethnic-racial bond with Koreans is not perceived as fully authentic.

contexts and subjects whose experiences of discrimination and marginalisation are not *primarily* shaped by race and racial discourses. In the empirical sections of their papers, Hough (2022) and Yu (2023) mainly focus on a variety of non-biological, ethnic traits and practices, ranging from language to nationality. Thus, whilst race and ethnicity are deeply intertwined concepts (Siebers, 2017; Grosfoguel, 2004; Gunaratnam, 2003), I argue that these papers are still misusing the concept of racialisation because they are applying it in a context where racial relations do exist, but to groups whose social otherness and value in society and everyday interactions are primarily marked by their ethnic identities and markers. In contrast, Udor and Yoon's paper (2022) uses the concept of racialisation to describe how colourism and skin colour become the signifiers of difference triggering the racialisation of African migrants of various backgrounds in Korea. Whilst acknowledging the importance of ancestry and bloodline descent as a racial component of Korean nation-state-building, the authors rightfully urge us to accept that racial and ethnic relations are not mutually exclusive, and to "reflect on how global hierarchies of race originating from Euro-America – whereby Asians fit between Whites and Blacks – intersect with local national identity narratives to shape patterns of racial exclusion in Asia" (Udor & Yoon, 2022, p. 2020). In short, while we should not get rid of the concept of racialisation altogether, the point is to identify which power relations and identity narratives are most relevant for which groups and in what contexts and consequently, identify and apply the adequate concept to explain their impact on migrants (Siebers, 2017; Siebers & Dennissen, 2015).

To recap, I argued that the concept of ethnicisation is an effective conceptual lens to explain the social process of othering that affects the everyday lives, interactions, and relationships of Mongolian migrant women in Korea. I define ethnicisation as a dynamic and relational classification process whereby the host state and society essentialise and give a moral value (i.e., good, desirable, productive versus bad, undesirable, backward) to migrants' heterogeneous and historically, culturally, and territorially located ethnic traits and resources. As a result of this process, migrants are deemed more or less desirable or beneficial to the maintenance and development of the nation-state. In other

words, the social precarity they experience is a direct result of this classification and hierarchisation of migrants' ethnic traits. I explained that more popular concepts like racialisation have been (mis)used to describe the process through which migrant groups are essentialised and rendered 'othered', especially in the Northeast Asian context. I pointed out that racialisation is a highly contested catch-all concept carrying a range of ambiguous meanings and connotations; as such, this term needs to be applied with care and consideration of not just the research context, but of the research subjects, too.

6.2.2. The relationship between everyday ethnicisation and space

Evidently, ethnicisation does not happen in "a discrete and autonomous container" (M. Jones, 2009, p. 489; see also Ashfina et al., 2022, p. 78). Like other social processes, relations, and structures, ethnicisation and space reinforce and reproduce each other. Geographers have paid great attention to the relational character of space, especially in the context of the city (Massey, 2011, p. 4; Keith, 2005, p. 252; Massey, 1994). For example, scholars have emphasised the important role of urban planning in shaping urban living and political space, and how socio-spatial segregation serves as a tool facilitating and reinforcing the ethnicisation and separation of unwanted residents (Yiftachel & Yacobi, 2003, pp. 676-677). But space can also be understood beyond the physical built environment, that is, in terms of mental space (i.e., what people think of or give meaning to space) and social space (i.e., what people do in space; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). Physical, mental, and social spaces are interconnected characteristics that influence each other, and that apply to both public (e.g., a restaurant, the sidewalk) and private (e.g., the home) spaces. In practice, the relationship between ethnicisation and space can result in "perceptions and practices of where individuals may or may not go, how they expect to be treated in places, [and] how they may actually be treated in places" (Tuttle, 2022, p. 1527; see also E. Anderson, 2015; Arredondo & Bustamante, 2022). Below, I expand on the relationship between ethnicisation and space by explaining that, firstly, ethnic markers like language can trigger ethnicisation in public spaces; secondly, ethnicisation blurs the lines between private and public space; third and finally, multiple social relations can intersect in space and result in intersectional ethnicisation.

Firstly, ethnic markers like language can trigger the process of ethnicisation in public spaces (Kobayashi & Preston, 2014; Hough, 2022). Simply put, migrants' language skills become a marker of their ethnic otherness, meaning migrants are judged on the basis of their language skills, with 'locals' associating limited proficiency with their foreignness and unwillingness or inability to adequately integrate in to the host society (Kobayashi & Preston, 2014; Leitner, 2012; Arredondo & Bustamante, 2022). In practice, Mongolian migrant women, most of whom can physically 'pass' as Korean due to their physical appearance and facial features, become ethnicised when they speak their native language in public, have an accent whilst speaking in Korean, or are not fluent enough. For undocumented migrant women, limited language skills become a particularly noticeable marker of their ethnic otherness and results in a significant power imbalance. Badamlyanhua (ULM.38.4), who is an undocumented migrant working in a restaurant in the outskirts of Seoul, recalls being threatened to be deported by a customer when they thought she was a Vietnamese woman[31]: "[the customer] told me 'I know you are Vietnamese' and said I should be nice to her or she would send me back to Vietnam." Orghana (ULM.48.4), who is also undocumented and working full-time as a waitress at a Korean restaurant, experienced similar encounters. Whilst she felt the need to learn Korean to get by, she struggled to find the time to learn it beyond the basics. She explains that this language barrier resulted in frequent misunderstandings and unpleasant interactions with customers. She says:

> "When I first started working [at the restaurant], there were customers who would treat me badly once they realised I wasn't fluent in Korean. They would ask for something, but I wouldn't understand, so they would make a scene out of it... In those situations, I would smile back and ask my boss to help with the situation and try to ignore it. But [these instances] were common especially [because] I worked with customers daily."

Within the defined physical boundaries of the Korean restaurant, where customers took for granted that they would be clearly and easily understood, Badamlyanhua and Orghana were regularly

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[31] As mentioned in Section 1.4.2.b, Southeast Asian women make a large share of foreign spouses in Korea. Due to their national identity and nationality, they face a great deal of discrimination and othering, also on the basis of their phenotypic features (E. Lee et al., 2015; M. Y. Park, 2017).

confronted with their ethnic otherness and were, to some degree, also reprimanded for it by Korean customers.

Secondly, social relations, norms, and expectations are made in and through private spaces, too. Boundaries between private and public space are so porous and blurred, one could argue that there is actually no distinction between the two (Carter et al., 2012, p. 141; Tuttle, 2022). Social relations do not operate through space as if it was made of separate airtight containers. For example, the belief that women should be primary caretakers at home influences their labour relations in the workplace, and vice versa. On this note, Enkhtuya (LM.27.10) shares an encounter that is particularly telling of the blurriness between the private-public space and ethnicisation. Whilst she was helping her Korean flatmate move out of their shared flat, she explains that her friend's father's attitude changed immediately as soon as he found out Enkhtuya was not Korean. She recalls that:

> "One day, my roommate was moving out of our shared flat, and her father and brother were there to help. The father was friendly but [became] judgemental after I said I was from Mongolia. He started saying in a boastful way how much Korea had grown since the difficult times. He asked me, 'Are you happy that you are coming and learning to live in such a developed country like ours?' To put it nicely, I felt bad. Then my roommate and her brother got worried and apologised to me after their father left. I think it's a generational difference."

This encounter in the intimate and arguably 'private' space of Enkhtuya's flat-share illustrates that the process of ethnicisation also takes place in private spaces, too, where migrants from countries deemed less desirable are essentialised as lower status minorities who 'ought' to be grateful for the opportunity to live in Korea (E. A. Chung, 2020c; Yu, 2023; S. J. Yoon, 2016; Y. Lee, 2009) through a series of microaggressions and intrusive questions (D. J. Johnson et al., 2022, pp. 129-130; Sue, 2013). The generational difference Enkhtuya refers to in relation to her friend's father is arguably only a circumstantial aspect shaping this instance of ethnicisation, given that older generations may be more prone to voice their thoughts and observations about Korea's international status and foreigners. It is also important to remember that Korea has undergone significant and drastic socio-demographic

and economic transformations over the last four decades, so it is possible that older generations have not fully gotten used to these changes yet.

Third and finally, multiple social structures and processes coexist in space (Massey, 1994, 2011) and can intersect in and through space and result in layered forms of discrimination and marginalisation (Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018; Ang et al., 2022; Laster Pirtle & Wright, 2021; L. Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020). An instance of this is Khaltmaa's experience of working in the international logistics sector, which she considers to be both male-dominated and unwelcoming of foreigners. Khaltmaa (LMB.48.7) explains that her presence as a Mongolian woman has greatly influenced her experience doing business with Koreans. In her opinion, she is treated as less professionally prepared, both because she is a woman working in a 'men's business' and because she is from a 'poor' country. In her own words:

> "I have been looked down on for being a foreigner a lot. I get treated differently when going
> to meetings with my Korean business partner. When I go alone and talk about business, I get
> treated as a foreigner, a woman, and a person from a poor country. Especially with new
> customers or old people. There was a lot of difference in attitudes and body language. Women
> in [the logistic] business are very rare and uncommon, and then the relationship changes when
> I go to meetings alone or with my Korean business partner."

Khaltmaa's insights show that gendered power dynamics in a male-dominated workspace result in a process of gendered ethnicisation. This extract also illustrates how mental space (i.e., the idea that the logistics workspace and sector is a men's business) actively influences social space (i.e., the social behaviours happening or expected in that space, including Korean businessmen disregard Khaltmaa's experience on the basis of her gender and nationality). In reference to the extract above, it should also be noted that the various processes of Life's Work can take place within the same space. In this case, ethnicisation actively exacerbates and justifies labour differentiation. Gendered ethnicisation entails that Khaltmaa's labour as a woman from a 'poor' country is subordinated to or potentially of inferior quality than that of male Korean workers (Strauss, 2018, 2020). Gendered ethnicisation also

reproduces the maintenance of the superiority of the ethnic male dominant group in and through this specific workspace (Tuttle, 2022, pp. 1532-1533; Arredondo & Bustamante, 2022; Leitner, 2012).

In short, the process of ethnicisation and the resulting social precarity does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, this social process, other social structures like gender, and physical, mental, and social space reinforce each other and can result in discriminatory practices to the detriment of ethnicised others. More specifically, I showed how language becomes an evident ethnic marker in public space, where migrants tend to be marginalised and reprimanded if and when they cannot meet locals' expectations of language proficiency. I also explained that these social norms and expectations pertain beyond public spaces. In practice, social precarity stemming from ethnicisation also exists in and shapes intimate spaces, too (e.g., at home, in the form of asking intrusive and belittling questions). Finally, I demonstrated that multiple social processes and structures can intersect in and through space, resulting in a layered and burdensome experience of social precarity where Mongolian women are marginalised and disregarded on the basis of both their gender and their ethnic otherness.

6.3. Ethnicisation and the mitigation of social precarity by ethnicised migrant women

There is no single 'correct' way to navigate the process of ethnicisation and the social precarity it consolidates. When researching how minorities and migrants deal with this process of othering and marginalisation, it is important not to pathologise individuals and groups for how they decide to cope - or not. As Sims-Schouten and Gilbert (2022, p. 91) contend, we should avoid:

> "blaming members from ethnic minority communities for not coping in an oppressive environment [...] [and making] one-sided exclusionary assessments and judgements locating 'problems' in the individual and their community, ignoring the dynamics in the immediate social context".

In the subsections below, I organised my interviewees' responses to ethnicisation. Depending on the context of the interaction and the specific event or microaggression, and on the basis of "the meaning

and importance that they attach to incidents of [ethnicisation]" (ibid., p. 340), some of my respondents engaged with one or more agentic responses to social precarity. Later, I also provide insights into other forms of discrimination that Mongolian migrant women face, including Korean societal standards of success and acceptability, to illustrate that marginalised groups can respond to different forms of social precarity and oppression in different ways. In other words, whilst my interviewees are entangled in and find ways to mitigate the process of ethnicisation and its outcome, at the same time, they may be more accepting of certain societal standards and view them as inevitable aspects of life in Korea.

6.3.1. Reciprocal ethnicisation and individual re-narration against social precarity

The two most common responses my interviewees relied on to navigate and cope with the process of ethnicisation was to ethnicise Koreans, and frame their own ethnic otherness and individuality in a positive light. These informal and mundane responses did not carry an explicit political message (MacLeavy et al., 2021, p. 1568) nor a foreseeable implication for my interviewees' future (Katz, 2001a; Hughes, 2020). Rather, they were attempts at actively challenging the process of ethnicisation by changing the narrative about Mongolian migrant women's place in Korean society, one interaction at a time. The first mitigation strategy I observed consists in reproducing ethnicising beliefs and assumptions about Koreans and, in particular, Korean women. In practice, some of my interviewees felt mistreated and belittled on the basis of their nationality, so they resisted their own ethnicisation by ethnicising Koreans for not behaving according to the principles of democracy and equality they praised in the Korean nation-state. In other words, some of my respondents had the tendency to blame Koreans for their apparent lack of tolerance for diversity and migrants. For example, Munkhbayar (LM.35.10) thinks that:

> "Korea's immigration system and infrastructure are very humane and developed. There are many types of visas, but it seems that the population has not developed and changed as quickly as the country has developed economically".

Munkhbayar is also very critical of the legal environment for migrants in Korea, due to her own negative experiences and loss of a sense of safety and community among Korean nationals. In her opinion:

> "There are more families living with foreigners in Korea than in Mongolia. However, the law for foreigners seems to be lacking… After all these years, the legal environment for them is bad."

> "Korea looks very developed, but its people are still not developed. My boss came in and shouted and scolded me. If there is a complaint, [the law] protects Korean nationals first. Human rights only apply to Koreans. The law does not serve foreigners. If a foreign worker is poor, [the judge] just gives him a little money and sends him away. Foreigners are treated according to their country of origin. If you are poor, you will be treated poorly, but citizens of rich countries feel like their country will look out for them and feel protected here."

On a similar note, Bayartsetseg blames this lack of tolerance on the fact that "Koreans are not used enough to respect other cultures because they consider themselves to be one [ethnic] nation." Enkhtuya is more direct in her ethnicisation of Koreans, grouping them all into one ethnicised group that reproduces conservative and unwelcoming beliefs against all migrants. She explains that:

> "Koreans are very conservative and have many stereotypes of other Asians. They think Mongolians are on the same level as Southeast Asians. They are very proud of the development label that Korea comes with now, and that other Asian countries do not have."

Through these comments, my interviewees challenged the moral superiority of the Korean ethnie which is a guiding principle in the social classification process that is ethnicisation. Additionally, what these comments reveal is that some Mongolian women carry a deep-seated disappointment towards an imagined Korea that turned out to be less welcoming, less tolerant, and less willing to accept them as they are. Munkhbayar believes that migrants are treated unequally depending on their country's international and economic status. Enkhtuya's comment also hints at the underlying assumption that

Mongolians are *not* like Southeast Asians. Whilst I cannot determine what beliefs informed her comment, I can mention that other interviewees also shared their belief that Mongolian women are more resilient, independent, and outspoken than Southeast Asian women. This essentialisation of Southeast Asian women is, to some extent, another instance of how my interviewees challenge Korean social hierarchies in arguably flawed ways, that is, by essentialising and putting down other marginalised groups.

Social structures like gender can be weaponised by both parties (i.e., migrant groups and the host society) to further devalue and subordinate disenfranchised subgroups (i.e., women). Mongolian migrant women's ethnicisation of Koreans can target particular groups more than others. These groups tend to be Koreans who are perceived as older or 'lower status' (e.g., people perceived as poor and uneducated), and Korean women. In an attempt to mitigate and resist their own social precarity, Mongolian women resort to bringing down these real and imagined individuals and reduce them to undesirable and unpleasant characters. For example, Khaltmaa points out that in her experiences of ethnicisation, context and the Korean interlocutor's social background matter. She says that:

> "It depends on what kind of person you meet and when you meet. In general, Koreans are nice. The other person's social status really influences the way they treat foreign women like me. Higher education, higher status, government people usually are more respectful. Someone with a lower status, maybe a market seller, is a much different story."

This sort of value-based ethnicisation applies to Korean women, too. In these instances, the process of ethnicisation draws on gendered beliefs and prejudices (Laster Pirtle & Wright, 2021; L. Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). For example, Kheshigmaa (MMK.33.11) ethnicises Korean women for their involvement in care work, which she sees as their only and limited contribution to society. She stresses that whilst she feels the pressure to assimilate into the desirable model of Korean womanhood, "I don't want to be someone who only stays at home to watch the kids... No matter how much I live in Korea, I do not want to become the same as Korean women." Delbee (MMK.50.21) echoes this feeling when she says "I don't just sit around the house looking after the children… I try

to develop myself." By ethnicising specific groups of Korean society on the basis of specific cultural practices and social relations, Mongolian migrant women reproduce ethnicisation themselves: they reduce and essentialise others on the basis of their nationality, socio-economic status, gender, and cultural practices in an attempt to challenge social hierarchies and ultimately, put themselves in a higher position. In addition, they also assert what kind of gendered identities they want to embody in contrast to Korean women, whom they devalue on the basis of their involvement in gendered labour and nationality.

The second type of mitigation strategy I observed consists in the practice of re-narration (Nielsen, 2011) - that is, the positive reframing of their identity and individuality through self-acceptance and emphasis on specific personal traits (Cousins, 2019, pp. 23-24; Kubiliene et al., 2015, p. 353). During our interviews, my interviewees often reframed personal themes and traits in a positive light so as to challenge and subvert ethnicised ideas about Mongolian women in Korea. It should be noted that only the women who were fluent in Korean engaged with the strategy of re-narration with Korean colleagues or employees; most labour migrants did not speak up as much, mostly due to the language barrier. There were three themes in particular that were often connected with this agentic act of re-narration: personal development, international marriage and money, and being a foreigner. As per the first theme, Mongolian labour migrant women, in particular, emphasised their personal experiences of self-development and adaptability as evidence of their resilience and self-worth, which they contrasted with unflattering and unfair narratives about ethnicised foreign workers. In other words, they deconstructed the ethnicised image of the female migrant and re-narrated it through their own personal stories (Nielsen, 2011), thus drawing a renewed sense of confidence from having overcome many hardships and periods of uncertainty in Korea. For example, Orghana believes that:

> "Because I changed a lot, I have a new perspective since coming to Korea. I feel like I can do
> and achieve anything and any goal if I want to… I discovered myself in Korea, that I am a lot

more patient, a lot more hardworking, and a lot more capable. I learned about myself in Korea. Koreans unlocked that side of me."

Similarly, after about five years in Korea, Saikhanbayar (LM.29.5), a 29-year-old labour migrant on a E-9 visa, feels that:

"I overcame my fears and many challenges, and I was able to persist. I can say that I am successful because I am encouraging others as well as myself. I mobilised myself, worked 8-11 hours [a day], and played sports on the side, and succeeded. I learned Korean and also learned the piano. After all of this, I will say that I am successful."

I consider the re-narration of the ethnicised woman as a resilient and capable individual as an intimate and modest agentic response (at least for the migrant women themselves) to social precarity, and the essentialised assumptions about Asian migrant women it entails (MacLeavy et al., 2021; Kubiliene et al., 2015; D. J. Johnson et al., 2022).

As per the second theme, Mongolian marriage migrant women were particularly concerned with subverting societal prejudices about international marriage in Korea - that is, as a tactic for unskilled and 'desperate' Asian migrant women to escape poverty in their home country. It should be noted that this experience of social precarity mostly pertains Mongolian marriage migrant women, since international marriage is the reason why they are in Korea. Their concern with this narrative stemmed from having received intrusive questions about their husband's salary, which, in my interviewees' eyes, hinted at Koreans' bias that Asian women from developing countries marry Korean men for money and to escape poverty (J. Zhang, 2022; Yeung & Mu, 2020). Again, this sort of bias shows how ethnicisation does not exist in a vacuum, but draws on other social relations (i.e., gender), resulting in a layered experience of social precarity, exclusion, and social hierarchisation. Consider the experience of Kheshigmaa, who is a marriage migrant. Korean people often assume that her husband earns a considerably high salary because they have four children together. In reality, they have been struggling financially, and have received state subsidies to raise their first three children. Yet, she says she has met a lot of people assuming her husband must be very well off, and openly

asking her questions such as 'how much does your husband earn per month', and even 'how much money does *he* send to Mongolia' or 'is it nice to live in Korea?'. In her own words, she thinks that:

"Of course, [being asked these questions] feels uncomfortable. It is very rude to ask about personal things, like age or salary. But when I get such questions, I try to be as polite as possible, saying, 'oh, it's fine, if something is not working out, *we* receive money from Mongolia'".

In giving such polite replies, and emphasising *who* receives the money, Kheshigmaa actively participates in the process of gendered ethnicisation, and challenges the assumption that she must have married a rich Korean man to profit from him. Kheshigmaa is particularly vocal about the broader societal consequences of the social precarity that gendered ethnicisation reproduces. On this note, she explains that:

"It seems that if one single Mongolian woman, who has a Korean husband and lives in Korea, caused a problem [like a scam], the public generalises that story and thinks all Mongolians in Korea are some sort of scammers... I thought that people would stop thinking that way of Mongolian women... I want to tell people that not everyone is like that. I also want to change my own perspective [about Korean society]… Multicultural families think that they have to do a lot of work in terms of changing social attitudes. I hope we can succeed in changing public opinion for people like us."

Finally, as per the third theme, both groups of Mongolian migrant women tend to re-narrate their being foreigners - and Mongolian, in particular - in a more positive light (Nielsen, 2011; Pande, 2017). However, it should be noted that it is mostly the marriage migrant women who engage in this re-narration in direct conversation with Koreans, thanks to their proficiency in both Korean language and etiquette. In practice, this agentic re-narration aimed to normalise their factual existence as foreigners in a country with a dominant narrative of ethnic homogeneity (Cawley, 2016; C. S. Lee, 2017, 2021). Like in the previous instances of re-narration, my interviewees did not necessarily make value-based judgments about their nationality or that of other groups (e.g., "Mongolians are better

than Koreans"). Rather, they preferred to state what they saw as facts (e.g., "Mongolians and Koreans can misunderstand each other") to actively question and oppose the process of ethnicisation in the present time as it was happening during encounters and interactions with Koreans. For example, Odval (MMK.33.12), who is 33-years-old and is a naturalised, but divorced marriage migrant who has lived in Korea for twelve years, says that:

> "When there was such a problem or attitude, I would confront it directly. People would ask out of curiosity 'where do you come from?'. But it is uncomfortable to answer if you are Mongolian. It was a bit awkward and difficult when it would happen to my child in kindergarten. But recently, when the class teacher asked whether she was a Mongolian, she answered proudly that she was. I teach such courses myself [as a multicultural educator], so I am open to this issue with my daughter also."

Similarly, when pressured to be and act more 'Korean', Amarjargal shares that she often needs to remind people in her life that she is not Korean, even if she looks like one and is married to one. Through this strategy of re-narration, she normalises the differences between her and Koreans. In a very conscious manner, she adds that:

> "I am a foreigner. I have to say it first, otherwise [Korean coworkers and Korean in-laws] will complain. They expect a lot from me without explicitly saying so[32], so a lot of misunderstandings happened when I could not do exactly what they wanted from me. At first, I [used to say] 'sorry, sorry I made a mistake'. Now I tell them 'no, it's not my mistake, we misunderstood each other' *laughing*."

It should be noted that Odval and Amarjargal were able to engage in this more direct and outspoken form of re-narration thanks to their proficient knowledge of the Korean language and social etiquette. Not all of my respondents possess these resources and would feel confident enough to speak up. For most Mongolian labour migrant women, re-narration tends to focus on their personal development and

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[32] For context, Amarjargal thinks that, in her opinion, Koreans are far less direct and straightforward than Mongolians, and that they often expect people (at home, in the workplace) to already know what they should do without giving out clear instructions.

self-resilience, and is more of an internal and intimate response to social precarity and ethnicisation than an outwardly-direct conversation.

In summary, Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women tend to experience the process of gendered ethnicisation is rather similar ways, as they are practically essentialised on the basis of their nationality and shared ethnic markers. Meaning that in-group differences among Mongolian women (e.g., in terms of socioeconomic status, language proficiency, employment status) tend to be overlooked, and all Mongolian women are equalised and judged according to the social value that the host society places onto their ethnic traits. This being said, there are migrant-specific outcomes to this process. On the one hand, Mongolian marriage migrant women are ethnicised in relation to widespread gender biases that portray women from developing countries as scammers. On the other hand, Mongolian labour migrant women find themselves devalued as unprepared, unprofessional, unwelcomed workers in male-dominated sectors, because of their embodied gender and ethnicity. I explained that both groups of migrant women participate in the process of ethnicisation and find ways to mitigate the resulting social precarity. I grouped their agentic responses into two main categories. On the one hand, migrant women resist ethnicisation by reproducing ethnicising ideas about Koreans. In doing so, they actively challenge the superiority of the Korean ethnie. I also showed that this strategy is problematic as it often results in the gendered ethnicisation of other marginalised groups, like Southeast Asian and Korean women. On the other hand, I explained that Mongolian migrant women actively participate in the process of ethnicisation also by re-narrating themselves in a more positive light. They reframe their hardships and lived experiences as foreign women in Korea in a more positive light to question and subvert dominant ethnicised beliefs about migrant women. Most Mongolian marriage migrant women are able to engage with re-narration during conversations with Koreans at work, in public spaces, and at home. Conversely, the language barrier constrained the Mongolian labour migrant women, who practise re-narration as a form of positive internal self-talk.

6.3.2. Social precarity as contextual constraints and discrimination

Whilst the majority of my interviewees employed a variety of intentional responses to participate and resist the process of ethnicisation, they were also confronted with mundane, contextual constraints that exacerbated their ethnic otherness. In the face of these other forms of discrimination, some of my interviewees seemingly did not engage with the other agentic strategies. As Sims-Schouten and Gilbert (2022) argue, minority groups do not always oppose discrimination through clear and political agentic strategies. Context and underlying constraints also matter in the ways minorities and migrants deal with marginalisation (D. J. Johnson et al., 2022, p. 135). In practice, societal expectations regarding work and family decisions were seemingly accepted by some of my interviewees as an inevitable systemic issue stemming from life in Korea. It should be noted that whilst they somewhat accepted these standards and the resulting social precarity and discrimination as 'inevitable', my interviewees still felt the emotional impact of these unpleasant experiences and incidents. For instance, Mongolian labour migrant women, especially the undocumented, took to heart assumptions and critiques about their language skills and involvement in manual labour. They felt ethnicised as poor, unskilled foreign workers with little to no potential for 'success' (Kingston et al., 2015; Udor & Yoon, 2022; Yu, 2023). Conversely, marriage migrant women felt particularly disheartened by comments about their parenting and financial decisions. In their case, these societal norms resulted in them feeling like incompetent and irresponsible Asian women who had 'too many' children (E. A. Chung, 2020e; G. Kim & Kilkey, 2016; Chiu & Yeoh, 2021).

On the one hand, these standards emphasised the importance of work, language skills, and social status, which arguably entailed a migrant's ability (or lack thereof) to participate in and benefit Korean society. Hence, Mongolian undocumented labour migrant women like Badamlyanhua (ULM.38.4) and Battsetseg (ULM.45.14) saw their own experiences working as irregular factory workers, cleaners, and most recently, as waitresses, as a failure: they had failed to meet these standards, to become desirable contributors to Korean society, and to live a better life than in Mongolia. Badamlyanhua, for example, shares that:

"I don't think I have achieved success here in Korea, no… I think education, work, and money are what makes a person successful in Korea. I don't have a family like that, I am divorced, away from my daughter, working a tough job… I am not even fluent in Korean at all".

Similarly, Battsetseg viewed her own experience as a Mongolian manual labourer as negative and undesirable. She wished a better future for her children, who, in her opinion, were already ethnically more Korean than Mongolian. She explains that:

"When I was young, I dreamed of becoming a flight attendant. Now I'm just trying to make my children's dreams come true and for them not to do manual jobs like me… Our children are Koreans who do not know the [Mongolian] language and do not eat Mongolian food. So, I think they will stay here. There is no point in going back to Mongolia for the foreseeable future."

Whilst some of them engaged in re-narration against ethnicisation, they arguably did less so against other forms of societal disenfranchisement and precarity.

On the other hand, Mongolian marriage migrants like Amarjargal (MM.39.7) tried to come to terms with Korean society's expectations of 'good' parenting. Having regularly received harsh comments and intrusive questions about her decision to have four children, she accepted that she had somewhat failed to meet Korean standards of acceptability and prestige. In the end, she feels constantly criticised and perceived as a poor Asian woman with too many children. In her own words, she explains that:

"I lost my family when I was young. So, because of my family now, I can look at my four children and that's happiness for me and this is successful. But in Korea, they don't think like that. Many children are really too much work and then, [they ask] 'how could you afford raising them?' 'you need a lot of money, so how can you support your family?' ... As a woman, live happily, but if you want to live happily, living in a foreign country does not lead

to a true happy life. Even though I am happy, I am still not happy *laughing* Do you understand? Too many things to carry, it's a burden."

This extract serves as an important reminder that marginalised groups are not infallible political strategists, and will respond to discrimination in different and at times inconsistent ways depending on structural constraints and the meanings they attach to specific incidents (D. J. Johnson et al., 2022; Kubiliene et al., 2015). Nonetheless, this lack of a clear or outspoken response to discrimination should not take any value or power away from migrant women's agency.

In short, I explained that Mongolian migrant women experience discrimination also as a result of broader societal standards regarding prestige and acceptability in Korean society. In this subsection, I reflected on the fact that my respondents do not always oppose these norms and at times, to some degree, they viewed these value-based judgements as inevitable. Mongolian labour migrant women, especially the undocumented, viewed their own experiences as manual labourers as negative and undesirable. Mongolian marriage migrant women felt they were not meeting societal standards of good parenting. I explained that for both groups, these negative and pejorative narratives were harder to contest, thus showing how ethnicised migrants respond to different iterations of social precarity in different ways - and sometimes, not in a challenging or defensive manner.

6.4. Conclusion: ethnicisation, social precarity, and the mundane reproduction of Life's Work

This chapter examined the empirical process of ethnicisation and how it reproduces social precarity in and through the everyday spaces and interactions of different groups of Mongolia migrant women in Korea. I defined ethnicisation as the process through which Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women are essentialised and classified according to the value Korean society puts on their ethnicity and embodied ethnic traits. I argued that this process is a deeply gendered one, as it also instrumentalises pre-existing gender biases to the detriment of specific groups of migrant women, whose visas come attached with negative gender narratives and prejudices. The result of the process

of ethnicisation is a sense of social precarity, i.e., a social hierarchisation whereby Mongolian women are subordinated to the host society and can be subjected to different forms of discrimination and mistreatment because of it. Whilst the process of gendered ethnicisation is one that purposefully erases individuals' characteristics and personal histories and essentialises them on the basis of their ethnic markers, Mongolian migrant women experience this process in different ways depending on their visa status and embodied gender relations. I used the term 'gendered ethnicisation' to capture this gendered process of ethnic essentialisation. For instance, Mongolian marriage migrant women are ethnicised on the basis of their nationality and ethnic trait, but also according to widespread prejudices against women from developing countries and their alleged use of international marriage to escape poverty. Conversely, Mongolian labour migrant women are ethnicised not just for their ethnic background, but also in conjunction with the gender norms attached to their male-dominated workplaces.

I explained that gender ethnicisation does not happen in a vacuum nor is it met with passivity. More specifically, I illustrated how physical (built environment), mental (ideas and expectations about specific spaces) and social space (people's behaviours and interactions in space) enable ethnicisation, which in turns results in the social precarity of different groups of Mongolian women in a variety of places (e.g., the workplace, the home, public spaces). Having described and discussed various instances of gendered ethnicisation and the resulting mundane social precarity it reproduces, I argued that migrant women are active participants in this process of Life's Work. I demonstrated that both marriage and labour migrant women resist and challenge ethnicisation in an attempt to reclaim their subjectivities and identities in both their personal interactions and Korean society, more broadly. I illustrated that these agentic responses can be categorised into two types: on the one hand, Mongolian women reproduce the ethnicisation of Korean society and Korean women; on the other hand, they re-narrate their own ethnic otherness in a more positive light. In both cases, the goal is to challenge, at least at the individual level, the Korean social norms and narratives around ethnic superiority and subordination which inform the process of ethnicisation.

Like with their lived experiences of ethnicisation, my interviewees responses to said process differ between migrant groups. For instance, Mongolian marriage migrant women tend to engage in direct conversations with Koreans, whereas re-narration for Mongolian labour migrant women often entails an inner re-framing due to their lower level of language proficiency. In this chapter, I also illustrated that there are other social pressures, expectations and norms, that do not elicit the same agentic responses in ethnicised migrant women. In other words, different groups of Mongolian migrant women respond to certain contextual constraints differently and may direct or prioritise their agentic efforts towards specific interactions or in given spheres of their lives. Finally, these mundane experiences of ethnicisation and social precarity confirm what Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated - that processes of Life's Work are connected with each other and actively exacerbate each other. As I explain in the next and final chapter of this thesis, the processes feed off of each other, like in a circular, self-reinforcing loop of precarity. Ethnicisation in the spaces and interactions of everyday life reproduces the social precarity and hierarchisation of Mongolian migrant women, and in so doing, it helps justify the rationale behind the processes of citizenship-making (i.e., only migrants from certain nationalities can be deemed 'desirable') and labour differentiation (i.e., the skills and qualifications of migrant women from developing countries cannot be as 'good' as Korean's).

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

7.1. Interconnected lives: the processes of Life's Work, gender, and migrant agency

This thesis set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the empirical social processes contributing to the social reproduction of Life's Work in the lives of Mongolian migrant women in Seoul?

2. How are these social processes connected to each other and to the socio-cultural structure of gender?

3. How do different groups of Mongolian migrant women navigate and mitigate these processes and the precarities they reproduce?

By answering these three questions, this thesis brings forward the following contributions: it clearly identifies the empirical social processes that contribute to the social reproduction of Life's Work; it illustrates the interconnectedness between these processes and the underlying socio-cultural structure of gender; it demonstrates the active entanglement of a wide range of migrant women in the social reproduction of Life's Work and the relevance of their agency in mitigating various forms of precarity.

Firstly, drawing on existing research on Life's Work and its social reproduction (Katz, 2008, 2004, 2001a; Mitchell et al., 2004; Strauss, 2018), I identified three key empirical processes which deeply shape the lived experiences of both Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women in Korea. They are citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and gendered ethnicisation. I defined citizenship-making as a nonlinear, uncertain, and continuous process of 'being-made' and 'self-making' (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017; E. A. Chung, 2017, p. 432, 2021; Clarke et al., 2014), where different groups of Mongolian women experience different forms of legal precarity depending on their visa status and embodied gendered relations. Moving on, by labour differentiation, I referred to the social process of dividing and organising specific tasks and jobs into segments or categories in an hierarchical manner determined by skill and social relations (Federici, 2004; Norton & Katz, 2017; Katz, 2001b; Strauss, 2018; Rodríguez‑Rocha, 2021), which results in labour precarity. This precarity

entails the devaluation of Mongolian women's labour and human capital, and their subsequent dependence on informal, precarious employment. Finally, I examined gendered ethnicisation, that is, the process through which Mongolian migrant women are essentialised and classified according to the value Korean society puts on their embodied ethnic traits and gendered identities. As a result of this process, Mongolian migrant women face social precarity, which I described as the social hierarchisation and subordination of Mongolian migrant women on the basis of both their ethnicity and gender. In short, each of these three processes reproduces Life's Work as specific iterations of precarity - legal, labour, and social - which, together, make up and consolidate the reality of Life's Work.

Secondly, in terms of the relationship between processes of Life's Work, and the role of gender in reproducing them, I argued that these processes feed off each other, like in a circular, self-reinforcing loop of precarity. Whilst I focused on specific scales (national, city, local) and spaces (the Korean immigration system, the labour market of Seoul, and the spaces of everyday life and encounters) to examine each of these processes, I would like to emphasise the interconnectedness between these processes. They do not take place in a vacuum but rather, they actively exacerbate each other, and in doing so, they normalise and consolidate the various forms of precarity they each reproduce (Katz, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2004). Indeed, social processes and relations do not happen in a vacuum nor at scales which operate as air-tight containers (Massey 2011, 2004; Lefebvre, 1991; see also Brenner, 2000; H. B. Shin, 2014). I showed that gendered ethnicisation helps justify labour differentiation; the subsequent labour devaluation of Mongolian migrant women, on the basis of their embodied gender and ethnic identities, is then used to justify their unfavourable hierarchisation in the Korean immigration system. In other words, it could be argued that there is not a top-down or causal relation or hierarchy between these processes. Rather, they mutually inform each other and are deeply entangled with and drawing on other pre-existing socio-cultural structures like gender.

Indeed, throughout this thesis, I illustrated the significant influence that gender norms, relations, and processes (Kobayashi & Peake, 1994; McDowell, 2008; Panelli, 2004) have on the

empirical processes reproducing Life's Work. This thesis showed that various, dynamic, and contradictory gendered norms and expectations attached to migrant women's desirable role in the host society, their engagement with specific forms of labour, and their nationality and ethnic background, have deeply informed the processes of citizenship-making, labour differentiation, and gendered ethnicisation. A gendered analysis of these processes also shed light on intra-group differences among Mongolian migrant women. Marriage and labour migrant women from Mongolia experience these processes of Life's Work and the precarities they reproduce in different ways, as a result of both their visa statuses and their specific embodied gendered relations. For example, in the Korean immigration system, legal precarity looks different for Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women. For the former, it entails legal dependency on their Korean husband-citizen and the expectation to culturally assimilate into a role of 'good wife and good mother' (Chung 2020; Chiu & Yeoh, 2021; Kim & KIlkey, 2016). For the latter, legal precarity refers to the constant need to gain new skills and qualifications with the hope - with no guarantee - of renewing their visa and thus, their right to stay in Korea legally. In the labour market, labour precarity for Mongolian marriage migrant women pushes them into niche segments where they use the resources (i.e., language proficiency and knowledge of social etiquette) that they have acquired as wives to Korean men. For Mongolian labour migrant women, their labour precarity entails not only their subordination or dependence to Korean employers and visa sponsors, but also their potential mistreatment as a result of sexist practices and beliefs in male-dominated workplaces. Finally, in the private and public spaces of everyday life, both groups of migrant women are essentialised on the basis of their nationality and ethnic background, but also according to the gendered stereotypes attached to their specific visas: marriage migrant women from developing countries are viewed as poor and potential scammers; labour migrant women from developing countries are viewed as under-qualified foreigners who ought to be grateful for the opportunity to be living in Korea.

Thirdly and finally, I demonstrated that both groups of Mongolian migrant women, albeit in their own visa-specific ways, are deeply entangled in the social reproduction of Life's Work, and that

they are active participants in its empirical processes (Favell, 2022; Katz, 2004; MacLeavy et al., 2021; Yeung & Mu, 2020). Through a variety of agentic responses and mitigation strategies, my interviewees find ways to mitigate their legal precarity by transforming themselves into either culturally and socially assimilated and compliant citizens, or 'worthy' economic subjects in Korean society. To mitigate this labour precarity, Mongolian marriage migrant women rely on segmented and niche jobs related to multiculturalism and teaching; Mongolian labour migrant women focus on the service industry and other logistical business for fellow migrants. My interviewees also mitigate the ethnicisation process by participating in it by ethnicising Korean society and Korean women, and by re-narrating their own gendered, ethnicised identity in a positive light. Marriage migrant women tend to negotiate their social precarity in direct conversations with Koreans in their lives, whereas Mongolian labour migrant women re-narrate themselves through their inner dialogue due to the language barrier. Therefore, albeit in different ways specific to their visa status, social and financial resources, and distinctive embodied gendered relations, both groups of Mongolian migrant women are far from being passive victims of the empirical processes of Life's Work. Rather, they are part of them as they actively find ways to endure, challenge, and mitigate Life's Work.

To recap, this thesis brought forwards the following contributions: it clearly identified the empirical social processes that contribute to the social reproduction of Life's Work; it illustrated the interconnectedness between these processes and the underlying socio-cultural structure of gender; it demonstrated the active participation of a wide range of migrant women in the social reproduction of Life's Work, and the relevance of their intentional and relational agentic responses to the resulting forms of precarity.

7.2. Directions for future research

Future research on Life's Work, migration, and agency in Korea could take the form of a multi-sited ethnography to examine and compare the reproduction of Life's Work in different Korean cities, like Ansan, which Korean scholars refer to as a migrant city (S. Choi, 2019; Hong & Atteraya, 2013; see

C. Kim, 2015). Focusing on different Korean cities besides Seoul would enable an active effort to avoid reproducing academic biassed preferences for 'prime cities' (H. B. Shin, 2021, p. 67). Through a comparative study of different 'ordinary cities' (Robinson, 2006), future research could discover not only other empirical processes of Life's Work, but also how the physical, mental, and social spaces of different Korean cities shape the precarities experienced by migrant women. I also believe that analysing other socio-cultural structures beyond gender, could provide even richer and more detailed accounts of Life's Work, and migrant women's precarity and agency. Socio-economic status and classed relations, for example, could be an important focus to consider in future research (Anthias, 2012; Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki, 2017; Kofman, 2012; Van Hear, 2014). Comparing the experiences of migrant women of different nationalities could also shed light on the ways that different groups experience and mitigate these socio-cultural structures and the empirical processes of Life's Work.

From a methodological standpoint, future research on Life's Work and migrant precarity will benefit from a more diverse range of research methods and interviewees. As discussed in Chapter 3, the COVID-19 pandemic created severe obstacles to data collection and the pool of participants this specific doctoral project could draw on. On the one hand, participant observations and focus groups could be used to find out what experiences and forms of agency different groups of migrant women have in common, or not, and how they come into practice (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014; Lamont & Swidler, 2014). On the other hand, it would be interesting to discover how the experiences of Mongolian marriage migrant women who used international marriage brokers differ from those who met their husbands organically. Based on my interviewees' comments, it seems that the use of marriage brokers is more common among 'older' generations of Mongolian women who are now in their late 40s, early 50s. Hence, a study that takes on an inter-generational approach could also shed light on the different ways that Mongolian marriage migrant women and their children have dealt with brokers and assimilationist state policies (Albertini et al., 2019; Mansouri & Johns, 2017; Zorlu & Van Gent, 2024). These analyses would also contribute to the existing literature on international migration brokerage between other East and Southeast Asian countries (E. A. Chung, 2022; Lindquist et al.,

2012; M. C.-W. Lu, 2005; Yeoh et al., 2017). Insights from Korean immigration officers and migration-related institutions could also help to identify even more clearly what the 'voice' of the state is, and how state employees interpret and implement gender structures in their day-to-day interactions with migrant women from different geographical and social backgrounds (Borrelli, 2022; Borrelli et al., 2022; Ostrand & Statham, 2021; Weber & Bowling, 2004).

7.3. Final remarks: Radical hope in the face of Life's Work

This thesis contributed to a richer understanding of the empirical processes of Life's Work, gendered precarity, and migrant women's agency. I showed that these processes are deeply entangled with each other and reproduce Life's Work also by drawing on pre-existing, structural gendered norms and relations. But whilst my research objective was to identify and examine these empirical processes and their resulting forms of precarity, my hope is that, by the end of this thesis, the agentic responses to precarity of both groups Mongolian migrant women has shined through just as much, if not more. I believe that my interviewees' agentic responses in the face of Life's Work are evidence that we all are entangled in – rather than detached from - the structural and mundane processes that influence and shape our daily lives. Albeit a double-edged sword, this entanglement means that change can come from our everyday actions. I hope future research can shed light also on migrant women's community-based acts of agency and illuminate new paths for collaboration between migrants, Korean society, and organisations and institutions across multiple administrative levels and scales. Whilst Mongolian marriage and labour migrant women experience different instances and iterations of Life's Work, and their needs and priorities do not always overlap, there is room for collaboration between these two groups, or at least within the groups.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I emphasised Cindi Katz's (2004, p. xi) words: "[t]he possibilities for rupture are everywhere in the routine. If the efflorescence of cultural forms and practices that make up social reproduction hegemony is secured, so, too, might it stumble." This quotation has

guided me through the process of writing this thesis and has become a powerful reminder of everybody's potential for individual and societal change. In the face of the several, tightly intertwined, and all-encompassing empirical processes of Life's Work, it could be tempting to succumb to the reality that contemporary social, economic, political systems reproduce precarity for the sake of the few, and the demise of the many. Yet, it is paramount to acknowledge our agency, find individual and collective strategies to nurture radical hope and care for ourselves and others, and thus, structurally subvert the processes that make us precarious subjects under patriarchal capitalism. May this thesis serve as evidence and reminder that our routines and everyday agency can have the potential to make the hegemony of Life's Work stumble and create room for change.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of (Formal) Interviewees (marriage migrant women)

Marriage migrant women	Place of birth	Date of interview
Amarjargal (MM.39.7)	UB	11/12/2021
Ariun (MMK.36.14)	UB	08/01/2022
Bolormaa (MMK.51.21)	UB	23/12/2021
Baatar (MM.31.5)	Darkhan Aimag	05/12/2021
Bayartsetseg (MMK.33.14)	UB	28/12/2021
Delbee (MMK.50.21)	UB	01/04/2022
Kheshigmaa (MMK.33.11)	UB	12/12/2021
Khongorzul (MMK.39.17)	UB	27/12/2021
Narantuya (MMK.45.25)	UB	30/12/2021
Odval (MMK.33.12)	UB	18/12/2021
Sarnai (MMK.38.16)	UB	06/01/2022
Uugan (MM.48.24)	UB	10/12/2021
Urantögs (MMK.32.7)	UB	20/12/2021
Yargui (MMK.44.18)	UB	19/12/2021

Appendix B: Life of (Formal) Interviewees (labour migrant women)

Labour migrant women	Place of birth	Date of interview
Amgalan (LM.27.3)	UB	26/03/2022
Ankhtsetseg (LM.28.5)	Arvaikheer Soum, Uvurkhangai Aimag	09/04/2022
Badamlyanhua (ULM.38.4)	Chuluunkhoroot Soum, Dornod Aimag	25/04/2022
Battsetseg (ULM.45.14)	Darkhan Aimag	17/05/2022
Bayalag (ULM.49.6)	Dornod Aimag	01/05/2022
Enkhtuya (LM.27.10)	Erdenet[33]	27/03/2022
Gereltsetseg (LM.36.15)	UB	18/04/2022
Khaltmaa (LMB.48.7)	Jargalsaikhan Soum, Khentii Aimag	26/04/2022
Mandakh (LMB.37.7)	Dornod Aimag	03/04/2022
Munkhbayar (LM.35.10)	UB	24/03/2022
Orghana (ULM.48.4)	UB	03/05/2022
Ochir (LM.42.12)	UB	29/04/2022
Saikhanbayar (LM.29.5)	UB	16/04/2022
Soyolmaa (LM.29.2)	UB	13/05/2022
Yagaan (LMB.33.15)	Numrug Soum, Zavkhan Aimag	20/04/2022

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[33] Erdenet is the second-largest city in Mongolia, with over 90,000 inhabitants. It is known for its mining and copper industry.

Appendix C: List of (Formal) interviewees (organisations)

Name of organisation	Organisation's focus	Date of interview
Multicultural Family Center	Marriage migrant women	16/03/2022
Mongol School	Mongolian marriage migrants, labour migrants, migrant youth	31/03/2022
Mongolian Women Federation in Korea	Mongolian marriage migrant women	05/04/2022
Women's Human Right Organization	Marriage migrant women	20/04/2022
Migrant NGO	Mongolian undocumented migrants	02/05/2022
Helpline call centre	Marriage migrant women	04/05/2022