"Your mother never teach you ah?":

A Retrospective Study on Womanhood in 1960-2000s Singapore

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SUMMARY

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This study focused on married women's negotiation of gender roles and social positionings during Singapore's nation building era (1960s-2000). Using decolonial approaches to centre ordinary and mundane everyday activities as sources of knowledge, this study aimed to create knowledge on Singapore gender relations and the long-term impact on Singaporean women. The research questions are: (1) What were the context and factors in Singapore that marginalised young Singaporean women the 1970s-80s? (2) How did Singaporean women negotiate their roles as mothers and wives, and what were the consequences faced at middle-aged? and (3) In what ways did Singaporean women resist subjugation?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using videoconferencing with seven married women, aged between 55 and 60 and have children. This study found that natal family's lack of financial resources, women's lack of English proficiency and institutional gender discrimination restricted some Singaporean women's access to higher education in the 1970s-80s. Singaporean motherhood was heavily shaped by the idea of meritocratic pursuit of material success, wherby mothers hoped for children to gain upwards social mobility. Furthermore, working women's negotiation of domestic duties were class-differentiated, and financial independence of homemakers diminished over time. Singaporean wives also tended to be subjugated within spousal units as a result of 'Asian values' discourse, maintaining husbands as 'heads of household'. As a result, women tended to feel isolated and frustrated at middle-aged. However, female-dominated domains such as care work and motherhood allowed Singaporean women to form generative relationships that emancipated them. While resigning to their reality of subjugation, Singaporean women also resist by rescripting gender roles for the next generation, socialising their children with different sets of gender roles. Understanding Singaporean women's subjugation and resistance could provide opportunities for future acts of solidarity.

Keywords
Singapore, decolonial feminism, middle-aged women, gender roles, resistance

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Introduction

"*Your mother never teach you ah?*", a colloquial slang used to jeer at someone after they have done something foolish, ill-mannered or socially frowned upon. It is used with close contacts as a rude and crass joke, but may be harsh and offensive to others. It carries the notion of someone having poor-upbringing. Besides attacking the person-in-question directly, it also blames their mother for doing a poor job of parenting. This slang carries the underlying notion that mothers are normative persons to raise children, responsible for their actions even when they grow up. It reflects my interviewee, Madeline's quote, *"People will always judge whether a child is well-behaved and criticise if the mother knows how to raise the child, never the father."*

My study situates Singaporean women, born around the time when Singapore becoming independent, at the centre of knowledge production. A former British colony since 1819, Singapore was self-governed from 1959, merged with Malaysia in 1963 and gained independence in 1965. Singapore is a unique settler nation because the majority population is ethnic Chinese colonised migrants/subjects instead of white colonial settlers (Chua, 2008). Chinese migration to Malaya and Singapore was known to have taken place as early as the 10th century, before European colonial and missionary migration presence in the 15th century (Teoh, 2014).

When Singapore gained independence, the need for the country to thrive in global capitalism is argued to be necessary for the ruling party to govern Singapore in times of unstable electoral democracy, following regional anticolonial movements in the 1940s-50s (Chua, 2017). The anticolonial struggles in South East Asia (SEA) was essentially a civil war which saw armed conflicts between colonial regimes and communists in colonised lands, happened concurrently with the Cold war in Soviet Union and the establishment of People's republic of China in the 1940s (Chua, 2008; Wade, 2009; Hansson et al., 2020).

Singapore begun experiencing rapid industrialisation with increased investments from foreign capital by mid-1960s (Chua, 2008). The country rapidly became the regional hub for export and management of various productions by 1970s, partly from industries developed by the United States Cold war planners through offshore procurements during the Korean War (Hansson et al., 2020). After decades of sustained economic growth through capitalistic industrialisation that lifted many out of poverty, Singapore is now an island-state made up of a large population of educated, homeowning and globally

connected middle-class, a country known as a 'model' of development, amplifying the small island-nation's voice in global economy and politics that is disproportionate to its size (Chua, 2017; Ang & Stratton, 2018). To sustain Singapore's position in global capitalism, the country continued to adopt and accept consequences of capitalistic values such as meritocracy that promotes individualistic competition and self-reliance in education and employment (Chua, 2017).

I will focus on time period beginning from Singapore's rapid industrialisation in the 1960s to the nation's more robust economy in the 2000s. As such, I named this period 'establishing Singapore' and would use it throughout my thesis. I chose the word, 'establishing' instead of 'emerging' because Singapore had long existed before independence and being colonised (Miksic, 2017; Chong, 2020). Furthermore, contemporary Singapore was already in 'completely modernist terms' when it gained independence (Chua, 2008, p 10). Singapore did not have equivalent movements such as women suffrage in Europe and the United States. Women were allowed to vote since the first general election in 1948 when Singapore moved towards self-governance (Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), 2015). 'Establishing' is also a verb that implies action, indicating that there are people in power positions determining the process of establishment, helpful in interrogating layers of power. Moreover, 'establishing' carries the connotation of gaining recognition in the global landscape, especially global economy, something important to a small city-state. Now that Singapore is considered established (Chua, 2017), a retrospective study on the period of establishing is timely and can contribute to Singapore's history writing.

Using existing literature written on independent Singapore and feminist decoloniality, I posit that the lived experiences of women interviewed were so 'ordinary' and unassuming that have been overlooked in understanding the history of establishing Singapore. There were little literature[1] that centred on their narratives of everyday lives in the 1960s-2000s. Literature about Singaporean women at that time period predominantly analysed ways in which patriarchal state policies shaped gender discourses to maintain hegemonic family units and drive the country's capitalistic economy[2]. In most of those literature, voices of the subject were not emphasized, and this study aims to fill this gap. I propose that the life trajectories and intimacies of women who grew up during Singapore's industrialisation could provide an alternative standpoint to understand the social conditions in Singapore at that time. Hence, my study retrieved and centred knowledge

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[1] For example, Ho, 2015
[2] For example, Heng & Devan, 1995; Pyle, 1997; PuruShotam, 1998; Wong & Yeoh, 2003; Kho, 2004; Teo, 2007; Teo, 2009; Chan 2020.

from these women's retrospective negotiation of roles to establish Singapore. I suggest that their retrospection could contribute to existing knowledge on state policies' implications on women in Singapore.

Feminist decolonial practices carry potentials of scripting alternative historical narratives that show the process of subjugation throughout the sustained economic growth of Singapore. I adopted Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh's (2018:p. 5) interpretation of decoloniality as 'a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice and praxis.' Their argument is based on Anibal Quijano's (2000) definition of 'coloniality of power'. This concept sees global capitalism as patterns of power, maintained by the hierarchy of race, whereby labour relations is presided by historical exploitations (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality includes the process of active reduction and dehumanisation of people that reduced and subjugated them to fit classification in order to colonise them as lesser beings (Lugones, 2010). Quijano's (2000) definition can be adopted in the context of Singapore as the country plays a significant role in global capitalism and has used 'multiculturalism' as a tool for social control (Chua, 2003; Chua,2017).

This research is my practice of feminist decoloniality. To explore coloniality in Singapore, I used Gustavo Esteva's and Madhu Suri Prakash's (1998; 2014) concept of one-third/two-third world to understand how social conditions aimed at maintaining race hierarchy and driving the Singapore economy intensified or mitigated the reduction of Singaporean women to lesser being. I also combine Chandra Mohanty's (1991) 'third world women' and Meyda Yeğenoğlu's (1998) definition of a 'western subject' to understand Singaporean women as a diverse group and the fluidity of their social position. My research questions are:
1. What were the context and factors in Singapore that marginalised young Singaporean women the 1970s-80s?
2. How did Singaporean women negotiate their roles as mothers and wives, and what were the consequences faced at middle-aged?
3. In what ways did Singaporean women resist subjugation?

I interviewed seven married Singaporean women, born between 1961 and 1970 whose children were adults, over videoconferencing. Aimed at answering my research questions, I asked them retrospective questions surrounding their aspirations when they were young adults, how did they manage their roles in domestic and working spheres, their sense of autonomy in being able to make decisions for their families and themselves, and how they felt towards domestic and work arrangements made in their early

adulthood? Retrospective questions could provide nuanced understanding to the context that interviewees were in at different life stages, carrying potential to rewrite history from their standpoints.

Additionally, I asked interviewees about their present opinions towards their overall life satisfaction, womanhood in their mothers' and daughters' generation, and what advices would they give to their younger selves and children. Finally, I asked them questions about their hope for the future, such as what 'aging with dignity' meant to them. Questions on interviewees' present informs us in what ways has the past impacted them, which could provide lesson to inform future feminist actions. Interviewees' hope for future could provide understanding on the long-term impacts of gender roles performance in their young adulthood, carrying potentials to explore ways that may better support them at old age.

On top of Introduction and Conclusion, this thesis consists of five other chapters – Methodology & Methods, Literature Review, and three chapters on Findings & Discussions. In the Methodology and Methods chapter, I discussed the use of technology to conduct intergenerational interview and intergenerational dynamics of researcher-interviewee relationship, including a detailed description of my data collection process. My literature review analysed decolonial feminist approaches and theories to situate Singaporean women's roles in Singapore's national development. In addition, I reviewed literature on the construction of women's roles in Singapore and how gender is used to establishing race and citizenship in Singapore.

In the first Findings & Discussions chapter, I discussed three main factors that restricted Singaporean women from accessing higher education and better jobs in their young adulthood. Lower social economic status of interviewees' natal family, not being proficient in English and facing gender discrimination in more resource-intensive sectors prevented interviewees from participating in Singapore's labour force that provided higher material returns, limiting some of them to low-wage work. I analysed how those barriers could change women's social position for better or worse. Their social positioning was analysed using Esteva's and Prakash's (1998; 2014) one-third/two-third concept to illustrate the fluidity and precarity of their social positions as a result of those barriers, showing that the lived experience of 'Singaporean women' is not singular.

The second findings & discussion chapter presented how interviewees negotiated their domestic roles – as mothers and wives – and paid work in relations to the government's

stance of Singaporean women's role in society. I presented the class-differentiated conditions that pushed or disallowed interviewees to become homemakers, and how Singaporean motherhood was grounded on the meritocratic ideals of children having social mobility. Not participating in the labour force resulted in them losing financial independence which brought them anxiety towards aging and unable to perform kinship duties as 'daughters'. Spousal hierarchy and the concept of 'head of household' was discussed in interviewees' negotiation of their roles as wives. Playing a subordinated role to one's husband was grounded on 'Asian Values' perpetuated by the state's strategy to maintain social order (Zakaria & Lee, 1994). Hence, some interviewees' individual needs were downplayed, lacking emotional support from their husbands. Nevertheless, some interviewees also had supportive and mutual relationships with their husbands.

The final chapter explored areas and ways which interviewees found emancipation and practiced resistive acts against subjugation. Interviewees' relationships with children, rarely found in other kin relationships, were generative. Furthermore, interviewees demonstrated autonomy in the ways and aims they carried out labour within female-dominated sites of care. They formed webs of knowledge with similar women and prioritised children as a full being; instead of, producing potential units of manpower to drive Singapore's future economy. Interviewees' participation in this study by talking to me and their relationship with their children were unintentional act of resistance that transcended generations. I analysed their resistance using Maria Lugones's (2005) interpretation of Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) writing on facing 'intimate terrorism' while in resistance.

Methodology & Methods

Methodology

Collecting data during the Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges and opportunities to experiment with creative methods. I adopted Chazan's and Macnab's (2018) concept of *feminist intergenerational mic* to interview seven women using videoconferencing service, Zoom. The feminist intergenerational mic utilised technology as part of data collection process to create conditions that disrupted conventional data collection procedure and researcher-participant dynamics. This methodology challenged (1) researcher-participant relationship and power dynamics whereby researchers build relationships with participants, and (2) intergenerational relationship of elders as wisdom donors by building multidirectional and reciprocal relationship. The practice of feminist intergenerational mic also disrupted ageist stereotypes such as elderly being technologically illiterate.

This methodology challenged the researcher-participant power dynamic and relationship through the conditions needed to operate data collection. For example, contrary to conventional interviews where researcher set aside a fixed time to collect data from participants, this methodology provides room for time to be negotiated. Like Chazan and Macnab's (2018) workshop that has a 'tech training' session, some participants and I had rehearsal zoom sessions. It allowed interviewees to test out the application by accessing the Zoom discussion room independently and navigating the functions (i.e. entering room, turning video on/off, mute/unmute). Prior to the rehearsal, I sent out step-by-step information on how to download the app and made myself available if interviewees needed support.

Due to the prevalence of videoconferencing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviewees were familiar with the idea of using Zoom. While some expressed not knowing how to use it or had some issues when using it, I affirmed them that we would navigate it together, and they can use this interview as a safe space to experiment with the digital tool. Interviewees who were still working in jobs that provided them with a laptop tended to use a computer for the interview, and were already familiar with using videoconferencing tools. Those who were currently not working tended to use their mobile phones and were using Zoom for the first time. Many sought supports from their daughters, especially for downloading and using it the first time.

During rehearsal interviews, interviewees were able to take the chance to ask me about myself and my research motivation, building trust and connection. Interviewees who did not require a rehearsal usually asked me similar questions before their interview, during consent taking, or throughout the interview. When interviewees asked me questions, it was akin to being interviewed by the interviewees, similar to 'flipping the mic' in Chazan and Macnab's (2018) workshop, except that in my case, it occurred much more informally and spontaneously. This required self-disclosure and vulnerability on my part. After building a stronger rapport and going deeper into the interview, interviewees tended to ask me more personal questions related to my mother and our relationship, my education and employment background, future plans, and opinions of my generation.

The negotiation of time and role of question asker/responder translated to challenging the idea of elders as wisdom-donors (Chazan & Macnab, 2018). If one looked at knowledge transmission in a literal and transactional manner, I may be providing technological knowledge to some interviewees when they agree to be interviewed. I also asked interviewees if they would like to know about the research findings as a way to allow room for critique towards my study, and not alienate interviewees from the knowledge gathered. When interviewees asked me questions beyond this research frame, especially on my personal background and opinions, we both become wisdom-donors to each other. It also implied two-way movement of respect and interest. Some interviewees, after knowing about my education and past employment history, even explicitly asked me for certain advices on ageing. While I sought to downplay these social statuses and refused to take on the role of knower, I maintained affirmative relationship throughout interaction with interviewees. Apart from using self-disclosure to affirm interviewees when needed, I shared experiences and knowledge disclosed by other interviewees, while maintaining confidentiality. This was because some interviewees shared more common lived experiences between one another compared to me. In addition, disclosing shared experiences among interviewees implied that their lived experience was not isolated, and affirmed them of their capabilities and ideas of emancipation. This created a web of wisdom sharing going in multiple directions among interviewees.

Nevertheless, I did not build affirmative or more personal relationship with all interviewees. While this methodology has strong potential in building a trustful and mutual relationship between me and interviewees while undoing researcher-participant power dynamic, it was still important to be mindful of personal boundaries and preferences. To assume that interviewees did not have boundaries was imposing and

risked reducing them into mere receivers in our interaction. This would assume that I have the authority of a knower or giver in the interviewer-interviewee relationship, the complete opposite of this methodology.

Methods

Interviewees were recruited via snowballing. I used word of mouth, posted notices on my social media accounts and mass-sent text messages. Of the organisations which I contacted to request support in recruitment, none were accepted as this study was not done in collaboration with them.

The participation criteria went through one round of revision during the recruitment phase. The initial criteria were (1) Singaporean women born between 1951-70, (2) has married at least once, (3) currently have adult child(ren) and (4) personal gross income does not exceed 5999 SGD. I used the income as a proxy indicator of one's education and social class. By setting an maximum income limit, I intentionally craved larger space to prioritise knowledge coming from 'average' Singaporean women from lower and middle social economic status socio-economic status (SES). Using data[3] from the Singapore Ministry of Manpower's (2020) annual labour force report, I deduced that the 75th percentile gross monthly income range of females between aged 50-54, 55-59, 60-64 and 65-69, are $5000-5999, $4000-4999, $3000-3999 and $2500-2999 respectively. In order to avoid over-excluding potential participants based on their earnings, while still using income as an approximating filter, I used $5999 as the maximum earning level as the selection criteria. Moreover, income was not a precise proxy for homemakers and retirees as they do not have income; hence, able to participate even if they are of higher social class. Therefore, I was not preoccupied that the income level will excessively exclude knowledge from women of higher SES.

By setting a maximum income limit initially, I was not implying that those of higher earnings now do not face issues or have meaningful knowledge to share. Rather, it was based on the assumption that they may be more likely to have access to services and consumptions that can ease daily living. Furthermore, their social positionings is likely to formally and informally add legitimacy to their knowledge and makes their knowledge more accessible. This decision was made based on Yeoh's (2001; p. 464) writing on

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[3] See Table 32 of Labour Force in Singapore 2019 report: Employed Residents Age Fifteen years and over by gross monthly income from work (excluding employer CPF), Age and Sex, June 2019.

studying postcolonial cities, urging one to 'confront the fraught terrain of representation and allow multiple claims to discursive authority in the difficult task of making room for the subaltern to speak, without either romanticizing or flattening out his or her voice'.

However, during initial recruitment, I noticed that the income bracket brought discomfort to women of all class backgrounds. Women whose income level was within the limit tended to feel singled out or saw the income limit labelling them as 'needy'. On the other hand, those whose income level exceeded the limit felt dismissed. As such, I removed the income criteria and the final participation criteria were: (1) Singaporean women born from 1951-70, (2) has married at least once, (3) currently have adult child(ren).

All seven interviewees were Singaporean women aged between 55 and 60 at the time of interview. All of them were married, one was in her second marriage. They each had with two or three children, who were adults mostly in their 20s. Among the participants, six were ethnic Chinese (Cantonese, Fu Chow, Hainanese and Teo Chew), and one ethnic Malay (Boyanese). During the interviews, participants' highest education attained included secondary school, diploma, and university degree. One university graduate and one secondary school graduate obtained their first master's degrees when their children were older; another diploma holder obtained an additional diploma when she went through a career switch. Three interviewees were still working while the others were either retired or became a homemaker many years ago.

Using an interview guide that was designed in English and translated to Chinese, I conducted semi-structured interviews in either English-Singlish or Mandarin. Duration of interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours 20 minutes. When setting up interviews, interviewees often told me to *just* address them 'aunties'. 'Auntie' is an everyday and colloquial way of addressing middle-aged and/or married women. When the woman is of a certain closer social or kin relation, they are commonly addressed with their first name or nickname following 'auntie'. Interviewees often found it a hassle when asked for their names during the informed consent process. While some conceded by telling me to address them as Ms/Madam (first/last name), there were instances when this came across as too formal. As addressing an elder in Singapore by their first name is considered impolite, we finally settled on addressing interviewees as Auntie (*first name*), except for one interviewee who was my colleague and we had always been on a first name basis.

All interviews were audio-recorded. I transcribed English interviews word-for-word in English and translated Mandarin interviews into English. It was common for interviewees and me to use certain Singlish[4] expressions during interviews. I transcribed Singlish expressions word-for-word to retain their meanings so as to avoid misinterpreting certain local sayings that has no equivalent English expressions. I wrote interview summaries for interviews that were not audio-recorded. The audio-recordings were deleted once transcriptions were completed and checked. All transcripts have been anonymised and I gave each interviewee a pseudonym. I used NVivo 12 to thematically code my data.

Limitations

As an ethnic Chinese woman with a limited social network of racial minority women and my inability to speak Malay and Indian languages, it was challenging for me to recruit non-Chinese women. Using video-conferencing to conduct interviews also created a class-barrier as potential interviewees may not have the technological resources to participate. The global care chain of migrant domestic workers plays an important role in providing care and domestic labour in Singapore. As interviewees' usage of the domestic help services were not prevalent, this study was unable to interrogate the interrelationship with Singaporean womanhood. Hence, I emphasise that the knowledge from this thesis provides a snapshot of the lived experiences of Singaporean women. It is not representative as the universal experience of Singaporean women in interviewees' generation.

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[4] Singlish is a form of colloquial English that encompasses elements of other languages such as Malay, Chinese dialects and Indian languages (Yeo, 2010)

Literature review

Using decolonial feminist practices to situate women in Singapore's growth strategy

In this study, I adopted two key practices of feminist decoloniality to centre on Singaporean women's narratives as sites of knowledge for Singapore's history of industrialisation. The following sub-chapters will elaborate concepts that carry potential of using women's narrative to script an alternative history of Singapore that dwells on the coloniality of power in Singapore's growth strategy.

Rewriting history centring on narratives of the ordinary

Married and middle-aged women, like the interviewees, were often referred as 'aunties' in Singapore. Aunties embody Singaporean 'ordinariness'. The presence of aunties is so interwoven into the everyday Singapore that there is nothing seemingly spectacular about them that demands a second glance. Similar to the portrayal of 'aunties' in other Anglo-American popular culture, they are figures who are readily available and recognisable as a stereotypic embodiment (Sotirin & Ellingson, 2007). While easily identified and playing integral roles in society, aunties are frequently side-lined, often on the margins, much less being centred on in research.

Gayatri Spivak's (1999) and Philip Holden (2008) critiqued postcolonial literature's tendency to ignore ordinary unexceptional events. The overlooked ordinariness of aunties is akin to Spivak's (1999) analysis of British writing on widow sacrifice (*Sati)* portrayed woman as an 'object of slaughter'. The widow, Rani, was deployed when her existence was pertinent enough in producing imperial history. She died of natural death which was deemed, "in academic sense, uneventful" (Spivak, 1999, p. 238). Spivak (1999) chose to dwell on the ordinariness, wanting "to ask what is not considered important enough by the hidden parts of the discipline, hidden only because they are too well known in their typicality to be of any interest to anyone engaged in the retrieval of knowledge." Spivak's (1991) critique could be read alongside Mohanty's (1991, p. 38) writing, "Resistance is encoded in the practice of remembering, and of writing. Agency is thus figured in the minute, day-to-day practices and struggles of the third-world women."

By interrogating the ordinary that is hidden by its ordinariness, Spivak (1999) argues that it holds strong potential in not only bringing lesson of women's triumphant but also writing hegemonic historical accounts. Interviewees' domain of home is safe, obscuring the conditions and relations of privilege, oppression and exclusion (Sotirin & Ellingson, 2007). Therefore, writing about buried historical hegemonies aligns with Holden's (2008) proposition of 'remembering otherwise'.

Holden's (2008, p. 351) first proposed approach is to 'remember otherwise, continually questioning the forms of remembrances take, and indeed the desires that underlines them'. Remembering otherwise is not just excavating elements erased from Singapore's national narrative. Instead, one must also resist the risk of romanticising the past by making simplistic association with the present that one identifies with. One has to face the desires underlying their nostalgia for certain histories. By urging writers to not romanticise the past, Holden (2008) also echoes Gayatri Spivak's (1999, p. 209) critiques on 'self-imposed exiles of Eurocentric economic migration' who falls for the temptation of nostalgic investigation of lost roots. I found myself being anxious of Spivak's critique as a Singaporean, whose ancestors were a part of the Chinese diaspora, currently conducting this study in Finland.

Holden's (2008, p. 357) second proposal is to use 'colonial memories and colonial metaphors to disturb the comfort of the present', it is 'a confrontation with resolve – and an inability to – a changed place in the world'. It aims to decentre 'post-colonialism' from colonial metropolitan centre and the nation-state (Chua, 2008, p. 239). While Holden's (2008) proposals focused on the writing of postcolonial literary works in Singapore, I argue that they carry decolonial feminist potential. This proposed approaches allow room to challenge current status quo of knowledge production, shifting geopolitics of whose knowledge and history is legitimate and gets to be remembered.

Taking on Spivak's (1999) and Holden's (2008) critiques, the act of interviewing unsensational and unexceptional women in this study centres the ordinary as sources of knowledge. I use their lived experience and knowledge as one alternative remembrance of the history of establishing Singapore. I posit that rewriting history using narratives centred on ordinary Singaporean women's everyday experiences could highlight how coloniality functioned through subjugating women in Singapore's development.

Recognising diversity of Singaporean women's identity

Secondly, a decolonial feminist analysis requires recognising the diversity of Singaporean women and refusing to conflate them into one stagnant and coherent group. This meant recognising interviewees as a group of Chandra Mohanty's (1991) 'third world women' and Meyda Yeğenoğlu's (1998) definition of a 'western subject'. In addition, using Gustavo Esteva's and Madhu Suri Prakash's (1998; 2014) one-third/two-third world concept could allow nuanced understanding of fluidity of interviewees' social positions over their life course.

Mohanty (1991, p. 38) uses 'third world women' as an analytical and political category to explore intersectional links between histories and struggles of women, especially women of colour, existing outside the normative western framework of women. This term entails the recognition of diversity among marginalised women, having potential to uncover different conditions and diverse lived experiences. Positioning interviewees as third world women also necessitate the rejection of universalising white middle-class women experience, imposing development indicators to fit women of third world into binary parameters of success or problems (Mohanty, 1991).

In the context of this study, majority of the interviewees were ethnic Chinese, belonging to the dominant racial group [5]. Some interviewees were highly educated, having university degree qualifications, and some had well-paid jobs. Every interviewee possessed at least one identity marker that codes them as part of a dominant group. This seemingly situated them and the knowledge retrieved from this study closer towards 'western' women. However, these identity markers are based on western development indicators commonly used to measure third world women's success and problems, such as literacy rate and birth-rates, which are (Mohanty, 1991). These markers risked erasing the nuances between third-world women and what how they make sense of their lives in their terms. Using those markers to define interviewees risk erasing their agency and engagement with history, merely keeping them frozen in time and space (Mohanty, 1991).

Interviewees belonging to various dominant groups do not negate the potentials of their lived experiences as sites to locate power relations and the social positioning of women in Singapore. While I acknowledge correlations between demographic categories and privilege, it is important to avoid essentialise interviewees experiences based on their

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[5] Singapore consist of four official racial categories, Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others, commonly known as 'CMIO' in short.

identity markers. Intra difference within each identity category can alter one's access to privileges. Interviewees could potentially be the exceptions of their identity groups based on the intersections of identities. For example, being a race majority but not having class privilege. As such, it is also useful to interrogate Singaporean women considering Yeğenoğlu (1998) argument that 'western' should not be thought of as uniformed essence; rather it is the process of becoming a constitution of identities. For example, the type of schools that interviewees attended, and life choices made during certain political and historical contexts differentiated women even if they who share similar identity markers such as race, gender, marital status and education level.

Using Yeğenoğlu's (1998) term, interviewees were not 'western' based on social identity markers, but had potential to become or unbecome a constitution of identities over their life course. I consider the social meaning of their identity markers, but centres on their individual lived experience. Interrogating interviewees' comfort within their lived experience in their terms acknowledges the diversity among them. This challenges the idea of an assumed identity marker-derived comfort and default social inclusion based on one's belonging to each group of social identity.

Highlighting intra-group difference also aligns with Mohanty's (1991) critique towards writings that assumed 'third world women' form a coherent group. As a coherent group, women are always seen in opposition to men 'regardless of religious, economic, familial and legal structures', and those systems are assumed to be constructed by men and the population of men and women only exists in exploitative relations (Mohanty, 1991, p. 68). Hence, interrogating individual differences between interviewees who share similar identity markers can uncover different lived experiences within seemingly coherent social conditions. The knowledge can deepen understanding on processes of marginalisation and upwards social mobility as Singapore establishes itself. This mode of understanding also complements with interrogating the ordinary to understand power relations and conditions that lead to social exclusion.

As such, I argue that using Esteva's and Prakash's (1998; 2014) category of 'one-third' and 'two-third' allows nuanced understanding of the process that differentiated women belonging to similar background and social identity over time. According to Esteva and Prakash (2014), one-thirds are preoccupied with sheer survival needs and those on the margins of two-thirds are pushed closer into the one-thirds. The two-third marginals 'never had real access to the 'benefits'' enjoyed by two-third centres who occupied the centre of the modern world (Esteva and Prakash, 2014, p. 4). Interviewees' social

position, comfort and privilege can be more accurately represented using 'one-thirds' and 'two-thirds' categories than using social identity markers, such as gender, race or income level. After all, identity markers form a non-exhaustive list, and the extent of one's privilege and marginalisation in relations to the society is not a zero-sum game of identity markers. Identity markers also do not capture the mobility of one's social positioning over time. Esteva and Prakash's (1998; 2014) one-third/two-third concept acknowledges those on the margins which can reflect intra-group nuances and avoid essentialising identity markers. Mohanty (2003) also revisited her construct of 'western' versus 'third-world' women and adopted the 'one-third/two-thirds' as it 'incorporates an analysis of power and agency' without being essentialist (Mohanty, 2003, p. 506).

Combining Mohanty's (1991) and Yeğenoğlu's (1998) concepts of 'third world women' and 'western subject' with Esteva's and Prakash's (1998; 2014) concept of one-thirds and two-thirds allows a thorough temporal interrogation of the process of becoming a constitution of identities. The nature of knowledge retrieved in this retrospective study is temporal. Such knowledge encapsulates changes during the process of establishing Singapore. Hence, it is insufficient to contextualise interviewees as either Mohanty's (1991) 'third-world women' or Yeğenoğlu's (1998) 'western women' as if they were stagnant and coherent. Their social positionings can shift over the course of Singapore's development and throughout their life course. Complementing the use of 'third world' and 'western' women as the foundation of this study helps to understand the process and fluidity of interviewees social position in Esteva's and Prakash's (1998) one-third/two-third terms. This way of interrogation have potential to demonstrate how process and conditions of coloniality differentiated Singaporean women over time, reducing some to lesser beings (Lugones, 2010).

Construction of Singaporean women's roles to facilitate Singapore's growth

The construction of gender discourse in Singapore, predominantly motivated by economic growth, can be observed in multiple interlocking spheres – political, education and family. Gender discourses operated in each sphere as part of the nation's economic development strategies, but never on the basis of 'gender'. Gender-neutrality is also internalised in everyday middle-class family lives (Teo, 2009). Women have always been present in all corners of Singapore's economic development strategies, but only as a vehicle.

The construction of Singaporean gender roles in family emerged only towards Singapore's independence. Singapore does not have a long traditional family structure[6] (Kuo & Wong, 1979; Pyle, 1997). Eddie Kuo & Aline Wong (1979) argue that it was only in the 1930s when Singapore started having a more stable population compared to the early 20th century when the population was largely made up of male migrants with no intentions to settle down. The patriarchal family ideology arose in the 1950s when women in emerging middle class among the politically active fought for equal rights, joining force with a group of middle-cum-upper class British rulers (PuruShotam, 1998). This is a key background information to keep in mind when interrogating women's roles in the domestic sphere. It challenges the notion of "Asian values", perceived as a hardened traditional family role, which will be further discussed in the second chapter of findings.

Socialisation of gender roles through girls' education was more diverse in the 1910s, and was streamlined into one dominant discourse during the standardisation public education in Singapore in the 1960s (Teoh, 2014; 2018). Only during the rapid industrialisation of Singapore in the 1960s, a more systematic and standardised set of women's roles began to emerge through girls' education and family policy. According to Kho Ee Moi (2004), the key focus of girls' education was to prepare them for the labour force and forming a common national identity, as with most developing countries right after their independence. Citizenship education in the late 1960s aimed to produce youth who did not only excelled academically, but also physically by becoming rugged, active and having strong national patriotism, and gained competence to become blue-collared workers for the industrial economy (Kho, 2004). While both boys and girls were subjected to this same set of citizenship education, there was an emphasis on preparing girls for domestic roles (Kho, 2004).

Girls' domestic role is coded as 'traditional' and argued to be imperative for maintaining social framework of Singapore by then prime minister, Lee Kwan Yew. However, this ideology runs contrary to the emergence of family 'traditions' in Singapore historical writings since stable formation of family structure was a relatively recent phenomenon (PuruShotam,1998). 'Tradition' is used strategically by statesmen as a hegemonic tool. Singapore's first prime minister, Lee Kwan Yew, associated Singapore with East Asian countries rather than neighbouring Southeast Asian states (Zakaria & Lee, 1994). By situating Singapore closely with East Asia, he described the 'Asian model' as individuals

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[6] I write family and gender here in a cis-heteronormative manner as same-sex marriages are still not legalised and sex between males is still criminalised under Section 377A of the Penal Code. Section 377a of the Penal Code is also colonial remnant. It was enacted in 1938 by the British to police male sex work (Radics, 2015; Salehin & Vitis, 2020).

existing in the context of their family, and he saw the education of women as a threat to family units when educated women are more likely to be financially independent and do not need to put up with unhappy marriages (Zakaria & Lee, 1994)

Women's domestic roles that are described as traditional by statemen was shaped as part of 'Asian values'. Asian values were attributed to Confucian teaching, of Chinese origins, but earlier histories of girls' education in Singapore shows that there is a discrepancy is understanding what is traditional and its locality (Teoh, 2014; 2018). There was a gap when statesmen selectively labelled certain gendered practices as 'traditional' in Singapore as earlier girls' education taught different gender roles, not uniformed across the country. Hence, the use of 'tradition' and 'traditional' by statesmen in the years of establishing Singapore was a hegemonic tool not based on historical fact.

Jean Pyle (1997) argues that women and their labour, albeit not recognized enough, were a critical part of Singapore's economic development that resulted in economic success. This was facilitated through carefully written family and fertility policies since 1960s. Women play the dual role of wage earners and homemakers, aligning with gender hegemonies underlying girls' education curricula in early years of Singapore's independence (Chan, 2020). The central theme surrounding women's role in Singapore is 're-production' - producing labour and reproducing for the economy. On top of producing labour, they are also expected to reproduce for the economy which constitutes family duties, entailing caregiving, homemaking and childcare. Women's position at that time was similar to the position of West European women in in 1800s whereby the female body was an instrument of reproducing labour and expanding the work force (Federici, 2004)

The government's preoccupation with economic development and using the female body as a tool to further this aim draws similarities with Chandra Mohanty's 1990s critique of the 'third world women' in the eyes of the west. 'Third world women' has been illustrated in terms surrounding "underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, and "overpopulation" of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 6). In the beginning of establishing Singapore, late 1950s-60s, the framing of women in Singapore matched western idea of 'third world women'. They were marked by low literacy, high birth rates and oppressed by traditions.

Utilising these western indicators imposed on the third-world depicted a problematic state of women in Singapore. This in turn provided the landscape to 'advance women's rights and welfare as a strategy' to garner votes. People's Action Party (PAP), used the slogan "one man, one wife" in 1959 by promising to abolish polygamy and equal wages (AWARE, 2005). The Women's Charter was also passed in 1961 as a law served to protect women and children. These were followed by activists' campaigns for women's rights and gender equality. Nonetheless, the enactment of these policies was not for the sake of gender equality or human rights, rather women were auxiliary to the state's conception of a modern nation.

Chan (2020) and Kho (2004) argue that improving girls' education and women's participation in national development were motivated by economic development goals rather than gender equality. Their argument is obvious in then prime minister, Lee Kwan Yew's (1975) speech at the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) International Women's Year Seminar cum Exhibition. He said, "Industrialisation required women workers. This led to the education of women. This subsequently led to demand for political equality, the right to vote, equal rights, before and after marriage, in the ownership of property." In the same speech, Lee (1975) also, paradoxically, stressed that women could only be independent up to a certain extent as he saw their independence as a threat to upholding 'traditional family relationships', reflected by higher divorce rates and 'social problems of broken homes for children'

Lee assumes that women, as long as they are illiterate and do not have financial freedom, will be the bearers of traditions and would be submissive to their husbands. It rids of their agency and assumes that they form a singular group based on western indicators of modernity that codes religiosity, literacy, family-orientation and domesticity as not progressive, traditional, ignorant, and backwards (Mohanty, 1984). Moreover, woman's responsibility to ensure family functioning, according to Lee, operates in relations to her husband. A divorce implies a break from one's husband. Hence, a woman's whose existence that is no longer in relations to her husband results in her getting blamed for not maintaining a 'traditional family relationship'. Lee's contradiction of wanting women to become highly educated workers but fearing that they become too independent and threaten traditional family structure is based the binaric assumption that when women are not 'third world', they become modern. Borrowing themes from Lugones' (2010) and Sojourner Truth's (1851) poem Ain't I A Women?, the modern woman is western who is not a subject of coloniality for she will not be colonised and only lesser beings can be colonised. As such, Lee's narrative fear of Singaporean women's independence is based

on the idea that by becoming modern, Singaporean women cease to be targets of subjugation.

The only difference between Mohanty's (1984; 1991) discussion of third-world women in relations to the west and in the context of Singapore was that, those in power who saw women as the western term of 'third world women' were not western colonisers. Rather, they were British-university-educated local men, influenced by British social democratic ideology who formed Singapore's ruling political party, the People's Action Party (PAP), founded in 1954 (Chua, 2017; p. 6). Hence, using Lugones's (2010) interpretation of Quijano's (2000) "coloniality of power" is useful in interrogating the subjugation of women when their subjugation occurs in relations to the state's economic growth strategy.

Establishing race and citizenship in Singapore through gender

The ideology of women playing a vital role in holding a family together, yet only exists on the periphery was symbolic of the state's hegemonic family unit. The idea of 'head of household' is still a widely recognised concept in Singapore, used commonly in family and social policies. In 1993, then finance minister Richard Hu's reason for medical benefits not extended to female civil servants reinforced the idea the head of household is a man's role, "It is the husband's responsibility to look after the family's needs, including their medical needs. This is how our society is structured. It would be unwise to tamper with this structure" (AWARE, 2001, p. 6). Currently, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) (2020) defined 'head of the household' as,

 "the person generally acknowledged as such by other members of the household. The person acknowledged as the head by other members of the household is normally the oldest member, the main income earner, the owner-occupier of the house or the person who manages the affairs of the household. Where the household comprises a group of unrelated persons, the head of household refers to the person who manages the affairs of the household, or any person who supplied the information pertaining to other members."

While the Ministry of Social and Family Development's definition of head of household is now explicitly gender-neutral, the gender distribution of head of household in Singapore is still disproportionate. Households were headed predominantly by men, with 72.0% headed by males in 2019, a gradual and continuous decrease from 83.0% in 1990 (MSF,

2020)[7]. Based on the gender distribution of head of household, one could safely assume that the 'head of household' tends to be the father and/or husband.

This concept of 'head of household' could be traced to British colonial roots, as a tool for producing meanings of gender and race to deny the significance of commonwealth citizenship of black people. Black people, according to Mohanty (1991, p. 26), is used as a unifying term for colonised people from the third world without privilege of white adjacency. Since the 1950s, 'head of families' was a concept used in British immigration laws to prevent Black commonwealth citizens from entering Britain. This deems the commonwealth citizenship held by the black persons as irrelevant, granting them no access to the United Kingdom. The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrations Act assumed men as the 'heads of family' and allowed them to send for their 'wives', but not the other way around (Mohanty, 1991). This example shows how gendering practices have been used to organise citizens.

Singapore's 'head of household' worked similarly to the British immigrations law in the producing and organising race and citizenship in Singapore. This is further reinforced by patriarchal lineage of one's nationality, surname, race, assigned 'mother tongue' and access to community support. Race is defined within the CMIO framework based on the four main racial categories: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others. Mother tongues have been reduced, i.e. Chinese dialects have been reduced to 'Mandarin', various regional 'Malay languages' reduced to Malay, and Indian languages were reduced to 'Tamil'. The patriarchal lineage of race translates to social markers of citizenship and racial multiculturalism (Chua, 1996). It sets boundaries to membership and spatiality of different racial group.

For instance, an overseas-born child born to a Singaporean woman did not automatically become a Singaporean citizen until 2004 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). On contrary, children of Singaporean fathers inherit Singaporean citizenship. A child also took on their father's race until 2011 when double-barrelled race was allowed in the birth registration of a mixed-race child (Tan, 2012). While racial categories have been expanded to encompasses both parents' race, children would still need to select and align themselves to a 'dominant race', which would inform their opportunities and pathways. For example, if one's dominant race is Chinese, one will learn Mandarin throughout their compulsory education. One's dominant race also directly affects where one lives. The Ethnic

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[7] There is no additional information on how this data was collected and which household member answered the survey.

Integration Policy, which is aimed at preventing the formation of 'ethnic enclaves', sets a quota for each racial group in every block of public housing flat. As such, one's race could affect one's housing and educational prospects. The race registration of a mixed-race new-born is thus strategic in organising race in the wider society.

My aim of illustrating connections between Lee's ideology and Singapore's construct of 'head of household' to Mohanty's (1991) critique of British immigration laws is not to merely establish the colonial roots in Singapore. Rather, I aim to highlight the adoption of colonial strategy, using gender politics to produce race and citizens, by locals who were highly educated in the west.

By the 1980s, Singapore was experiencing falling birth rate from anti-natalist policies by introducing birth control and family planning in the 1970s (Yap, 2003). This led to policies aimed at establishing the Singapore citizen through immigration strategies and local reproduction. Following the state's modest success of attracting non-Singaporean born talents, they moved to producing their own talents, resulting in the Graduate Mother's Scheme, introduced in 1983 (Quah, 1984). This scheme was commonly described as a response to falling birth rate while women's education level increases (Fawcett & Khoo, 1980; Lyons-Lee, 1998). It encouraged graduate females to get married and produce intelligent offspring. The eugenicist basis of this scheme sparked the nation's 'Great Marriage Debate'.

The call for graduate mothers to reproduce while encouraging those who are lower-income and less educated to limit their family reproduction is "tied to a cultural/racial maintenance" (Heng & Devan, 1995). The scheme stemmed from the fear of a decreasing proportion of Chinese majority as the group was postponing marriage and childbirth at that time, and were also the most highly educated racial group (Wong & Yeoh, 2003). This scheme was more than proportionately inaccessible to the Malay community due to its significantly lower proportion of university graduates. In 1990, only 0.6% of Malay Singaporeans were university graduates in contrast to 5.1% and 4.1% of Chinese and Indian Singaporeans respectively (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002).

Race reproduction at that time needs to be seen against the backdrop of the earlier cold war in South East Asia when 'communism' was conflated with radical Chinese community due to highly mobilised population within Chinese education institutions (Chua, 1996). The closure of Nanyang University (*Nan tah*), the only Chinese-medium

university in 1980 meant that Chinese-speaking individuals no longer had the option to pursue university education in Singapore. That implies that ethnic Chinese who were able to pursue university education at that time were anglophone. Not only was the graduate mothers scheme eugenicist, it gatekeeps the reproduction of race in Singapore. By taking a pronatalist stance towards university graduate women into having children, it incentivised educated anglophone Chinese and Indians to reproduce. Hence, not only was a women's body in Singapore a tool to produce labour and reproducing offspring for the economy, it also reproduces the script for the desired qualities of citizenship.

Findings & Discussion

Chapter 1: Common destiny, differentiated opportunities

This chapter covers the conditions of Singaporean women's early adulthood during Singapore's industrialisation period. I explored the opportunities and barriers faced by interviewees during their life trajectory and how that further subjugate or mitigated their subjugation.

To gauge interviewees' autonomy at that time, I asked them about their aspirations when they were young. Interviewees generally felt distant from the idea of 'aspiration'. They stated that they in their young adulthood they were focused on 'trying to survive' and did not have time to think about what they wanted. Madeline described, *"In my generation, our fight is for survival, basic needs – to have shelter, a stable income, food on the table."* Not only did survival needs dominated interviewees' priorities at that time, it shaped their life trajectories and decision-making processes. Often, the word, 'aspiration'/ 'dream' was met with a disconnected blank look during interviews. I rephrased my question and asked how they imagined their lives at aged 30, 40, 50, etc. when they were younger. 'Younger' was broadly defined it as the age between 18 to late 20s. It was around the time when interviewees have completed secondary school education.

Si Hui: I really don't have much expectations because our time was like ok go out and work… All we care about it we have enough to pay bills, food to eat. Whatever is left just put in bank. All we care about it we have enough to pay bills, food to eat. Whatever is left just put in [the bank].

The singularity of interviewees' preoccupations over survival needs during their early adulthood was symbolic of a discursive 'good life' in Singapore. The ideal 'good life' stemmed from a place of poverty and shortage. It was determined by stability and safety linked to the fulfilment of material basic needs, i.e. shelter, food and savings for social mobility. When Singapore was granted independence, the nation lacked a universal sense of identity and destiny among its citizens (Chua, 1996). As such, capitalist development and its material promise became the common destiny for Singaporeans. ''Politics' was reduced to 'economics'', statesmen framed 'survival' of the new nation in economic terms, embodied by an individual's ability to 'make a living' (Chua, 1996, p. 53). The discourse of the Singaporean 'good life' became the universal destiny for Singaporeans, associating material progress to 'survival'. Besides interviewees' strong

preoccupations over survival and shortages, the resistance against my initial participation criteria that included an income limit signalled discomfort towards money and material possession.

The Singaporean destiny of 'survival' through capitalist goals and participation was reflected in the purpose of education and schooling trajectory. Education in Singapore was state operated meritocracy underpinned by a hegemonic fairness and equality, as tool for upwards social mobility (Chua, 1996). However, the reality of equal opportunity for upwards social mobility was not uniformed, and the connotation of equal opportunity as long as one works hard was at best an ideal. The following sub-chapters will elaborate on barriers that interviewees faced in pursuing a 'good life' in terms of their language, social class and gender. Some of them experienced multiple marginalisation because of a combination of identity markers. Barriers faced form the process that differentiates women along social class lines, subjugating some of them over time. The barriers; thus, determined whether women's social positions remained in Esteva and Prakash's (1998) one-third world, or moved towards two-third centre or along the margins between both positions.

Social class and natal family's support for education

Generally, interviewees' natal families were working class and their parents were not highly educated. In spite of not being able to help out with their children's schoolwork, interviewees' parents were supportive and recognised the importance of education as a means of upwards social mobility. However, interviewees' parents, while recognising the advantages of higher education, tended to not view it as problematic if their daughters did not pursue higher education after secondary level. Due to scarcity of resources, parents might be more likely to allocate financial resources for education to sons instead of daughters.

Joyce: I ever approached my mother saying that I wanted to go to Australia to take some course, and study there and work there. But my mum said no, the money will [be] reserved for your brother's study.

Among interviewees whose secondary school results were good enough to qualify for higher education, they either proceeded to GCE A level[8] at pre-university institutions (i.e., two-year 'junior colleges' or three-year 'centralised institutes') or pursued vocational diplomas at polytechnics or private institutions. Majority of interviewees took up diplomas rather than GCE A level based on two key reasons. The first reason being that entry standards for diplomas at that time were lower than requirements admitting into junior college. The second reason being diploma provided individuals with higher employability with work-related skillsets not provided by the theoretical GCE A level qualification. In contrast, a GCE A level graduate was required to continue with university education in order to be competitive enough for the labour market, thereby increasing the time and economic cost to participants who needed to join the labour force as quickly as they could.

Jia Xin: I took up [A-level] but I changed to diploma instead. Because I think it's faster, wouldn't take so long and not so expensive. [A-level] got to go to the university. So it cost more. Because if you stop at A-level [without continuing to university], a diploma will be better.

For those who were unable to afford or have good enough academic results to continue higher education, they joined the labour force. They formed the blue-collar[9] workforce contributing to the industrial production export driven economy. Education institutions then also offered limited types of courses, with more options in technical training to produce labour force in the industrial economy.

Madeline: If you are able to study, you will continue to study. If you can't, then get a job… There was also not as much opportunities in the past, or many courses. If you failed secondary 4 or didn't do so well to get onto Pre-U, which is 'A' Level, you can neither move up nor down. You are stuck right there…there was really just so little opportunities… All I thought of was that if I can't study, then I have to find a way to work. Opportunities to go to private school was very limited. I also didn't have money as my family was very poor.

This section illustrated how social class and gender act as determinants behind whether and where interviewees continued their education. Even if one's natal family were

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[8] GCE A Level is the acronym for General Certificate of Education Advanced Level and students' result determines whether they get a place in university education in Singapore.
[9] 'Blue-collar' workers include clerical and sales workers, production and transport operators, cleaners and labourers (MOM, 2021).

supportive of their education, daughters' education was not prioritised when there were limited resources within the family. Interviewees' options of education were also dependent on their socio-economic situation, and they may have to give up education to join the labour force if they did not have the resources to do so. Continuing education provided a chance to pursue the 'good life' and move towards the two-third centre.

Language discrimination

Interviewees who did not speak English were also in a disadvantaged position. Those who attended Chinese vernacular education or had little exposure to English language in their everyday lives faced additional barrier in advancing education and accessing higher-paying white collar [10] jobs. Not proficient in English doubly oppressed interviewees whose family was poor and had little resources to advance their education.

Madeline: Because I was Chinese-educated, the opportunities available for me were extremely horrible. There were English-educated people at that time and they had a lot more opportunities. Even during interview, English was being used. Hence, as Chinese-educated person at that time, people looked down on us. Employment opportunities was very limited. At most, you end up as a factory worker. Hence, there weren't really any dreams to talk about as I didn't even dare to dream.

Language affected interviewees' access to schooling and quality of employment opportunities. The ability to speak English translated to better and higher-paying job opportunities. Madeline expressed that she '*hated English so much*' at the time when she was unable to find suitable employment. There were separate classes in the commercial school attended by Doreen. Madeline's sense of resistance against English and institutional separation of the English and Chinese-educated echoed Teoh's (2018) finding whereby Chinese-educated interviewees in her book mentioned that there were a 'great deal of hostility' and English and Chinese-educated peers 'just don't mix' (Teoh, 2018, p. 61). Scholars have noted the marginalisation of Chinese-educated community during Singapore's post-independence decades (Teoh, 2018; Kwok & Teng, 2018). According to Roxana Waterson and Kwok Kian-Woon (2012, p. 10-11), this group of

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[10] 'White-collar' workers adopt Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) (2021) definition of 'PMET', referring to professional, managers, executives & technicians.

'Chinese educated have had to face the problem of marginalisation, in effect becoming a minority within a so-called majority race.'

The plight of Chinese-educated ethnic Chinese demonstrated Yeğenoğlu (1998)'s idea of one's identity is formed by a process that constitute various social identities. Determining interviewees' social positioning solely based on their ethno-racial group was insufficient to highlight the language-based marginalisation they face that had obstructed their pursuit of better jobs and higher education in Singapore which proletariased them.

Nevertheless, it was not only Chinese-educated individuals who experienced marginalisation due to language. Faridah, who attended English schools struggled with English language. She did not enjoy any proximity to English in her formative years as her family's main language of communication was Malay. It was through the additional effort she put in by repeating a year to retake her GCE A Level examination that she managed to pass her English examination, allowing her to attend an English-medium university. Likewise, Doreen initiated to transfer herself to English class in commercial school to be more exposed to English, so as to gain higher proficiency. Interviewees who did not enjoy close proximity to English language had to put in immense amount of effort and resilience to gain social and cultural capital, which may be out of the ordinary. Instead of joining the blue-collar workforce, like Madeline, which was a common phenomenon among students who did not perform well enough to continue education beyond secondary school at that time, Doreen and Faridah put in extra effort to remain in higher education.

Faridah: At O level, I passed everything, but I flunked English. I failed… so I repeated in school… Because I feel that my family background, I don't speak English you see. There's no English book, material to read at all. Only Malay. So my Malay is definitely very good because my mum will just buy those magazine… But I don't have any English books, that's why my English suffered… English is very important to make it easier for you to go through education.

Doreen: In commercial school, they separated us into classed of Chinese-educated and English-educated students although both classes were taught in English. They taught the same thing in both classes. I studied in the Chinese-educated class for a year then I decided to transfer to the English-educated class in my second year… It was stressful because when my friends speak, I dared to speak but I

know that I am not as articulated, or I don't know.. I- I took it to stride and saw it as learning (laughs) I treated it as practice.

Gaining English proficiency over time helped interviewees, such as Faridah and Doreen, who were not anglophone in their formative years, mitigated the linguistical marginalisation. With English proficiency, they gained access into higher education and the white-collar labour force. The job and education opportunities that came with the Doreen and Faridah's higher English proficiency demonstrated the temporal fluidity of marginalisation throughout interviewees' life course as they gained material possessions to move closer to the two-third centre (Esteva & Prakash, 199; 2014). On the other hand, Madeline's social positioning did not change significantly as she was stuck in the blue-collar labour force. It only changed after she pushed herself through higher education taught in English in her middle adulthood, subsequently securing a white-collar job.

Gender discrimination in resource-intensive work fields

In the case of women's access to higher education and certain white-collar labour force, the meritocratic notion of equal opportunity and fairness did not apply. Hegemonic domestic roles of women acted as a basis for discriminating against women's access to more prestigious fields of study. Although the discourse of women's role, paradoxically, included being in both the labour force and domestic sphere, the discrimination faced by interviewees highlighted that they were only welcomed into certain parts of the labour force – blue-collar or less resource-intensive white-collar occupations. This was a consequence of encouraging girls' education and labour force participation for the sake of advancing Singapore's economic development, and not for women's rights and gender equality. Nevertheless, interviewees whose job aligned with the state's economic growth strategy or were capable of producing future labour to sustain economic growth had more access to gaining job security and material returns.

Institutional gender gatekeeping was rooted in the discourse of women's reproductive duties, which essentialised them as default subjects for reproduction, caregiving and homemaking. The discourse of reproduction was mobilised to establish boundaries acceptable for women to participate in the white-collared labour force. Institutions used Singaporean women's discursive reproductive roles to gatekeep them from entering certain male-dominated fields. Those fields were, scripted as more resource-intensive and rigorous; hence unsuitable and wasteful for women who are 'bounded' by domestic

duties after marriage. Hence, entry into such fields were systematically less accessible to women than men. One widely known example is the field of medicine discriminating against women in Singapore by having a gender quota at that time (Tan, 2017).

Interviewees also shed light on other fields discriminating against women. Not only did institutional gatekeeping played a direct role, women were also penalised for not being able to play both paradoxical roles as little support was available for childcare and homemaking at that time, forcing them to exit their career prematurely:

Hannah: During my time… there was a particular course that was conducted jointly by [name of institutions], called Mechatronics. My result was much better than my ex. We applied for the same course, there's no reason I don't get it. But he got it, I didn't get it. So, conclusion is because I am female and he is male… [There are spaces] reserved for men. And that is kind of a pity [as] we are not given the same, similar opportunities and during my time, there is not enough support for women who work. It's extremely tough… Women are expected to work, come home and you still [have to] look after the family. There were no other avenues for women… You either have career or you have family... It's very hard to have both, very very hard.

Interviewees' field of work not only illustrated the boundaries of work that was considered a norm for women, it also depicted where Singapore was in establishing its economy. The choices available for interviewees to either continue education after secondary school or join the industrial labour force illustrated Mohanty's (1991) observation of the 1960s when western labour markets expanded labour-intensive industries to the third world. This led to an industrial labour force that overwhelmingly constituted young third world women. In the case of 1970s Singapore, the entrance of multinational capitalism drove the national economic growth and required blue-collar manpower in industrial production (Hansson et al., 2020).

In this study, interviewees mostly, although not exclusively, had white-collar jobs experiences. They were almost evenly split between working in traditionally female-dominated professional care work – such as education and social work – and male-dominated sectors such as engineering and computing. One of them was a blue-collared worker who only became a social worker after pursuing higher education in her middle adulthood. This phenomenon was reflective of 1980s-90s Singapore economy restructured to move into a high-tech industry, specialising in product design, research

and development that drove labour demand for more acute engineers (Kho, 2004). As the state recognised the need for women to join newer engineering professions in order for Singapore to succeed as a 'world of high-tech industries.' (Kho, 2004, p. 90). Filling needed manpower in the high-tech industry from the 1980s with Singaporean women's labour was similar to earlier times right after Singapore's independence when women's labour was used to fill the need for blue collar workers to drive the industrial economy.

Three of the interviewees filled demand for highly skilled work in the computing and engineering field required in a high-tech driven economy. All of them achieved success in their career in terms of acquiring leadership positions, salary and important work responsibilities. By being on track to contribute to the nation's strategy for capitalistic development, they received, in return, the materialistic promise to their labour at that time.

White collar work that was coded as women's work, such as teaching, was also in line with the national development strategy (Rahayani, 2016). Teaching, as a profession, was a form of reproduction as education was key to building a quality labour force. Education was a key driver for producing a highly skilled labour force; hence, important in the process of establishing Singapore (Kho, 2004). Teachers contributed indirectly to the future high-tech economy unlike interviewees already working in the sector as producers of labour.

Manpower produced for future economy growth sustains the existing capitalistic economy of Singapore. As Singapore's capitalistic economy was maintained by the subjugation of women and upholding race hierarchy, sustaining the economic structure would reproduce existing coloniality of power, continuing to subjugate groups that were already subjugated as lesser beings (Quijano, 2000; Chua, 2003; Chua,2017). As such, teachers' roles were important as instruments to sustain the economy via reproductive activities. The ultimate end product of interviewees' labour in female-dominated white-collar work was similarly to ensure Singapore's economic development. In return, their labour ensured material promises.

Overall, Singaporean women's access to different parts of the labour force was symbolic of the different position of Singapore in global capitalism at different time point. Women had greater access to blue collar jobs when Singapore was an industrial export country in the 1960s and 70s, whereas they had greater access to computing and engineering industry to drive Singapore's high-tech industry in 1980-90s.

This chapter presented conditions in which interviewees had to strategically decide their education choices based on the likelihood of them securing a good job thereafter to 'survive'. They faced barriers in accessing higher education and better jobs if they were not proficient in English or did not have skillsets that was aligned with Singapore's growth strategy. These barriers created an army of blue-collar low wage workers among women, proletariased by the state's formation of a multinational corporate capitalism to drive economic development (Mohanty, 1991; Offe, 1987 as cited in Chua, 1996).

Even though interviewees' participation in the white-collar labour force portrayed Singapore as a modern state in terms of women's representation in white-collar labour force, there were many barriers to overcome, such as language, social class and gender, to obtain to a white-collar job. As such, many other women were limited to blue-collar low wage jobs forming the Esteva's and Prakash's (1998, 2014) one-third social minority, excluded from reaping material returns of Singapore's economic growth. They were degraded into proletariat women in industrial work. Interviewees who overcame the barriers could access a place in white-collar labour force and had better chances of reaping the material promises of the Singapore's growth, moving towards the two-third centre.

Chapter 2: Negotiation of roles as mothers and wives

This chapter elaborates on interviewees' negotiation of reproductive roles, as wives and mothers, and providing labour in the workforce. Reproductive duties included domestic work and childcare to reproduce the next generation of quality labour force to drive Singapore's economic development. Both roles were seen as vital in nation building by statesmen whereby the producing labour contributed to economic development and reproductive duty maintained the overall social fabric of Singapore society (Zakaria & Lee, 1994; Kho, 2015).

The maintenance of Singapore's social fabric was practiced by maintaining dual-parent household units headed by a male figure. This potentially extended coloniality of power as household structure was key to reproduce race in Singapore (Mohanty, 1991; Chua, 1996; Quijano, 2000). As one's race and mother tongue were determined by paternal lineage, the social control over household structures had an exponential effect on overall race structure in Singapore. Nonetheless, this thesis's aim was to understand women's lived experience of being instruments to the state's effort in controlling race and driving economic growth. The following subsections explore interviewees' roles as mothers and wives as instruments to state's strategies to maintain social control.

Negotiation of roles as mothers

The paradoxical women's role of producing labour and reproducing was impossible to be achieve on equal levels as many Singaporean women struggled to grasp the diverged ends of contradictory policies towards women (Kho, 2015; Quah, 1998; Lazar, 1993). Moreover, interviewees mentioned that childcare service infrastructure was lacking at that time. They were often strained by infant care since they were not able to send their children to childcare services before they turned 18 months old, and infant care services was not available at that time.

Class-differentiated childcare arrangement and devaluation and women's labour. Childcare and work arrangements among interviewees were class-differentiated. When interviewees' children were schooling in the 1990-2000s, interviewees could be categorised loosely as Esteva and Prakash's (2014) one-third social minority and two-third majority. Interviewees' struggles to balance domestic work and employment also depicted an overall devaluation of women's labour.

Firstly, women belonging to the one-third social minority group tended to be the main, and often sole, breadwinner of their family. While they did not wear the title of head-of-household, they played important roles of financially sustaining their households. Interviewees were preoccupied with making ends meet to meet their household's daily needs. For example, Doreen furthered her studies which helped with her career progression, in part because of her passion in her work, but also as a backup plan if her husband loses his income:

Doreen: I like this job and I need the certificate for it. Another reason is that [my husband's] vision is not good. Hence, I cannot not be prepared. What if he becomes completely blind? Then I will have to take charge."

In the increasingly affluent Singapore, one-third women were marked by (1) being the key household provider and (2) having little to no access to alternative childcare support. As the need for income was urgent, they did not have the option to leave their jobs even if they could not find or afford trustworthy care for their children. They were more likely to settle for less ideal or no alternative care arrangement by bringing work home and be in employment with flexible timings or timings that complemented schooling hours of their children. Their lack of options showed that the narrative of choosing between childcare and work did not apply to them. Using Doreen's words, the one-third women played 100% of each role, bearing both paid and unpaid labour.

Doreen: At that time, there was no one to take care of the children and there's no one to help, I was a 100% housewife in the day then an insurance agent at night because I needed living allowance. The family needed the money. I am a 100% housewife in the day, but I also have a side-job… Even if I was a homemaker 100%, I also hosted international students in my home to get some pocket money, we needed some money…

Secondly, informal alternative childcare support from other women were critical in reducing working women's burden of childcare and domestic work. Sources of support tended to be older female kins, such as mothers, aunts, and mother-in-laws, or a neighbouring female nanny. They were likely to be trusted figures, perceived as capable to provide quality care for interviewees' children. As such, the informal support system of female kinship providing childcare and domestic labour played a critical role in enabling women to participate in the labour force, contributing to the Singapore economy. This support network of female kinship formed the invisible economy where the

economic value of care and domestic work was not measured as part of the country's production (Hingorani, 2018; Matthew, 2019).

Faridah: My aunt will come in the morning, because my 3rd child [was] sent to childcare. [Both my daughters] were already in school. So [my aunt] just do housework, cook for me, once she is done with everything, she goes home. Once I go home, I just have to serve dinner for the family, that's all because the washing and ironing all she did.

Nevertheless, kin-based support for domestic duties and childcare was unstable. When the person providing support fell sick or failed to provide adequate care for interviewees' children, it disrupted interviewees' work arrangement significantly, triggering them to quit their work. Especially since kins providing support tended to be older women, such as interviewees' mothers, mothers-in-law and aunt, they were more susceptible to age-related ailments and frailty over time, putting an expiry date to their availability to provide support.

The informal support that working women utilised was a common theme among two-third social majority women's negotiation of the paradoxical women's role. They transferred their reproductive roles of childcare to trusted older female kin(s) while continuing paid labour.

Often, interviewees who became homemakers departed or deprioritised their paid labour after the birth of their youngest child. This phenomenon demonstrated an attempt to extend one's dual responsibility of paid work and domestic labour. For instance, Hannah and Si Hui quitted their jobs during their career highs after their youngest child was born. Interviewees without any childcare support were usually struggling to perform both paradoxical roles simultaneously. Those who had financial resources at that time tended to either commit solely to their domestic role, or continue work by finding alternative, less ideal childcare arrangement. The availability of (unideal) childcare options did not extend to interviewees who were making ends meet, preoccupied with sheer survival like Doreen. Interviewees whose family was not in a one-third position to survive, like Hannah and Si Hui, were expected to put in 100% in domestic labour while their paid labour was deemed secondary, akin to a bonus.

Doreen: [My youngest daughter] needed to be home alone for 3 days a week. She will go home on her own after school and I will only be home at around 7 in the

evening... I think she was still too young at that time. I shouldn't have left her alone at home. I feel like I let her down in this period… [My neighbour] saw my youngest daughter, primary 2 at that time, going home on her own. She had to climb the gate outside the door to put her keys in to open it, then climb onto it again when she closes it.

Hannah: I had to take no pay leave to be in the hospital [with my child] that whole week. And it was so bad because being a department head, it is not… How understanding do you want your company to be? I was taking no-pay leave, so [that's] acceptable, but the stress was just too much for me. That was when I resigned. Then I became a housewife. That is when my career stopped.

My comparison between one third and two-third world interviewees was by no means a reduction of the challenges faced by interviewees in either group. Two-third world women were expected to focus solely on domestic labour especially childcare, which was apparent in them leaving their work when there was no alternative support for providing childcare. My findings aligned with Teo Yeo Yenn's (2013) argument that the principle role of Singapore women was to maintain the non-financial well-being of household. If they were highly educated, they were encouraged to continue working while managing her household. Their dual role was "shaped by an orientation towards nationalist goals of economic development" (Teo, 2013; p. 67).

However, fulfilling both roles without support was impossible, as depicted by Hannah and Si Hui quitting their jobs to ensure the non-financial well-being of their household. Through their experiences, I posit that women in high-paying jobs were placed in volatile employment conditions that limited their pursuit of paid labour. They needed to be prepared to leave their jobs to prioritise domestic roles whenever their support system broke down. The lack of stable and trustworthy support for childcare further accelerated this group of women into giving up their paid work, prematurely ending their career. As such, being in paid labour tended to be short-lived and was an illusion of agency among two-third world women, who tended to have advanced education qualifications.

Moreover, the decline in economic outlook of the country leading to a pay cuts increased the likelihood of disrupting women's career, especially if they did not have stable alternative childcare support. When that happened, they joined the ranks of poor third world women in the one-third world or hover around the margins of two-third. When Si Hui's mother suffered health complication unable to provide care for her children

anymore, the halving of Si Hui's salary due to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 sped up her becoming of a homemaker. Her halved salary was no longer seen as worthwhile in contrast to providing full-time care for her children. In Si Hui's quote, it was striking that while decision-making regarding childcare arrangements were shared between spouses, the work fell solely on mothers leaving them to face the consequences. Two-third world women giving up paid work demonstrated the devaluation of their paid work as secondary, not deemed vital in supporting the family compared to their husband's work.

*Si Hui: [My mother] had [medical condition] in early part of that year… That time was also recession… my company made us work half a day, pay was cut half so my husband said, forget it, **we** [will] take care of our own children, let your mum rest. That how **I** end up like that.*

Friedrich Engels's The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (2010), first published in 1884, argued that modern industrialisation opens an opportunity for liberation of proletarian wives by redistributing their time between the private sphere and earning from public production. Engels's (2010) argument was salient among interviewees who had to make ends meet and did not have the option to choose between work or domestic responsibilities. They formed a group of proletarian wives, in Engels's term, who had a higher degree of liberation in the capitalistic world compared to the bourgeois wife. The proletarian wife's public participation in labour allowed her to break out of the domestic confines.

However, the 'higher degree of liberation' that proletarian women acquired by participating in the workforce argued by Engels (2010) should not be confused with liberation from capitalism and the subjugation of women. Silvia Federici (2004) argued that women's labour was already devalued, and they faced employment restrictions which limited them to jobs carrying the lowest status in society. Engels's (2010) idea 'domestic confine' was grounded on the reduced status of women's skilled production within the domestic sphere, denying women's domestic work value and significance (Federici, 2004). If women's domestic labour was seen as valuable and as an important part of production that provided fair returns for their work, then there is nothing to break out from. Federici's (2004) argument applies to interviewees. Even though Doreen's previous proletarian circumstances allowed her to work, the work that she had access to were mostly blue-collar jobs.

> *Doreen: Because I needed living allowance, so I searched for everything, even tailoring and such… [I found a job selling] insurance, [which] was the most ideal employment at that time. I can be at home in the day, because you only meet clients after work.*

Similarly, jobs available to middle-aged women outside of the work force were limited to jobs of low wage and status. Interviewees' previous work, education and homemaking skills were not considered as valuable experience to access to better forms of employment. For instance, Si Hui did not have many employment options other than low-wage blue collar work even though she used to hold a managerial position overseeing major projects before being a homemaker for more than a decade. The restrictions faced by skilled middle-aged women accessing labour market outside of low-wage work have been so normalised, carrying the notion that they should be satisfied with any kind of work, albeit the bare minimum.

> Doreen: If [women] had stopped [working] for a very long time, for example they have stopped and [want to come] out to work when they are 60… there's no way… I noticed that in the supermarket near me, there's a lot of these aunties. They seem to enjoy their work. Maybe they no longer have to earn a lot now, and they enjoy the pleasures of just working. There are 4-hour shifts and they seem to be happy doing that.

> Si Hui: I am not going to do things like [being] a cashier. I want to do something where I can interact with people and be happy with, not something for the sake of getting that $50, that's not what I want to do. Something that I like to do.

The normalisation of middle-aged women satisfied with any employment even if it devalued their experiences and knowledge demonstrated Engels' (2010) seeing proletarian women's in the labour force as breaking free of the confines of domestic responsibilities. It failed to acknowledge the fundamental devaluation of women's domestic labour and limiting women to jobs that are low-wage and disrespected.

Singaporean motherhood shaped by meritocratic ideal of social mobility*.* Interviewees' generation of motherhood was underpinned by a fundamental desire for their children to have a 'better life'. 'Better life' for children was built on the Singaporean destiny of 'good life', having upwards social mobility and access to greater material

resources than interviewees (Chua, 1996). The optimal conditions for social mobility were grounded on hegemonic notions of fairness and equality carried by the meritocratic education system as a tool for upwards social mobility (Chua, 1996). As such, interviewees strived to give their children resources to excel in their academic performance. Optimal environment for children to succeed academically were perceived as having access to quality childcare or economic stability, ideally both.

Beyond giving birth, reproduction duties of women include ensuring children become discursive good citizens who were able to contribute to the country's economy. Interviewees shouldered the burden of ensuring their children become good citizens and tended to deprioritise paid work when their children did not perform well in school. When children excelled academically, they were assumed to be a good citizen who had potential in contributing to the labour force. Hence, if they did not perform well academically, they risked becoming a discursive 'bad' citizen who was deemed as having less potential in future labour force. Chua (1996) also mentioned that children's achievement is one form of material success which forms the anxieties of everyday life among many in Singapore. The punishment for being a 'bad' citizen would be social exclusion from enjoying the material promises of capitalism, which was not the 'good life' that interviewees hoped for their children.

Afterall, women's paid work was only deemed secondary to the household, unless they are the sole or main breadwinner. Therefore, the burden of ensuring their children's academic performance fell heavily on mothers. Guiding one's children with their schoolwork and ensuring that they succeed academically formed a significant part of unpaid domestic labour duties. This was especially so for educated women, as they were assumed to have the knowledge to guide their children with their schoolwork.

Si Hui: Because I don't send [my kids to] tuition, I am the tutor also. Um... I [did] what other people [do], give them assessment books to do. Tutor also got to do marking and then headache la actually. (Shudders) I think of all these things, I don't want to go through all that.

The phenomenon of women giving up paid work when children were not exceling in their academic studies was more pronounced among interviewees who were in two-third margins at that time. Their income was not considered to be critical to their households' livelihood, but hiring a tutor was a luxury. As such, they personally took up the role of supervising and guiding their children's learning.

Madeline: At that time, my son wasn't doing well in school, so I thought that something is very wrong, and I want to stay at home to watch over him. But when someone else is watching over your business, it starts to decline. It got to a point where the business is pretty much gone. I failed the business. I lost a lot of savings.

On the contrary, two-third centre interviewees could direct the pressure of ensuring children academic success to private tuition for their children. Having enough material resources to distribute their motherhood roles, they retained agency to continue paid work as they did not need to personally help their children in their studies.

Faridah: I go back [from work] at about 6, then have to look [at my] children's schoolwork, this stuff. This part is a bit challenging, but my husband engaged a tutor to help. He knows that I cannot teach my children, especially PSLE[11] maths. Oh dear, I cannot do it… I have the support from my family, and we engaged a tutor to help the children with their studies.

Interviewees' preoccupation with their children's studies and self-efficacy in helping their children with academic work signalled a turn in Singaporean familial roles and economic circumstances. As Doreen described, *"the previous generation had a tough life being busy trying to survive. For us, we are more affluent, but we wished for our children to do better academically."* Interviewees' parents did not have resources and as much pressure to help children with their academic work. Through this intergenerational difference of parenting, it was clear that interviewees were more educated and had attained upwards social mobility compared to their parents' generation. Interviewees' preoccupation of children's academic performance, symbolic of upwards mobility, was a deviation from earlier preoccupation of survival, symbolising an increased affluence among interviewees indicating that Singapore's economy was more established.

Financial consequences of negotiating motherhood and paid work

Interviewees who stopped work for an extensive period lost financial independence and employability over time. Those who used to be in the two-third social majority when employed were able to take a step back from income generating activities to prioritise domestic labour as they have accumulated independent economic resources. However,

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[11] PSLE refers to Primary School Leaving Examination that students take to graduate compulsory primary education. One's PSLE result determine the chances that a student have to enrol in different secondary schools.

The lack of income coupled with diminishing savings by being outside the labour force over an extended period of time gradually pushed them towards a financially precarious position. They resulted being on the margins of two-third and one-third world.

When interviewees who were not working have depleted their personal accumulation of financial resources, they depended on household allowances provided by their husband. This consequence aligned with Federici's (2004) writing on the emergence of housewives in the 19th century whereby the sexual division of labour limited women to reproductive work; hence, increasing their dependence on men whose command over women's labour increased due to their wages. Household allowance that interviewees received was not specifically directed at interviewees' individual consumption or as a compensation for her domestic labour. It was meant for day-to-day living expenses of the entire household. Akin to the country's policies related to girls and women, it was not aimed at their well-being and rights, but for the maintenance of the nation. Women only benefit through the by-product of the ensuring of the nation's and household's well-being.

Si Hui: It was quite tough [to become a housewife], because no income you know, suddenly. I cannot buy things as and when I feel like. Then everything is like, just cannot buy lor[12]. Got to think carefully. All my money goes to food that's all. After that time, no clothes, no nothing.

As such, interviewees who were homemakers did not receive any wage from their intimate labour. Intimate labour, according to Boris and Parreñas (2010, p. 2) constitute a range of activities such as "bodily and household upkeep, personal and family maintenance, and sexual contact and liaison." Examples of intimate labour includes the act of physical and emotional closeness, building familiarity, and acquiring knowledge about another person through one's own observation and interaction. Interviews who had been homemakers described intimate labour as demanding and labour-intensive. Si Hui described her duties as a homemaker as hectic managerial work that required a multitude of skills, learning and multitasking.

Si Hui: For us, we can multitask at home. Cook, teach […] I have so many roles at home. Morning drive them to work, ok, I wake up very early, prepare breakfast […] I vary their breakfast… then send them to school so I drive, rush back, [then] I go marketing. I don't anyhow buy, I see what is good and fresh, what is on [promotion] and sometimes I stock them [up]. [After returning home], I hand over the car to

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[12] 'Lor' is a Singlish filler word. In this context, it could be interpreted as a reluctant acceptance.

my husband, he drives to work. Then [I] teach my children… we sometimes walk back [from school]. I teach them how to take public transport [and] schoolwork, I also learn at the same time. Then I cook […] I don't know how to cook you know? My mum didn't teach me, so I learn along the way. While they are at school, I googled how to do this, what can I do? I called up my mum, call up my auntie, checked online… Every night, [I] have to train my children to take up a hobby, every time [I] got to watch them, see what they are good at…

While valued for their domestic labour, homemakers did not enjoy a high and respected social status. Interviewees also experienced differentiated treatment between working and being a full-time homemaker. Educated women who became homemakers were pitied. This demostrated the devaluation of women's domestic work; hence, homemaking was seen as unskilled and less valued (Federici, 2004).

Hannah: When you are a homemaker, people tend to think that you are some 'ah soh'[13].That you are probably not educated and are some dumb woman… Whereas when you are working, people tend to think, ok, you must be more… There is still that stereotype.

Interviewees who stopped working and became full-time homemakers over extended period of time formed Esteva and Prakash's (2014) definition of the two-third world living close to the margins with the one-thirds. While they were not preoccupied with sheer survival needs, they did not have real access to benefits enjoyed by non-marginals two-thirds. Relying on their husband and/or children to maintain their basic livelihood, they did not have access to the privilege of household members whom they depend on. Since one's social class in Singapore was represented by overall household income, the individual precarity and lack of financial agency among interviewees who did not have their own income was made invisible. Their real financial position left them precarious, having little control over their own sustenance. They did not possess anything tangible of material value of their own.

The privilege of being in the centre of two-third world and having one's own income meant being sheltered from the stress of financial precarity and survival. Two-third centre interviewees were socially included as they were likely to have the privilege to pursue mainstream capitalistic activities, such as making investments or participating in

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[13] Ah soh: Hokkien slang for middled-aged women who is lower class and unsophisticated

consumerism. Financially independent interviewees were able to be more carefree in fulfilling their own desires.

Moreover, interviewees who had their own financial resources were observed to exercise more agency in making financial related decisions for the entire family. For example, Madeline was the one deciding to downgrade their family's apartment when the family needed money. That was not typical as the Singaporean women's domain in household decision was generally limited to non-financial related matters (Teo, 2013). The different levels of decision-making power and emotional weight between two-third marginal and centre interviewees were seen in the ways Madeline and Si Hui described control over their current lives. Madeline's emotional lightness and Si Hui's anxiety illustrated the nuances between the two-third centre and two-third marginals.

Madeline: I was blessed that I have a sum of money after selling the house. When I work now, it is not about "having to work, otherwise I don't have money left." I am not at the state. I have my own savings now and continue to work. I am free to eat what I like, free to go wherever I want to go. Hence, I think I am quite happy.

Si Hui: My eldest [child] recently started to invest in stocks because she has savings now… Every time when she says, "oh mummy, I made this money", I tell her, "you don't tell me because I get very sad, I don't have any extra cash"… When you come to this age, there is no income and you feel a bit useless. (Pause and cries)

Interviewees' financial independence and security cascaded down to indirect socio-emotional impacts which will broken down in the following subsections. This section had shown how interviewees social position changes based on how they carried out the paradoxical duties of Singaporean women. Having kins and material resources to distribute domestic duties have been significant in allowing two-third centre women to retain their social positionings. Without these resources, it was easy for interviewees to become one-third or two-third marginals with not opportunity to move up the ladder anymore.

'Foreign talent' and loss of employability. Firstly, interviewees who became housewives lost their employability to obtain paid employment that valued their skills and experience over time. Interviewees, both two-third centre and marginals, similarly

attributed their loss of employability as they aged to migrant expatriate labour, commonly known as 'foreign talents'. I argue that their sentiments stemmed from the juxtapositioning of Singaporean women and 'foreign talent' in the state's pronatalist narrative. In 1980-1982, the state experimented with attracting non-Singapore born talents, or 'foreign talent', to join the cabinet and civil service (Quah, 1984). The recruitment of 'foreign talent' was of a 'modest success', as such the state decided to look inwards for talents becoming selectively pronatalist (Quah, 1984, p. 197).

'But these efforts to help Singapore compete in the New Economy will come to nothing if we do not have enough Singaporeans!' exclaimed former prime minister, Goh Chok Tong (2000). He was deeply concerned with the low total fertility rate, and urged Singaporeans to get married and have children to sustain the labour force and economic growth, otherwise the country's survival would be at stake (Teo, 2013). He acknowledged that he has 'no authority to order you to get married, or to decide how many children you should have', and "will bring in foreigners and new immigrants (Goh, 2000). 'They will complement our needs, but they cannot replace us' (Goh, 2000). Goh spoke of bringing 'foreign talents' for the sake of the country's well-being as the implication of Singaporeans not producing. Using 'foreign talents' as the solution to Singapore's low fertility rate, he situated them next to key people who were responsible for reproduction – women. But not just any women, women who were seen as more likely to reproduce talents for Singapore's labour force. Following the eugenicist history of Singapore's reproduction, women targeted to be responsible for reproducing talents for the country were well-educated and deemed capable of producing intelligent and productive manpower for the future.

As the selective pronatalism of the state population strategy was targeted at educated women, especially university graduate, Goh's speech and the country's population strategy pitted educated women, like interviewees, against 'foreign talent' competing for citizenship. Rather than nationality status on identity card, I refer 'citizenship' to the rights and privileges granted to a citizen to access a good and full life. Participating in capitalistic activities is also a part of one's exercise of citizenship as the Singapore destiny is grounded on the material promises of capitalist growth (Chua, 1996).Interviewees took the most direct hit of being juxtapositioned next to 'foreign talents', being reminded of the expendability of their own citizenship. An immediate example of citizenship rights is employment and being able to earn an income for one's living. As such, interviewees who were highly skilled and educated faced looming threats

of losing their employments and other citizenship benefits if they could be so easily replaced.

Interviewees faced challenges in accessing higher-paying job market that matches their skills and experience after being outside the labour force for extended period of time. Losing employability caused them to be stuck in a position whereby they were financially dependent and insecure. As such, they lost access to utilising employment means to live well and fully. On the other hand, 'foreign talents' who have gained citizenship have access to the employment market. Their employment allowed them to pursue the full life that interviewees were no longer able to, leading to interviewees experiencing anxiety and resentment. As such, 'foreign talents' were perceived by interviewees as a major threat to educated Singaporean women's identity and benefits as citizens.

Si Hui: I did [thought of returning to work], but nobody wants me. Our government wants foreign talents (laughs) I am not the only one actually… it's not easy for me to go out and get a good job that is well-paid… [Companies] rather get foreigners; they are also younger and cheaper to employ.

Hannah: It is at the expense of the locals… Singapore just ran out of ideas and they just start importing people. Import, import import. Now, with the Covid-19, what happened?... You find locals, middle-aged out of job. What can they do? [Private-hire car drivers.] What else? They can't do anything more.

However, educated Singaporean women without support for domestic duties were caught in a double bind. Even if they continued working, they faced challenges that were highly likely to drive them into domestic labour ultimately. Once they begun their domestic labour, they lose access to material benefits gained from employment. Over time, they were less likely to secure employment that matched their skills and experience; hence unable to participate in national capitalistic activities which was key in being a Singaporean. As such, a Singaporean woman could not gain full material promise of the country's capitalistic growth. The double bind illustrated how expendable women were in establishing and maintaining the country. If they did not reproduce, the state would look outside and turn to 'foreign talents', an import commodity that filled the gap when women did not perform their roles of reproductivity. The effect of utilising women as dispensable reproductive resources led to women whose identities as citizens were lost or threatened to direct their helplessness and frustration towards 'cheaper and younger

foreign talents'. However, both were ultimately expendable resources to forward the country's economic growth.

Fulfilling role of 'filial daughter'. Secondly, having financial independence was vital in maintaining interviewees' identity as daughters and extending their relationship with their natal family. Contributing financially to one's parents was a common kinship ritual that interviewees desired to perform to fulfil the role of a filial daughter. When daughters get married, they are symbolically part of her husband's family; hence, losing symbolic and physical proximity to perform rituals of intimacy towards her natal family. One Chinese saying goes, ' married daughter is akin to water splashed out (jià chūqù de nǚ ér, pō chūqù de shuǐ 嫁出去的女儿, 泼出去的水)'. It refers to a daughter joining her husband's family after marriage and ceased to be a formal member of her natal family (Shi, 2009). One is no longer responsible for her natal family as her duties have been transferred to her husband's family as she plays the role of daughter-in-law (Chappell & Kusch, 2007). It should be noted that this study did not interview enough participants from non-Chinese ethnic groups to understand whether they experience similar relationship with their natal families.

According to Yeoh et. al (2013, p. 454), in the context of Vietnamese migrant wives, Asian femininity is described as 'the discursive contours of the meanings of 'good wife', 'filial daughter' or 'dutiful sister''. Interviewees expressed holding similar values. Acts of filial piety typically include provision of intimate care, emotional support, financial and material support, and support in activities of daily living (ADLs) (Shi, 2009). It carries emotional meanings of care and gratitude to elders, and reciprocating their parents' effort and goodwill for raising interviewees. Filial piety values are also reinforced by Singapore family laws and policies that places the responsibility of old age support primarily on nuclear family members and children (Rozario & Rosetti 2012; Kang et al., 2013; Thang et al., 2021).

As married daughters lost emotional and physical proximity with their natal family, financial contribution out of their own pocket became all the more important as it may be the most practical and convenient way for daughters to perform intimacy with their natal parents while apart. The ritual of contributing to their parents, carried significance of care and appreciation; thus, maintaining familial ties between interviewees and their natal parent(s), fostering emotional closeness and comfort. None of the interviewees perceived filial piety as a form of obligation.

Interviewees who were unable to contribute to their parents tended to experience grief and regrets. The loss of financial independence prevented interviewees from contributing to their natal family; hence, unable to practice kinship rituals of care and gratitude especially towards their parents. Hannah was unable to contribute allowance to her mother, while the Faridah financially supported her fathers' medical treatment towards his end-of life. They exuded vastly different emotions towards their identity as daughters.

Hannah: We were living on my savings. So I don't give my mum [money], in fact, my mum and my sisters helped out by buying milk powder for me, buying pampers for me whenever they come, and that is like every month they supply this for me…

Me: Did you ever feel bad for not contributing to your mum because…

Hannah: Oh yes. (Starts crying) In fact, my mum is the one supplementing me. So that is really (pause) not good. Very bad. (Paused, continues crying)

Faridah: With my pay, I am able to support both my parents… my father just passed away 6 months ago. But I am very happy that I really take care of him, even though I didn't physically take care of him, financially, [I gave] all the financial support, [providing] the best hospital care I can give [to] him until he passed on.

Therefore, having financial independence was crucial in maintaining interviewees' identity as daughters and cementing their familial ties with their natal family. Even though they were not obliged to practice rituals of giving to their parents, it was considered important to interviewees personally, and not being able to do so brought about emotions of regrets and disappointment towards oneself.

Fear of becoming a burden in old age. The most common preoccupation that interviewees had towards ageing and old age was to become a burden, especially to their children. Nuclear family members were considered to be the first line of support by state policies. In the event that one was unable to be self-sufficient, nuclear family members were expected to be the the first to bear responsibility of providing, before turning to state resources such as social services (Mehta, 2006). Hence, interviewees stressed the importance of being healthy and having sufficient financial resources for ageing so that they do not have to seek help from children.

Knowing that their children's generation faced greater stress in with higher cost of living, all interviewees wished to be self-reliant. As children will form interviewees' first line of support as state support is the last resort, interviewees, especially those without substantial savings, were acutely anxious about falling sick or being in need of financial support.

Hannah: Given the situation as it is, it is so expensive and you want your children to still support you, that is tough, very tough for the kids. And the kids, if they want to start their own family then it is very stressful, extremely stressful."

Interviewees also considered it impossible to age with dignity if they were not financially independent since they would be reliant on their children, which was considered embarrassing and shameful.

Hannah: When you [don't] have money, what living are you talking about? You probably will not be able to survive. So the most important is that they must have the financial means, then if they have the financial means, that is not a problem. Without the financial means… you can't even talk about [dignity].

Interviewees' preoccupation and envisioning of old age illustrated the two-third marginal and two-third centre difference. Interviewees who have been outside the labour force for a long time did not have substantial amount savings for retirement. Hence, they were preoccupied with their familial support systems collapsing, especially with their children's resources being thinly spread out. If this support system were to collapse, their daily livelihood would be threatened. Preoccupied by survival, two-third marginals were concerned about daily 'life' while two-third centres were able to think about 'good life'.

As a result, interviewees outside of the labour force for a long time generally expressed more pressing financial-related worries about old age. They tended to have barely any savings in their Central Provident Fund (CPF) Basic Retirement Sum[14] as they did not make any contribution when homemaking. CPF is a compulsory savings scheme in preparation for retirement to all employees and their employers contribute to monthly; therefore, individuals outside the labour force were not able to make any contributions. Interviewees who were homemakers for an extended period of time tended to have so

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[14] The Basic Retirement Sum provides a "monthly income to support a basic standard of living during retirement" through monthly pay-outs when one turns 65 (Central Provident Fund Board (CPF), 2021a)

little savings in their CPF account that the amount fell significantly below the minimum sum. Hence, they could only receive their monthly pay out when they turn 65. Furthermore, their Basic Retirement Sum savings was so little that their monthly pay-out would barely supplemented the cost of basic livelihood. According to Teo Yeo Yenn and Ng Kok Hoe (2019), an estimated amount of $1379 is needed to maintain a basic standard of living.

Si Hui: Every time I think about my CPF I get very sad because there is [a] minimum sum [to be met]… As of now, I cannot take out any money even though I have already passed 55… my pay-out will be very little [every month]

The Matched Retirement Savings Scheme[15] was introduced in 2021 to run for five years to help 'senior Singaporeans who have yet to have the current Basic Retirement Sum build their CPF retirement savings for higher monthly pay-outs in retirement', and 440 000 individuals were eligible (CPF, 2021b; Tan, 2021). It does so by matching family's contribution up to a maximum amount of $600 per year. While interviewees who did not have the minimum Basic Retirement Sum acknowledged that the scheme helped them to gain some savings, it was still insufficient to alleviate them from financial precarity at old age.

Despite homemakers having close proximity to their nuclear family members, such as having close emotional relationship and living together, they did not enjoy the same privileges of financial security that their family members had. As receivers of their family's financial support, they did not have full access their family's material resources. This depicted how two-third marginals did not have access to the privileges of the two third centre in the context of Singaporean women who left the labour force to provide unpaid domestic labour. While interviewees and their family collective form a middle-income household, their individual access to material resources were differentiated. Hence, household socio-economic status made precarity faced by homemakers invisible.

Mitigation of Singaporean wives' subordinated position

Having one's own heterosexual marriage and forming a nuclear family with children was described as a default life process among interviewees. The naturalistic and normative idea of a heterosexual marriage and childbearing carried a discourse that the forming of

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[15] I was first introduced to this scheme by Si Hui.

a family unit would run its course. Nevertheless, there was an unspoken aspect on how to pick a suitable partner for oneself. The 'who' and 'how' to pick a heteronormative partner were not so clear in the process of socialising interviewees when they were young.

Faridah: I cannot wait to grow up. When I was in primary school, I [asked] why is it so long [before I] get to 20years old, to get married... I imagine myself, when I am 40, I am already settled down with children. That's why I married young right? 23. I am married in my 3rd year of [university], at that time I am not really ambitious… but I've always wanted to start a family. I am always looking forward to have my first child after I married.

Interviewees discussed spousal hierarchy and support structure within their marital unit during interviews. Heterosexual spousal relation is one form of gender relations. Gender relations include different categories of women's and men's relations to various social phenomena such as the state, division labour and economic systems (Iman, 1997). Structured by ideologies, beliefs, practices, property and resource ownership, and so on, gender relations permeate the entire society (Iman, 1997; Nkenkana, 2015).

In this study, a differentiated acceptability was observed between husband and wife being 'head of household' in private and in public. Interviewees tended to implicitly place their children's father as the centre of reference in their family and couple unit as the head of household. Interviewees constructed the head of household as dual - being a husband and a father. The ideal head of household ensures the material functioning and well-being of the household. By positioning husbands as the head of household, the role of wives existed in relation to their husbands and played supporting roles. The expected duties of a good wife included managing the non-financial aspect of the household and not undermining their husbands (Teo, 2013).

However, the reality of household financial arrangement seldom matched this ideal notion of household headed by men. In this study, regardless of being high or low income, majority of the interviewees were main or sole breadwinners of the family. Interviewees' academic and career success risked undermining their husband as they potentially appeared more capable than him. Hence, interviewees negotiated this mismatched gender reality by ensuring that their husbands would not be embarrassed by appearing less capable within their couple unit and towards other people. For example, Hannah drew a significantly higher salary than her ex-husband. When applying for a credit card,

she arranged for him to be named as the main credit cardholder even though she was the actual main credit cardholder paying the bills and the reason behind the application approval.

Hannah: When we first wanted to have a credit card, his pay was so low that he cannot [qualify for it]. Of course, I can, but I will become the main cardholder. I told my contact, to put him as the main cardholder instead of me. Yeah, that was kind of stupid. I became the supplementary instead. It was approved solely based on my occupation and salary.

The positioning of who was the acceptable head of household within each household's private reality and in public demonstrated gender relations in Singapore within a heterosexual domestic sphere (Ikan, 1997). It showed an active upholding of men as the head of household in public spheres by both interviewee and their husbands. Women's oppression is produced and reproduced through 'cultural habits', sustained as activities of both sexes (Nkenkana, 2015). As such, the patriarchal positioning of 'head of household' reproduced gender relations in Singapore that surbordinated women (Heng & Devan, 1995; PuruShotam, 1998; Wong & Yeoh, 2003).

Men's Ego and Asian Values. The stereotype of men as egoistic, which interviewees considered to be a traditional masculine trait was critical in upholding men as 'head of household' in public. Often, interviewees characterised men as 'egoistic', and used it to reason spousal hierarchy. They were mindful of their husbands feeling undermined. The tolerance that interviewees have for their husband's ego was often attributed to 'Asian tradition/values' which entails wives to be subservient to their husbands. Interviewees frequently described 'Asian values' as traditional and backwards. Those who were more successful than their husband in status quo, such as being more highly educated or who earned more, tended to be even more anxious about their husband's 'ego'.

Madeline: Men are still very 'Asian'. Lots of ego, only knows how to earn money and then go home.

Faridah: The mentality of the husband is still the traditional mentality. As for me sometimes, I have to strike a balance. On one hand, I want this career, but I also have to realise that I am also the wife. Sometimes, when I feel like

> *[sticking] out my voice, speaking my mind, but at the same time, I don't want my husband to feel like "oh you think you smarter than me is it?" that sort of thing. Remember you are still the wife, so it's not easy [for] women now, with a career, be that ideal wife, it's not easy.*

Then prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kwan Yew, described the 'Asian model' as individuals existing in the context of their family, and saw financially independent women as a threat to family units when they do not need to put up with unhappy marriages (Zakaria & Lee, 1994). The discomfort towards power dynamics leaning towards the wife within spousal units was observed through Hannah's initiative to name her ex-husband as the main credit cardholder.

The state utilised 'Asian model' to position Singapore closer to East Asian values, perceived to be more compatible with maintaining social order (Zakaria & Lee, 1994). According to Teresa Wong & Brenda Yeoh (2003), 'Asian Values' serves to preserve the state's ideal heterosexual relationship of the dual-parent family, as opposed to 'western values' which was seen as less family-centric. The preservation of social order based on the Asian Model required the pursuit of the ideal family through the subordination of women, including maintaining the domestic sphere as women's domain (Wong & Yeoh, 2003; PuruShotam, 1998; Heng & Devan, 1995).

Interviewees 'letting' or normalising husbands as heads-of-household reflected their duty to maintain the social fabric. The maintenance of a hegemonically ideal Singaporean family unit was through spousal hierarchy. Together, interviewees' and their husbands' responsibility was to fulfil the Singapore destiny of heterosexual married Singaporean couples. Their destiny was to reproduce the ideal family to preserve the Asian Model, which was defined by a legal heterosexual marriage with children, sexual division of labour, and an expectation that younger family members would support their elders (Teo, 2013). The ideal traditional family structure is the key fulfilling the universal destiny for Singaporean marked by material progress (Chua, 1996). Only through this, married couple and their children's promise of a 'full life' is assured. Their citizen rights and benefits were affirmed after they fulfilled their duties of producing the ideal family structure, qualifying for subsidised public housing[16], and receiving grants and cash gifts after they have given birth to a child[17].

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[16] For example, CPF Housing Grants (see https://www.hdb.gov.sg/residential/buying-a-flat/new/schemes-and-grants/cpf-housing-grants-for-hdb-flats)
[17] See Baby Bonus Scheme
https://www.babybonus.msf.gov.sg/parent/web/home?_afrLoop=61015793717096025&_afrWindowMode=0&_afrWindowId=19arum5oed_14

Emotional consequences of subordinated position as wives

Couple's collective pursuit of the Singapore destiny often overshadowed their individual roles and needs. Their parental responsibilities tended to overshadow their individual spousal needs and roles. The functioning of each household prioritised the well-being and success of children, neglecting marital well-being. As such, interviewees were observed to diminish their own needs as wives. Occupied with their duties as mothers and being mindful of not overstepping their husbands' ego are subservient roles played by wives to uphold the Asian model ideal family. While yearning for their husband's emotional support, interviewees paradoxically reduced their entitlement to their spouse's emotional support and affection. They tended to feel obliged to be grateful for having their living needs met and feel guilty if their overall needs were unfulfilled.

The necessary gratitude towards husbands providing for their wives' and their children's living needs shows a paternalistic gender relation. The paternal role was to provide for the household, whereby the receiver of the married man's provision, the household, was subordinate to him. Hence, they ought to be grateful. Intimacy and socio-emotional support from one's husband was deemed a bonus. Moreover, intimacy and emotional expressions were coded as feminine, not a masculine role. Married women with children were supposed to continue their duties as mothers and wives, without expecting her emotional and social needs to be fulfilled. As such, wives continued to be mindful of their husbands' ego, despite feeling isolated and unsupported, lacking recognition for their domestic labour.

Moreover, having different aspirations and goals with their spouses also intensified interviewees' sense of isolation as they were on a different life trajectory from their spouses. This was more commonly observed among women who attained greater career or education success than their husbands. For example, Madeline's husband used to put her down when she pursued her master's degree at middle-age.

Madeline: My partner wasn't supportive. He didn't encourage me. Because he thought that you were already so old, what's the point of spending so much money [to study]? Are you able to earn it back? Is there use for what you study? Will anyone employ you? Why study if you already don't have money? Hence, I wouldn't tell him much about what I want to do because he would give me a lot of toxic comments.

The discomfort recognising wives as 'head of households' reflected the fear of then Prime minister, Lee Kwan Yew, who argued that financially independent women threaten family structure, thereby destabilising the social fabric of the country (Zakaria & Lee, 1994). Fixated on the state functioning, his argument was detached from well-being and autonomy of women. Couples were imposed by the need to fulfil the gendered Singaporean destiny, demanding them to reproduce children for manpower. The instrumentality of gender systems in maintaining the Asian Model in Singapore thus reduced both the Singaporean women and men to vehicles of social functioning[18].

Nonetheless, I argue that the reproductivity of women doubly subjugated women. The side-lining of women's well-being led to interviewees downplaying their yearning for emotional support and intimacy from their husband. Interviewees' sense of entitlement towards being cared for was symbolic of women's position to the state. Women's subordinated position implied that their individual well-being was secondary to upholding the Singaporean destiny of capitalistic growth. While playing a key role to state imperatives, they were side-lined and treated as expendable.

Nevertheless, describing the realities of interviewees' relationship focusing as an unilinear power relationship is dangerous as it reinforces an essentialist notion of male dominance, ego and masculinity. Spousal relationship desired by interviewees, described as supportive and reciprocal, were present in some interviewees' relationships with their husband. According to some interviewees, their husbands were sources of emotional support and shared domestic duties. Interviewees were more likely to embrace playing a supporting role when their husband were more involved in their activities who supported them emotionally. This shows mutual spousal support which contributed to the well-being of spousal relationship.

Doreen: I will see [my husband] as the head of household. And I am a help maid who helps him…It's not one-way. He helps me too and always encouraged me… He is my very good helper, and I am his good helper. He really is. It's very good.

This section analysed how the Asian model imposed the expectation on wives to maintain the household by supporting their husband while their husbands provide for the family's material needs. Such gender relations reproduced spousal hierarchy by framing interviewees' husbands as the head of household, subordinating interviewees. The

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[18] This study did not include married men's lived experience, and I suggest that it will be important for future studies to also understand how this pursuit of the Singaporean destiny affected them.

mismatch reality of head of household caused tension between spouses as it disrupted the normative spousal hierarchy. The Asian Model was the fundamental mechanism to maintain gender relation within the intimate sphere to maintain social order in Singapore. Because the Asian Model operates on the subordination of women, women with higher income and/or education level than their husband were seen as a threat to the state's functioning. As such, interviewees who were actual head of households were more likely to self-censor or downplay their roles and capability in public while their husband acted as the figurehead of household to not disturb social order.

Chapter 3: Female-dominated labour as emancipatory and sites of resistance

Up until now, I have written a pessimistic destiny of Singaporean middle-class married women and their performance of gender roles. While taking into account of state politics, I have also been centring on the state, and its organisation of intimate family and spousal unit. The findings, thus far, have been pessimistic precisely because I have seen interviewees as mere tools of economic production in relations to the state. I risked reducing women into cogs of the economic growth machine, short of their capacity to think and exercise any power, merely reproducing another generation of labour force. It was not yet a decolonial feminist analysis because interviewees were not seen as the centre of reference, but in relations to the nation's strategy of establishing the economy.

Nevertheless, the earlier chapters of this essay set women's contexts and illustrated nuanced experiences among Singapore middle-class married women. It was necessary to bridge us to this chapter where I write about the ordinariness of interviewees' lives as potentials for liberation and resistance. This chapter does not invalidate the earlier two chapters and analysis thus far. Rather, the earlier chapters presented the conditions for interviewees to operate their resistance, where their resistance stemmed from, what their resistance interacted with and its implications.

Overwhelming women's emancipation goals has used the extent of 'menisation', where women perform 'men's work', as an indicator of emancipation (Nkenkana, 2015). Childcare and domestic work were not seen as freeing in classical social theories. For example, Marx and Arendt had framed agency in grandiose manner; work carried out in the private and domestic sphere, often by women, were framed as mundane, relegated as secondary (McNay, 2016). Western conception of agency is predominantly individualised – framed as a ground for individual responsibility, an inward self-transformation, by taking on a set of prescribed choices – which do not lead to liberation at its fundamental level (Lugones, 2005). Earlier western writings of resistance also concentrated on grand studies of peasant insurgency and revolution in 1960s- early 70s (Abu-Lughod, 1990). As such, resistance that did not fit this image of grand collective overthrowing of system, such as small-scale local subversion, did not qualify for earlier western 'criteria' of emancipation. Early writings of resistance also tend to romanticise resistance as human resilience and creativity in refusing to be dominated by systems of power without exploring the implications on the conditions of resistance (Abu-lughod, 1990). Not understanding the conditions will limit understanding the possibilities of

thriving and creative activity that resist multiple oppression under different conditions (Lugones, 2005).

In this chapter, I interrogated relationship building and labour in female-dominated care sector – paid and unpaid, public and intimate – as a decolonial feminist approach to uncover interviewees' resistance. I now move the centre of reference away from the state and its strategies, focusing on interviewees and their relationships. Relationships covered in this chapter included interviewees' relationship with their work, children and this interview.

Generative relationship with children

Interviewees' relationship and practice of domestic work, particularly with childcare, was generative, even though (unpaid) domestic labour have led to their more financially precarious situation. None of the interviewees who became full-time homemakers regretted caring for their family. Their sense of regret was directed towards the consequences they face, being financially precarious and being feeling isolated, not their children and their performance of care. Interviewees built meaningful relationships with their children through domestic labour and often saw their children as the best thing that they ever had.

Si Hui: I enjoy my time, I mean, uh, half half. When I think back yes, happy to be here and going through, actually each time I grow, I grow up together with my children [at different stages of their life]. Each time when I start with one child, it's different and I start the cycle all over again. I also learnt from them… I love it that they come back and talk to me instead of [going] out and [keeping it] to themselves… They are quite close to me, in that sense. But of course, my life, on the other hand, is like no life.

Children had been forces that led to emancipation of interviewees, for instance, divorcing abusive spouses and motivating interviewees to pursue their own success. Often, children were the only supporters among interviewees' kinship network. Instead of receiving emotional support from one's spouse or natal family to pursue actions that contributes to their individual well-being, interviewees received it from their children. For example, Madeline and Hannah's children played important roles in making major life decision that impacted their personal well-being.

Madeline: I think my children are my drive [to complete my master's degree]. They kept telling me that, "you can surely make it." I told them, "I can't do it anymore"… But they were the ones who kept saying, "you can make it."… They encouraged me… They were my [true] supporter."

Hannah: Finally [my children said], "mum, if it's going to make you happier, leave the marriage." … So this is where I got that support. Not from my immediate family, but my children… By the time I filed for divorce, my self-confidence was at a basement level… it was mainly because my kids encouraged me to do it, so I filed for divorce.

The parent-child relationships that carried generative potentials towards interviewees were also observed in their children's peers. Interviewees mentioned that their children's peers recognised their earlier struggles with poverty, and were empathetic towards homemakers who were socially excluded and struggled with re-entering the work force. By recognising unpaid domestic labour provided by interviewees' generation, some of them were spurred to take on projects to raise social inclusion of homemakers. For example, Si Hui's daughter's friend, piloted a project aimed at helping middle aged Singapore women to return to the labour force.

Si Hui: My daughter's friend in [university] wanted to do a project, but I don't know if it's abandoned or not. They wanted to create a group for people like us who gave up their jobs to take care of children who lose their skills throughout and come out together and do something. And let employers go to them and train them for something or help them do something.

Interviewees' children generation's concern for the wellbeing of interviewees and recognition of their unpaid domestic labour was distinct from the dominant subjugation of women as instruments of reproduction and devaluation of their work. Such relationship was born out of the relationship between both generations. Younger generation's knowledge on the circumstances that have marginalised some women have mobilised actions that attempted to tackle social exclusion of middle-aged women. As such, the generative and intergenerational support and relationship symbolises hope for future emancipation of women in Singapore.

Female-dominated domains as sites of resistance

Maria Lugones (2010) describes coloniality as beyond recognising the colonised being made inferior. Rather, it is an ongoing process of seeing the reduction of human to non-human, rejecting and resisting. The first two chapters presented the reduction of women to non-human instruments of reproduction and production of labour. The following sub-chapters will find out how interviewees resisted against their subjugation within oppressive spaces such as sites of female-dominated care labour, motherhood and interview for this study.

Women solidarity and recognising human value in female-dominated care work. Interviewees who worked or were still working in female-dominated care labour – such as teaching and social work – placed importance on life rather than producing manpower. This opposed to their reproductive duties of producing discursive good citizens to contribute to the economy. They were most concerned with others' well-being and building relationships with their students and clients.

Interviewees were able to be in charge when performing labour of care. They were observed to steer gender practices towards centring women's desires and wellbeing through their work. Interviewees' action in occupations that were aimed at producing a quality work force is infrapolitical. Infrapolitics is described as acts, gestures and thoughts that seemingly appears unpolitical, goes politically unnoticed and is insignificant (Marche, 2012). Often, resistive acts were operated through relationship building, between social workers and clients, or between teachers and students.

Madeline, a social worker, worked with female married clients facing marital dissatisfaction to centre on their own needs and desires. Working with her clients with shared experiences, she gained perspective on her own marriage and life. This social worker-client relationship depicted a network of knowledge and support formed between middle-aged married women. Forming their own network of knowledge allowed them to resist the degradation of women as expendable and secondary instruments of labour. Through Madeline's quote below, resistance was portrayed as 'moving on' from one's marriage. 'Moving on' did not necessarily refer to marital separation or divorce. Rather, 'moving on' meant not having expectations of getting support from one's husband in pursuing their desires. This implied a recentring of reference point within the couple unit. By not expecting support from one's husband, one prioritised themselves. This mitigated

the preoccupation of not fulfilling one's desire when approval and support from their husband was lacking. Madeline and her clients built solidarity from their shared experiences by exchanging emotional support and knowledge through the professional system of care. This web of shared experiences was also formed during interviews for this study when I shared similar experiences between interviewees anonymously. Interviewees were keen to know more about other interviewees and if they had similar experiences and how did they deal with it.

Madeline: When I counsel couples…the woman is just left there trying to think of ways to do something, but she ends up being so tired because she still has to take care of the family… I will motivate my female client by telling her to just move on and stop having expectations on her partner… That helped me too. I have some client who just moved on by her own, and if her partner wants to stay, she just let him remain there.

While 'moving on' did not refer to marital separation or divorce, Madeline also viewed divorce as a transformative way for married women in unsatisfying marital relations to liberate oneself. She observed that her clients who centred on their own desires tended to want a divorce eventually.

Madeline: I have met a lot of couples where the guy doesn't want to move on while the woman moved on and became very successful. At the end, she felt that she doesn't want such a life and initiated a divorce. But the guy usually can't understand what happened and thought that he is doing his best, and [thought that] his wife is never ever satisfied. It's really like my scenario. When they finally decided that enough is enough, and [would] want a divorce to have their own life, because you are caught in the marriage like having a Tripitaka′s Curse (jǐn gū zhòu 紧箍咒)[19] tying you up. I have to have a divorce to get rid of this curse." (Madeline)

In chapter 2, I discussed 'Asian values' and then prime minister Lee Kwan Yew's preoccupation with women becoming too independent, risking the destruction of the country's social fabric. Madeline's observation of her clients aligned with Lee's worry. Nevertheless, Lee's idea of 'social fabric' was maintained by the subjugation of women, reducing them from being humans to non-human instruments of (re)production. The

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[19] In the legend, Journey to the west, the Buddhist Monk, Tang Seng, placed an unremovable cursed hoop called the '*Tripitaka′s Curse (jǐn gū zhòu 紧箍咒)*' on the Monkey King's head to control him. The hoop tightens when the Monkey King disobeys Tang Seng, causing him pain.

'social fabric' maintained by women's subjugation meant that women would not benefit fully from it, as they were not considered to be humans in the society. Instead, they were non-human instruments meant to maintain the society. Hence, the idea of a meritocratic and fair pursuit of social mobility and its material promise did not apply to women, and was akin to a carrot dangling to sway women into submitting to their subjugation.

Similarly, teachers' non-priority of students' academic success opposed to the discourse of academic success in the Singapore's meritocratic education being able to guarantee upwards social mobility and material gains. The meritocratic ideology drives the reproduction of quality labour force. Academic success of students not interviewees' top priority. They were able to reject the material promise of producing academically successful students to prioritise their students' overall well-being.

> *Faridah: To me, my job is to teach and nurture my students, whether people see [what I am doing as ineffective or] effective, I don't care. I will just teach the way I know that [makes them] become a better person... Ya, that's more important so to me, if I don't get the best teaching award, I don't care. I really don't care. I know in my heart I teach the kids to be a good person and understand the subject that they are learning and to guide them in a proper way."*

Faridah's narrative had shown autonomy in how they carried out their roles as teachers, prioritising their students' growth and character even at the expenses of their material returns. Even though female-dominated care work was bound to contribute indirectly nation's development strategy by producing quality labour force, interviewees were not merely tools to drive the state's strategy to develop a robust workforce. They were also willing to risk the material promises of their labour to prioritise wellbeing of their students.

Interview as space for resistance. Centring ordinary women – defined by their normative marital, child and socioeconomic status – as a knowledge source was resistive in nature. Interviewees had remarked that although our conversations felt pleasant and easy, it also required them to think. Our conversations reflected a discomfort or out of the norm practice from everyday.

Interviewees who expressed their negative emotions, such as sadness, loneliness or frustration towards their marriage and spouses tended to feel relieved for being heard, but also embarrassed or guilty for expressing those feelings. They were worried about

how outsiders might view their husband in a negative or imperfect light. As such, interviewees were quick to clarify themselves, without prompt, fearing that I might mistake their expressions of emotions and desire for solidarity as complaints about their husband. I assured them that I understood that the intentions of telling me about their feelings were not to complain about their husbands, to portray them negatively. Afterall, the feeling towards one's marriage and putting one's husband in a negative light are not mutually exclusive.

Discussed in chapter 2, husbands played the role of heads of household which carried the connotation that they were main household providers. Interviewees were worried about their husbands being perceived as inadequate providers when they discussed about their emotional needs being unmet, fearing that might imply that their husbands had failed as heads of household. Interviewees' husband's image as head of household taking priority over interviewees' individual needs and feelings which led to their anxiety reflected the secondary and subservient position of wives in relations to husbands. Hence, interviewees focusing on their individual needs and discussing the support that they wished to receive from their husband were out of the norm. Interestingly, I noticed one interviewee being more vocal about her marital dissatisfaction and frustrations when her husband entered the physical space where she occupied during the interview. It was almost as if her words were directed at him instead of me.

Interviewees' discomfort and anxiety ran parallel with Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) concept of 'intimate terrorism'. whereby the oppressed mestiza[20] who reacted in a hostile manner towards those who degraded her will then turn into an alien isolated from her culture, losing the comfort of belonging (Lugones, 2005). Interviewees' discomfort could also be read as the rage that Lugones (2005) describes as isolating yet transformative. One's reality transforms by being outside of the oppressive reality, but being outside of reality also meant being alone and inhabited in one's self (Lugones, 2005).

Afterall, the mestiza was supposed to make peace with others through her docility and servitude, otherwise she risks becoming alien to both her European and indigenous culture (Lugones, 2005). Likewise, married Singaporean women were supposed to make peace with performing subservient roles of wives who supported and did not undermine their husbands. Interviewees' expressing their emotions about their husbands and marital relationships was in itself resistive, allowing their own emotions to take precedence.

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[20] 'Mestiza' usually refers to indigenous-European mixed-race descent in Latin America.

The rage of the oppressed mestiza was considered as madness because it was out of character (Lugones, 2005). Similarly, it was out of character and out of bounds for interviewees to express unhappiness, to desire more from their husbands. Interviewees risked having their emotions deemed laughable when they expressed that their husband's paternalistic economic maintenance of household was not enough for their marriage. Hence, it was easier to stay in the 'confines of the normal' because by not being angry towards the familiar reality, one continues to be part of the society and culture; not risking to become isolated (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 3). Yet, interviewees interacted with the discomfort to make space for their own emotions.

By centring on one's own emotions and lived experience during the interviews, interviewees disrupted the comfort that was derived from their self-censorship to not risk shaming their husbands. I suggest that their self-censorship was similar Anzaldua's (1987, p.20) 'intimate terrorism'. 'Intimate terrorism' is described as women of colour alienated by the dominant white culture and did not feel safe in their own indigenous culture, stuck in between and not belonging to either culture; hence, unable to move. Adopting Anzaldua's concept of 'intimate terrorism' in this study, women who resisted were stuck between being a full person who was not subjugated and the dominant discourse where they were supposed to be subservient instruments to the state.

Considering state policies and conditions that had marginalised interviewees at different life stages discussed in earlier findings chapters, I argue that the requisites to become a full person who will not be subjugated in Singapore did not apply to women. Even though race, class and language could mitigate the experiences of women's subjugation – allowing some to become two-third centre women – their womanhood will not fully release them from state subjugation. Their subjugation was operated by state policies that determined women's roles and positions. Therefore, Singaporean woman belonged to the society when they abided by the dominant gender script, playing their roles in subjugated positions. Their belonging brought comfort even though they were reduced to a lesser being. If a Singaporean woman opposed to her scripted gender roles, she would become a social deviant, thus excluding from other women abiding to the gender script. Not performing one's roles as a Singaporean woman will also not make her a part of Singaporean men as she was already at a subservient and subordinated position from the beginning. As such, she becomes stuck in neither group, alienated by women and despised by men.

Not engaging with one's discomfort of subjugation maintains gender relations at status quo. Following status quo provided the subjugated a sense of ease as nothing changes, and she remains part of a group. When interviewees talked about their marriage and emotions, they moved outside the easy confines of gender norms of being good wives-submissive-victims. Nevertheless, the act of telling did not make them bad wives-disobedient-agents either. Resistive acts were not meant to be combative, rather it was to disengage to release oneself from subjugation, germinating their 'resistant self' (Lugones, 2005, p. 92). I read interviewees' telling as a form of disengagement, the space created potentially bringing rest and care. By telling, interviewees were unintentionally in resistance, not free of their oppression yet. Being in resistance, they were both resisting and oppressed, as in that Lugones's (2005, p. 90) state of 'resisting <=> oppressing'. Therefore, unintentionally, the interviews served as spaces for interviewees to be in resistance.

Resistance through motherhood. Since I was around the same age as most interviewees' children, interviewees sometimes made comparison between me and their children, gave me advices and asked me questions. Apart from having a researcher interviewer-interviewee relationship, I also possessed an intergenerational relationship with interviewees, akin of mother-daughter, 'girl'-auntie. Similarly, I saw interviewees as individuals who could be my mother, my mother's friend or someone whom she might have been if not for certain life choices.

Interviewees' resistive acts of telling during interviewees were likewise salient in their relationship with their children. Interviewees — lovingly, angrily, wearily and optimistically — passed down their gendered knowledge to the next generation, while resigning to their reality being too late for transformation. Often, their knowledge and lived experience were passed down in the form of cautionary tales. They exuded desires for their children, especially daughters especially, to be able to thrive and pursue their own desires.

Life advices that interviewees gave were centred on the desires and well-being of their daughters. They frequently expressed their wishes for their children to be able to freely travel around the world, and daughters to be financially independent to avoid having to depend on their spouses. In addition, they advised daughters on how to find a spouse who complements their lives, which they themselves did not use receive from their natal family. Some advice they have include finding a partner who is of similar education level, and one who is supportive and willing to pursue similar goals.

Hannah: With the wrong partner, you might as well stay single. Forget it… a golden rule I tell my kids, "your partner must make your life better. If your partner does not make your life better, don't have a partner. Stay single. It's ok, it's alright. Because the main purpose of having a partner, this partner must complement your life and make your life better. Makes you a better person, overall makes it much better. If your partner is going to give you stress all the time, forget about it." Nobody told me that.

Besides daughters, interviewees such as Faridah were socialising sons to redistribute domestic responsibilities with their future spouse and accept their wife's reproductive choices. Even if interviewees saw reproduction as a normative and natural aspect of marital life when they were younger, they were now disrupting the notion of reproduction as women's role and a naturalised aspect of marriage. This reflected a deviation from the state's manufactured set of women's roles that centred on reproductive responsibility. Interviewees were transforming gender roles of their children's generation. For example, the reproductive choice of Madeline's future daughter-in-law was something that Madeline and her son did not have a say in.

Faridah: I teach my son to be able to do housework so it [is] not only the women's job. Because now every family is dual-breadwinner, not [just] one. [They] must understand each other, try to work things out together. They cannot rely on women. [Not anymore]. As I said, whether they can balance or not, depends on the upbringing.

Madeline: Most modern women these days rather not have children. I can also accept. Even my son's current girlfriend, future wife, says that she is not keen on having children, I said that it is ok. If you can't, it's better you don't harm anyone. [My son] asked me if I think that he was continuing the family line, and I said that there's no need to.

Interviewees' passing down their own knowledge on picking a compatible spouse and centring on women as people, was unlike the socialisation and relationship they had with their natal family. Even though interviewees tended to have strong emotional bond with their natal family, they may not be adequately supported in their adulthood. Retrospectively, interviewees frequently wished for more knowledge from their natal family in picking a compatible partner. Picking the wrong partner was also seen as one's mistake to bear alone.

Madeline: As for mum, she was like, "that's your choice, you settle it yourself." Even if you went back to them and complain about this person, that this person is not ideal or not supportive, they will say, "that's your choice, so you have to just suck it up".

Madeline's mother's sentiment reflected the Chinese saying, "married daughters being akin to splashed water, no longer part of their natal family". Although some interviewees received practical support to continue fulfilling mothering duties, they rarely received emotional and social support related to their experiences as wives. They expressed needs for emotional support including affirmation of the marital woes faced, support for decisions they make, especially decisions that are socially stigmatised such as leaving a marriage, and/or saying something that risk embarrassing one's husband and/or themselves, or challenging spousal hierarchy. Hence, interviewees' advice to their children symbolised a generational change in mothering. This could be a one marker of a turn in Singaporean family history. Advising children to centre on women's individual desires and well-being was unlike expendable positions of Singaporean women during interviewees' young adulthood.

Nevertheless, the process of socialising their children with a different gender discourse carried its dilemmas. Resisting did not stop oppressing immediately for both are not opposing dichotomous events. Rather it was a push-pull tension as the one resisting is also being oppressed at the same time. While interviewees encouraged their children to pick someone of their equal social status and prioritise their own desires, they also struggled with the paradoxical role of being a supportive wife. Disrupting normative gender relations brought tension to interviewees' identities as mothers, wives and women. For instance, Faridah struggled with giving her daughter appropriate advice on maintaining spousal relationship as her identity as a mother and an individual woman was in conflict. Each of her identity operated in its own logic in different 'world of sense' (Lugones, 2005, p. 90). As Lugones (2005, p. 90) writes, "she is multiple as reality is multiple."

Faridah: *I am in a dilemma. I just want to say, "Aiya, just say whatever you want to say. Don't care about your husband." But… I [thought], "oh, am I teaching her the right thing?"... "always remember that men have ego, whatever it is, try to be diplomatic"… That's all I can advise my daughter, I cannot just say, "just walk out of the marriage." You cannot say that right, you know?*

The tensions that interviewees experienced reflected Lugones's (2005, p. 90) making sense of Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) 'terrorised self' whereby one feels the "possibility and terror of their resistance", distinct from being under someone's control. Anzaldua (1987) describes the terrorised self as the often unconscious self-blaming and hating, knowing that one is hurting, suspecting and internalising that there is something 'wrong' with themselves. As such, interviewees were aware of the consequence of resistance is to become an alien, not belonging inside or outside of the scripts that told them how to perform as Singaporean women (Lugones, 2005). By not being inside or outside, one becomes isolated.

I argue that the potential consequence of resistance could alienate them from Singapore gender practices and citizenship, while being rejected by dominant feminist conversations. In the capitalistic Singapore, the spaces available women to practice transformative resistance was narrow as their roles were paradoxical – to be reproduce in the domestic sphere and to produce labour for the economy. These roles were in opposition to each other in terms of women's well-being whereby to resist one role was to practice the other. Yet both roles ultimately subjugated Singaporean women as expendable instruments to drive the Singapore's economy. As subjected individuals, it was frightening to be outside the ordinary even if the system oppressed one into servility (Lugones, 2005). Considering the fear faced by the terrorised self, interviewees' resistance was not straightforward and cannot be grand. Inaction is often reduced to passivity by the western notion of resistance (Lugones, 2005). According to Lugones (2005), not acting does not mean inactivity and one who cannot act can still be active. Therefore, women who resisted became stuck and isolated, neither a good Singaporean woman nor a legitimate (western) feminist.

Furthermore, interviewees' resistance tended to exist within the domestic realm of motherhood. The domestic space carried the notion of family-orientation and tradition, coding interviewees as third-world women (Mohanty, 1984). As such, their resistive acts hardly fit into western narratives of third world women which were often limited to the language of victimhood and problems as interviewees were not victims (Mohanty, 1991). Resistance taking place in sites coded as 'third-world' would not be considered as grand or drastic; therefore, excluding Singaporean women from dominant feminist conversations and classical social contract theories.

The transformative potentials of interviewees' resistive acts were undeniable. Their acts of telling their personal history to me and their children were acts of scripting, disrupting geopolitics of knowledge. Interviewees' dialogue with me and their children, displayed the multiplicity of interviewees' identities and actions, creating new geopolitics of knowledge. Their acts of scripting itself excavated events and knowledge of the past and attached their meaning to it. By doing so, they disrupted the world of meanings to encompass their own possibilities. Their struggle was a simultaneous resignation to fate that they were unable to end their oppression and passing new gender knowledge to their children's generation to resist. Interviewees' resistance was a 'creative activity of be-ing' operating in ongoing dehumanisation of the oppressed Lugones's (2010, p. 754).

Overall, this chapter uncover the forms of interviewees resistance against their subjugation and the experiences of being in resistance. Recognising Singaporean women's resistance – especially operating intimately in tension – could aligned them with other third world women, providing potential for cross-national solidarity and organising against capitalistic oppression (Mohanty, 2003). Understanding the systematic exploitation of poor third world women in relations to the construction of state and multinational corporate capitalism carries potentials of cross-national feminist solidarity (Mohanty, 1991). Only when Singaporean women were able to understand how their framing of womanhood came about and how it imprisoned them, can they mobilise collectively.

While some interviewees were made 'poor third world women' through the process of establishing Singapore, marked by economic growth, the mobilisation of cross-nation third world women building solidarity was not observed in interviewees' resistance (Mohanty, 1991). Interviewees' resistance occurred in an intimate silo manner that was fraught with tension. They were aware that something was amiss, sometimes internalising that there may be something 'wrong' with them if they complained. They did not have yet the words for the (varying levels of) systematic oppression faced; hence, they did not have the potential for cross-nation feminist solidarity yet. As such their resistance took place in silo intimately, filled with fear and dilemma like the 'terrorised self' (Lugones, 2005, p. 90). Nevertheless, this chapter builds new knowledge on Singaporean women's resistance against their systematic subjugation, giving possibilities to accumulating more words to mobilise solidarity among other poor third world women in future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis aimed to bring forth narratives of Singaporean women whom lived through patriarchal state policies in the 1960s-2000s aimed at establishing Singapore's capitalistic economy. There were no prior studies that centred on the voices of ordinary Singaporean women to find out about their lived experiences and understanding of state policies that affected them (Heng & Devan, 1995; Pyle, 1997; PuruShotam, 1998; Wong & Yeoh, 2003; Kho, 2004). Hence, interviewees in this study were positioned as living keepers of history that gave potential for activity, in intimate and public spaces. My study interviewed seven participants to find out (1) what were the context and factors in Singapore that marginalised of Singaporean women? (2) How did Singaporean women negotiate their roles as mothers and wives, and what were the consequences faced by them? (3) In what ways did Singaporean women resist subjugation?

In the first chapter of findings, I showed the multitude of barriers and opportunities that interviewees faced to access higher education and white-collar jobs. Being in different conditions making it harder for some of them to achieve the Singapore destiny of material success; hence, their social positioning across their life course was fluid. Social conditions that became barriers preventing interviewees from accessing higher education and better-paying white-collar job includes social economic status of their natal family, gender and proficiency in English language. Women who did not face or overcame these barriers in their young adulthood were more likely to access better paying job markets to acquire material resources to become two-third centre women. Those who did not were proletariased, limited to blue-collar job that made them one-third women. Moreover, women's access to employment markets were determined by the type of economy Singapore was in. An industrial economy meant more blue-collar jobs for women, and an high-tech economy meant more white collar jobs for them. The barriers faced by interviewees demonstrated ways in which some of them were made one-third by Singapore's process of establishing the state in multinational capitalism.

In the following chapter, I interrogated interviewees' negotiation of their roles as mothers and wives, and how did the devaluation of women's labour worsen their consequences of role negotiations. Interviewees' negotiation of their paradoxical roles to produce and reproduce labour was class-differentiated. Often, alternative support for childcare and domestic labour were provided by older female kins. Interviewees who had alternative support could continue working and accumulate material resources. Interviewees in the one-third group without childcare support, had to settle for no or inadequate childcare

arrangement while they work to make ends meet. On the other hand, the struggle that two-third women without childcare support tended to quit their careers prematurely to become homemakers.

As such, homemakers lost financial independence and employability over time, unable to participate in the Singapore destiny of material success (Chua, 1996). They feel threatened by the possibility of losing their citizenship identity benefits, anxious about financial precarity at old age and regrets when they could not contribute financially to their parents. Although one-third women being able to continue working to earn their own income, they were often limited blue-collar proletarian jobs. The circumstances faced by one-third working women and two-third homemakers were the result of the devaluation of women's work, whereby they were limited to low-wage jobs or their domestic labour were deemed unskilled and not part of production. In addition, the income gap between two-third centre interviewees, and one-third and two-third margin interviewees symbolised a wider economic inequality within this age group of Singaporean women.

Women who used to be in the two-third centres moving to the one-third margins after becoming homemakers had been left behind in Singapore's economic development.
The establishing of Singapore was akin to being on a rafting boat ride along the current where some two-third women manage to stay on it moved forward, while others had fallen into the waters with or without the ability to get back up on the boat. Some were holding on tightly to the boat, afraid of falling into the water, not enjoying the boat ride at all. Those who were securely on the boat, moved along the current which symbolised the two-third centres who were not too preoccupied with the lack of financial independence, able to experience the carefreeness of having financial agency. Those grabbing tightly to the raft boat with toes almost dipping into the water symbolised interviewees who were two-third margins, who were in precarious positions of relying on their family members. They may live under the same roof as their two-third centre family members, but they did not have the privilege of enjoying any material promises and financial independence. They grieved the loss of financial independence and their identity as daughters. These emotions and preoccupation were one form of the loss from Singapore's national development. Those who had fallen into the water are the one-thirds, not enjoying the citizenship privileges and struggling to survive, not adequately represented in this study.

The 'Asian model' upheld a heterosexual male-led dual-parent household structure which reduced Singaporean wives to subservient positions (Wong & Yeoh, 2003;

PuruShotam, 1998; Heng & Devan, 1995). Interviewees who were their household's main provider tended to be preoccupied of disrupting this normative male-led household structure and were mindful of bringing shame to their husbands. In the process of maintaining this gender relation, interviewees prioritised their husband's emotions and images over their own emotional needs, ending up feeling isolated. Nonetheless, some interviewees also enjoyed supportive and reciprocal relationships with their husbands.

The positioning of Singaporean women in the household was reflective of their position in the Singapore society. They were non-human instruments to maintain household functioning, and an instrument to maintain social order in the state. Their needs and well-being were not considered as part of the family and state's functioning; therefore, normalising their undeserving of support and benefits for their individual needs. Therefore, interviewees tended to feel obliged to be grateful towards their husband being a provider for the household, and downplayed their individual needs as disrupting order in one's household was akin to disrupting the social fabric of Singapore (Zakaria & Lee, 1994).

In the final chapter of findings, I shifted my focus on interviewees' narratives instead of analysing their lived experiences in relations to Singapore's nation building to explore potential areas of resistance. Interviewees' relationship with their children were also generative towards interviewees, carrying emancipatory potentials, which was not observed in other form of kinships. Interviewees' also practiced unconscious everyday resistance in their relationship with their children, sites of female-dominated care labour, and their participation in this study. They accepted that they will not be liberated from their subjugation but also act to liberate the next generations from the gender relations that subjugated them.

Interviewees constructed webs of knowledge among women with shared experiences of subjugation and prioritised the wellbeing and growth of children; instead of, reproducing them as quality labour for the future economy. While being subservient and grateful, interviewees also recognised their needs and emotions that were sidelined. They focused on their own emotions of isolation and dissatisfaction towards their marital relationship during the interview provided relief and solidarity, although such acts were out of the norm and socially deviant. This demonstrated Lugones's (2005) understanding of resistance as '<=>' where oppression and resistance coexist. Interviewees also introduced different gender knowledge to their children that recognised women needs as

humans, knowing that it would not change their realities, hoping that their daughters would not be subjugated.

Overall, this study approached gender as a binary term, solely focused on married women. Nkenkana (2015) notes the need to analyse gender beyond dichotomous gender, examining systems and structure that victimised and deprived both men and women of their humanity. Future studies could explore how Singaporean men of similar profile negotiated and made sense of their gender roles in relations to Singapore's economic and national development in the 1960s-2000s. Understanding the division of labour between genders could provide understanding to the production of life and means of living which carries potential to end the subjugation of women. Shankara (1997, as cited in Nkekana, 2015) argues that the production of life and means of living are foundations of gender relations; therefore, eliminating the exploitative gender system is necessary to improve the status of women. The understanding of a shared oppression by global capitalism could also mobilise solidarity between other social minorities and poor third world women in future.

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