Shadowlines

Shadowlines:
Women and Borders in Contemporary Asia

Edited by

Devleena Ghosh

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CHAPTER ONE

SHADOWLINES: INTERROGATING "WOMAN" AND "ASIA"

DEVLEENA GHOSH

The articles in this special issue had their first iteration as presentations at the Eighth Women in Asia Conference in 2005[1], the theme of which was "Shadow Lines". This theme of "shadows" attempted to reflect tropes existing in relation to normative discourses, such as the patriarchal world of masculine power or traditional notions of class, ethnicity or religion. Shadow lines may encompass external boundaries, borders and gates that shape nationhood and identity or internal beliefs that form new liminal spaces in the everyday practices of lived reality. These demarcations may be explicit in deliberately and lawfully excluding women or implicit and fuzzy, operating as a shifting reality. The concept "Women in Asia" is problematic since some of the major debates in gender or women's studies have focused on the diversity of women's life worlds and beings and the contested nature of the term "Asia". As a theme it has the potential to become a holdall phrase for scholarship, research and activist work "from Suez to Suva". However, reflecting on these difficult terms can be a creative and rewarding process. The attempt to locate Australia within the region, rather than within a putative "West", and to deal with her geography rather than just her White history, can be an effective way of challenging many current "White blindfold" discourses. At the same time, gendered analyses of society, politics and culture which attempt a re-insertion of "herstories" into academic discourses have to be sophisticated enough to demonstrate the intrinsic gendering of all-embracing, supposedly "neutral" ideas such as race, nationalism, ethics and the state, rather than simply "adding in" women. The marginalised spaces of women's activities have to be legitimated as crucial elements of all social relations, highlighting the intimate relationships and connections between men and women.

The sub-theme of the conference "Shadow Lines" was an attempt to unsettle discourses about limits. That lines, borders, boundaries exist, whether those of prejudice, politics, economics or culture, is undeniable. But how do we analyse these issues without ossifying them, creating implacable alterities that refuse the liminal spaces that people occupy? What about those hidden and shadowed spaces of the interior, both of the home and the domestic as well as the inner courtyard of the psyche? These shadowed spaces in Asia are normally desired ones – they imply coolness, rest, tranquillity. Such spaces can be restrictive but they can also contain powerful emotions, subversions and ironies. The presenters at the conference dealt with many of these contradictions in different regional and disciplinary contexts. Ananya Kabir focussed on Nilima Sheikh's Kashmir paintings, which continued to evolve, in dialogue with Agha Shahid Ali and other "accounts of Kashmir, historical and contemporary", reading this dialogue as an attempt to think beyond the phantasmic, disembodied and yet persistent relationship between the nation and the collective psyche. She notes that by unifying materiality, enchantment and resistance, the feminine-feminist artwork moves beyond being mere "representation", holding out promise of a new community that questions the citizen's role within the majoritarianism within democracy through the glass of empathy rather than violence.

The shadow of colonialism provides the background to most of the contributions in this special issue. Gender was a crucial lens through which colonial societies viewed their populations. Patriarchy worked in these societies in pragmatic and discursive forms, normalising certain cultural practices, social customs and ways of being as "true" or "natural". Women were twice colonised in their simultaneous experience of patriarchy and colonialism (Peterson & Rutherford 1986), doubly relegated to the obscure margins by patriarchal and imperial discourses and narratives that celebrated male-oriented values such as bonding between men and reticent heroism, outdoor activities like battles, exploration and missionary activities, and the strong silent men who went to "take up the white man's burden" in barbaric, uncomfortable, steaming colonies.

Anne McClintock elaborates on these points by emphasising that a main thrust of the imperial project was the attempt to "fashion the identity of a large class of people (hitherto disunited) with clear affiliations, distinct boundaries and separate values – … around the presiding domestic values of monogamy, thrift, order, accumulation" (McClintock 1995: 167–68). She claims that women and colonised peoples were both infantilised and characterised as irrational and primordial; this meant that they occupied an ahistorical "anachronistic space". The confluence of the

contradictions and paradoxes of class, gender and race affiliations, according to McClintock, created the "racialization of domestic space" as well as "the domestication of colonial space". Tropes such as gender, race, patriarchy, maternity, femininity and domesticity, as well as the privileging of a clean, efficient and well-run home, good public hygiene, motherhood, scientific childbearing methods, and the instillation of proper morals, were re-inscribed and reconstructed in the service of colonialism and modernity, and nations were frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. Within this space, women were represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition; men, by contrast, represented the progressive agent of national modernity, embodying nationalism's progressive or revolutionary principle of discontinuity (McClintock 1997). Thus "undiscovered" land was frequently seen as virgin, untouched, a woman waiting to be deflowered by White conquerors.

But where do women stand in the imaginary of the postcolonial nation? When anti-colonial movements in Asia began to challenge imperial rule, women were inscribed with other values. They were categorised as "mothers of the nation", biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities, central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and transmitters of its culture, for example as mothers or teachers (Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989: 7). The dilemma of women and nationalism can be presented as: "How could women be nationalists when they did not have equal rights? How could women not be nationalists when they loved their country, people and home?" (West 1997: xii) National liberation movements are also inadvertently the record of a triumphant nationalism that makes its gains at the expense of women. They make common cause with women's issues because nationalism requires a certain self-representational vocabulary—a definitional apparatus to imagine and describe itself (Heng 1997: 31). This identification of women as bearers of cultural identity and boundary markers inevitably has a negative effect on their emergence as fully-fledged citizens (Kandiyoti 1991: 429-43).

In the metropoles, nationalism manifested itself differently. White women also bore the burden of empire, since their bodies and characters were inscribed with the superiority of European moral and civic virtues that distinguished them from women of other societies. They were neither patriarchal victims nor brave heroines; rather, their racial privileges in colonial society ran the gamut of complicity and resistance (Midgley 1998: 7). In E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, the ambiguous attitude of the British expatriate community to Adela Quested after she makes her

accusation of rape against Dr Aziz subtly reflects this paradox (Forster 2000). European women, as family members of imperial functionaries, were both complicit in the colonising mission as well as affected by the patriarchy of their own cultures. At the same time, Oriental men bore the double burden of being constructed as both incurably lascivious and rampantly sexual as well as effeminate, effete and languid.

Such sentiments meant that when colonial powers wished to consolidate their hegemony over their subjects, the terrain occupied by women was one that was most disputed. Many imperial powers concluded that the major priority of reform or renaissance of native societies was the reform of the status of women. Women represented the backward and barbaric traditions of native society and the necessity for the renovation of tradition became increasingly based on debates about the rights and status of women, the colonisation of minds as well as bodies (Nandy 1983). Such reforms were not imposed by law but by means such as education whereby European values could be subtly disseminated through colonised societies. In this context, Partha Chatterjee has argued that, in anti-colonial nationalist struggles, women were confined to the context of the family even where the latter was being reconstructed. In India, for example, the discourse over nationalism situated "the women's question" in an "inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest and the colonial state" (Chatterjee 1993: 117). The condition of Indian women, defined by certain cultural practices such as widow-burning, was extrapolated to mark the "unworthiness" of all Indian tradition and culture and provide the justifications needed to exhort Indian civilisation to embrace the modernising aspects of colonialism. Thus, the women's question in the agenda of Indian social reform in the early 19th century was not so much about the specific condition of women within a specific set of social relations as it was about the political encounter between a colonial state and the supposed "tradition" of a conquered people (Chatterjee 1993: 119).

In the postcolonial era, nationalism is still constructed as a gendered dynamic in the arena of the family. An article published in a popular annual three years after India's independence in 1950, which concluded with the English proverb, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world", claimed:

> Women are the creators of the nation. The community is created by human beings but each of these humans was once nurtured in the lap of a mother, hence who else can be the maker of the nation than women? This is certain that human resources are more valuable than wealth and the creator has left

> the development of this human wealth in the hands of women (Devi 1950: 157).

In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Gayatri Spivak (1987) posed a challenging question for scholars of gender and colonialism. She asked if the double eliding of native women by colonisation and patriarchy precludes their voices from ever being heard. If human subjectivity is inscribed like a palimpsest, written and re-written by “violently shuttling” discourses of power and knowledge and from shifting positions and locations, then it is impossible to retrieve subaltern agency from the colonial archives since one cannot assume that the colonised person has autonomy and that the archive presents a transparent record of her/his agency. The issue of gender further complicates this task, as the colonial archive usually contains the stories of men: “As object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak 1987: 287). However, Spivak does not imply that the engaged intellectual who wishes to highlight the oppression should therefore do nothing (Loomba 1998: 234). Rather, she advocates the adoption of the Gramscian maxim, “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”, or the combination of a philosophical scepticism about recovering any subaltern agency with a political commitment to making visible the position of the marginalised:

> The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with “woman” as pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish (Spivak 1987: 308).

Several of the articles in this special issue attempt to engage in the “circumscribed task”’ cited by Spivak. Louise Edwards, for example, explores the recent discussion about women’s participation in formal political positions in China since the 1990s and queries the efficacy of the dominant narratives mobilised in China to increase women’s rate of participation. She argues that the Chinese Communist Party-affiliated women’s advocates are constrained by contradictions between the reality of the political economy in China and long-espoused theories about women’s liberation and its place within socialist political economy. The All China Women’s Federation (a Mass Organisation within the Chinese Communist Party) has complex connections with women’s grassroots organizing along feminist lines and uses the media effectively to subtly

challenge long-held Chinese Communist Party understandings of the relationship between women's liberation and class liberation. Elaine Jeffreys, on the other hand, examines some of the tensions surrounding the People's Republic of China's official policy of banning prostitution by focusing on two highly publicized cases of deceptive recruiting for sexual services in "Over my dead body! Media constructions of forced prostitution in the People's Republic of China". Both cases involved young rural women who had migrated from their native homes to other more economically developed parts of China to look for work. Both were forced to sell sex and both resisted, one attempting suicide and the other stabbing her employer. In both these articles, if one listens closely, faint but insistent subaltern voices emerge from the silence.

Histories of European and colonial discourses have often elided key sites in the production of those discourse. For example, Ann Laura Stoler argues that Michel Foucault's analysis of key processes in modernity in Europe (as in his unfinished *History of Sexuality*), by short-circuiting empire, ignored the ways in which colonial experiences were imbricated in these processes. Instead, "bourgeois identities in both metropole and colony emerge tacitly and emphatically coded by race" (Stoler 1995: 7) and "a racialized regime of truth operated in cultural-anthropological, environmental-geographical, and sociological-political registers" (Howell 2004). Stoler describes how an implicit "racial grammar … circulated through empire and back through Europe" (1995: 14 & 30). Colonial societies became obsessed with finding and controlling internal enemies who destabilised the colonial power structure, transgressing bourgeois norms such as sexual control, domesticity and racial purity. Thus Europeanness in the colonies was constructed as a delicate and beleaguered identity, needing self-discipline to resist degeneration or "going native", in the face of the tide of "native" biological and cultural contamination. McClintock notes, like Stoler, that the categories of class, gender and race overlapped and criss-crossed in imperial politics and that the family offered national narratives an indispensable metaphoric figure for sanctioning national hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests (McClintock 1997: 91). Stoler recasts the connections between race, imperialism and sexuality by showing how bourgeois sexuality in Europe was discursively and practically implicated in the colonial sexual order (Howell 2004) and "control over sexuality and reproduction was at the core of defining colonial privilege and its boundaries" (Stoler 1995: 39).

According to Stoler, colonies functioned as "laboratories of modernity" (1995: 15), whose experiments on discourses and policies of race, class

and sexual relations were exported to the metropoles. For example, Dutch colonialism in South-East Asia produced significant and complex hybrid cultures through the influence of native and mixed-race mothers on their children and the intimate relationships between white Dutch children and their local, “native” nursemaids and nannies. Not only did people shuttle between metropole and colony but so did ideas, practices and policies, especially those that were mundane, domestic and intimate. “Modern” ideas about gender roles, domestic management or middle and working class “respectability” were tried out in the colonies before being exported to imperial centres. Modern discourses of sexuality and gender were created by interconnected engagements and dialogues between colonies and metropoles, and race/biology as well as sex/biology/gender were central elements in the fears and the desires of the colonial and metropolitan populations. Vera Mackie explores these themes through the trope of “the modern girl”, a ubiquitous figure in the visual culture of 1920s and 1930s Japan, appearing in cartoons, photography, painting, prints, graphic design and cinema. She discusses aspects of the complex relationships developed in liminal spaces, meditating on the human ties forged through artistic endeavour. According to her, gendered, classed, ethnicised and racialised positionings were constituted through a series of gazes between actors in the modern scene, embedded in complex relations of power amid the circulation of signs, symbols, bodies, commodities, finance and capital.

Postcolonial attempts at subaltern retrieval have been criticised by cultural critics other than Spivak. An influential essay by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1997) accuses European feminist discourses of constructing a monolithic, “third world” female victim as its object of research. She argues that these discourses assume that “third world” women have the same interests and priorities as European women and that the struggle against patriarchal oppression is homogenous and global. Thus the vast material and historical variances and contingencies within “third world” women are elided. Mohanty rejects such essentialist ideas of potential solidarities by advocating imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but systemic (1991: 4). It is thus possible for such communities and solidarities to “retain the idea of multiple fluid structures of domination which intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures, while at the same time insisting on the dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and their engagement in ‘daily life’” (1991: 13). Similarly, Trinh Minh-ha considers that the popularity of the “third world woman” is due to the

exoticising of the native woman into a fixed ineluctable alterity: "It is as if everywhere we go, we become Someone's private zoo" (1989: 82). Trinh concludes that the creation of the "third world" woman emphasises the European feminists' solidarity, support and mediation of these oppressed women in the global struggle against patriarchy, solidifies the difference between first and third world women and subverts the egalitarian discourses of Western feminism. Both Mohanty and Trinh powerfully repudiate Marx's dictum: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (Marx 1954: 106).

In the twenty-first century, globalisation and the flows of information, capital and people have produced a multi-faceted and complex set of studies on women and migration. Two such studies reflect on the multiple ways that women participate in different forms of negotiation between the blurred shadow lines of identity, notions of tradition and cultural change, love, sex and romance, the associations and intermeshings of family, community and the collective with the individual and the ongoing mediations and meditation on silence and speaking. What are the historical dimensions to these kinds of negotiations and conversations? How might we understand the transforming desires and wants of women in Asia, their preoccupations and lived realities? Nicole Constable, in her subtle and rich study, "Brides, maids, and prostitutes: reflections on 'trafficked' women", critically examines the blurred boundaries — or the analytical shadow lines — in scholarly and popular conceptualizations of Asian women migrants. She interrogates the commonalities and distinctions between women who migrate from the global South to the North as maids, brides, or sex workers and reflects on the importance of these factors. What are the implications of such blurring for women's self-perceptions and life experiences, for feminist scholarship, and for immigration policies? Drawing from ethnographic field research among Chinese and Filipina correspondence brides, Filipina domestic workers, and from the wider literature on sex workers, Constable considers some of the problems with a "trafficking" framework, and discusses the analytical and ethnographic possibilities that emerge from a closer examination of the real and imagined shadow lines between sex workers, domestic workers, and migrant brides. Her ethnographical case study works within broader migration patterns and considers the blurred boundaries between various sorts of Asian migrants. Devleena Ghosh explores the changes in the nature and location of work brought about by global shifts in capital and their major implications for social relations and worker identities. Her analysis of call centre workers in Bangalore highlights their dynamic social and cultural participation. She concludes that these workers, far

from being “cyber-coolies”, are active makers of their own meanings. The establishment of call centre capital in India is neither a wholly positive experience of economic independence and opportunity on the one hand, nor merely the further exploitation of cheap labour on the other. The globalisation process and the agency of call centre workers themselves are far more complex than these dualisms allow and remind us that culture is one site of struggle in which local populations and global corporations transact their unequal relations.

The sites of being for migrant women are the spaces, both public and private, of their new landscapes where they perform and practice forms of social, economic and political action. Nikos Papastergiadis has suggested that the place of belonging can no longer by purely geographic (a notion of place) or historical (a sense of connection) because it is “cross-cut by a variety of global forces” (1998: 1) If identities are fluid, unfixed and changing, it is perhaps appropriate that women can function across various arenas, appropriating the accoutrements of difference as they need them. Christina Ho delineates the imaginative projections of home and its traces in the present in “Can Careers Cross Borders? Chinese Women in the Australian Workforce”. In it, she analyses migration programs in the Western world which increasingly target skilled professionals as governments view migration through the lens of economic efficiency. However, once skilled migrants arrive in their new homes, they confront many barriers to re-establishing their careers in a new labour market. Ho’s paper uses qualitative and quantitative data to explore the consequences of this career disruption for professional Chinese women, now settled in Australia, who often find themselves reorienting their identities and values away from the world of work and towards non-market-based spheres of life, such as family, leisure and self-development, thus challenging the Australian government’s economistic definitions of social citizenship. She concludes that migration in Australia can only genuinely constitute a “success story” when policy discussions and research overcome the extraordinary belief that economics can explain the world.

This mediating between the past and present, the domestic and the wider social world mirrors the preoccupations of contemporary society and the way in which people’s material lives enter the imaginary and symbolic. This corporeality is at the generative core of meaning-making, extending the materialist trajectory of what people do in domestic space into the more intimate waters of subjectivity, embodiment and culture. The wider productive and social processes of labour and class intersect with the experiential modalities of sexuality and consumption within domestic spaces and women’s desires. These intimate experiences of broad social

and economic practices contain much of the most compelling and memorable moments of social life and their affect generates much of the immediate meaning and connection with broader socialities since women do not construct themselves in either/or categories, either in relation to a nativist longing for a homeland past, or in a global representational economy of the new capitalist culture of modernity. In this context, Lyons and Ford's research on the sex industry in the Riau Islands shows that for some Indonesian women paid sex work can provide opportunities for economic and social mobility. As a strategy to escape marginalisation, however, it is nonetheless incomplete. They call into question dominant ideologies of womanhood in Indonesia by problematising the intersection between class and gender and by questioning the assumption that sex workers are victims. The protagonists of their case study have benefited from the fluid nature of class formation and community structures in the borderlands.

The contributors to the Women in Asia conference were exemplary in not romanticizing women, diasporic and/or local cultures. Rather, most attempted a kind of radical re-enchantment in celebrating the contingent character of the present, always seeking what is still undiscovered. To borrow from Amitabh Kumar, the possibilities of the papers at the conference had to do with their potential to resist national wills and narrowly nationalist identities (Kumar 2000: 229). Mohanty has cautioned that the very process of constructing a narrative for oneself imposes a coherence that is never entirely there. But that perhaps, she adds, is the lesson to be learnt; home, community and identity all fall somewhere between the histories and experiences we inherit and the political choices we make through alliances, solidarities and friendships (Kumar 2000: v).

The spectre that consistently haunts these papers is the construction of woman as anomaly, as object of uneasy reflections about the nature of cultural boundaries. The new cultural spaces being created are constantly framed by counterpolitics and interventions. The loss of boundaries in the processes of living also influences the reinterpretation of the past and the translation of the present so that the nature of subjectivity is contingent and contested. It does not float aimlessly in a postmodern moment; rather it is grounded in a thousand plateaus, felt and experienced through the body, historical landscapes, domestic spaces, through performance as well as through the realm of the imaginary, in the impact of ideals and the burden of history.

Notes

1. The Eighth Women in Asia Conference, organised by the Women's Caucus of the Asian Studies Association of Australia and the University of Technology Sydney, was held at the University of Technology Sydney from the 26th to the 28th of September 2005. The conveners of the conference were Devleena Ghosh and Barbara Leigh.

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PART I:

SEXUALITY

CHAPTER TWO

BRIDES, MAIDS AND PROSTITUTES: REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY OF "TRAFFICKED" WOMEN

NICOLE CONSTABLE

Introduction

Over the past several years, feminist scholars of migration have begun to argue that it makes sense to talk about the migration of prostitutes, maids and mail-order brides as if they were part of the same larger phenomenon (Maher 2003; Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2004).[1] I agree that it is sometimes useful to consider these three types of gendered migration together, but my own starting point and my argument in this essay takes a different focus and point of departure. Instead of seeing the literature on what I refer to as domestic workers, sex workers and correspondence brides as largely separate, I am concerned with what I consider *unwarranted blurs*—or fuzzy shadow lines—between the three categories. I am troubled by the ways in which different types of gendered migration are often blurred together in academic, popular and activist literatures and are treated too much as though they are one and the same. Some academic literature and much activist literature that deals with multiple forms of women's migration prematurely assumes that they are part of a common phenomenon, one that can most simply be glossed as "trafficked women".

My second and related concern has been—especially in the case of correspondence marriages—that many writings have focused on, or reproduced in their own work, simplistic stereotypes or an imagined fantasy of "mail-order brides" with relatively little attention paid to the variations in the circumstances, forms of introduction, and the actual

experiences of couples who have met through correspondence and eventually married. Therefore, before considering productive comparisons, it is important to carefully consider the variations within each "category" of migrant woman, and the limitations of defining them as a category in the first place.

My aim here is to reconsider some of the scholarly and popular depictions of so-called "mail-order brides" as "trafficked" women; to question what I consider the warranted and unwarranted blurs that subtly or explicitly enter the scholarly and activist literature on mail-order brides; and to highlight heterogeneity in the experiences, circumstances and expressions of agency of women who meet men through correspondence. The literature on sex workers has influenced my thinking about correspondence marriage, not because brides and sex workers are fundamentally alike, but because they are both subjects of the wider discourse on trafficking, women's agency and women's victimization. I aim to highlight the weaknesses of a trafficking framework from an ethnographic perspective, and point to some of the ways that theoretical issues raised in the sex worker literature might apply to the study of correspondence marriages.[2] Despite theoretical insights that can come from a combined discussion of sex workers, domestic workers, and foreign brides, and despite many similarly structured patterns of inequality, I urge caution.

Women's Emigration to Rich Countries

Because migrant sex workers, maids and correspondence brides often (but not always) follow the broader patterned movement of women from poorer, so-called Third World countries of the less developed global South, to wealthier First World or more developed countries of the global North, they are often assumed or implied to share common structures of inequality that define, constrain and propel their mobility. The mobility of women from poorer parts of Asia (e.g., the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India) who perform the reproductive labour for people in wealthier regions (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Western Europe and the Middle East) is well documented (Constable 1997, 2003a, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b; Parrenas 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Gamburd 2000; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). But despite some broader gendered migration patterns, the overall theme lends itself too easily to the well-accepted logic of a more simplistic modernization narrative: of course poor women will want to move from a poor or "backwards" country to

work for or marry a richer person in a more "modern" country. The structural inequality of such a situation provides a common and readily accepted logic for the growing pattern for female labour and marriage migration. This logic is not necessarily wrong, but it is not the only way to tell and understand the story. Moreover, it is often read as *the* story, thus obscuring significant variations among and between women and through time.

One problem with such a narrative is that factors that do not fit so clearly may be obscured or ignored. For example, a simple modernization narrative risks obscuring the fact that Filipinas who work as maids in Hong Kong (and elsewhere), are not usually among the poorest or least educated women from the Philippines, and that many do not consider earning money their only or even their primary motivation. It can obscure the fact that many correspondence brides from China are not so young and not so poor, but are often urban professionals in their late thirties or forties, many of whom are divorced. Such a narrative often obscures non-material motivating factors for emigration. A desire to be married, to escape familial problems, or for love, romance, or compatibility, may be among the non-material motivating factors for women who seek to meet foreign marriage partners through correspondence. Like many Filipina prospective brides, given a choice, Chinese women often voice their preference for having their foreign husbands come and live in their country, rather than emigrating to the West.

The pattern of Filipina maids being more educated than their employers, or of professional Chinese or Vietnamese women marrying working class Western men (Thai 2002; Constable 2005a), reveal problems with maintaining the popular fiction of poor and desperate, so called "traditional", women emigrating to the West. Such a narrative may lead us to take at face value images that women promote of themselves as "traditional" women, actively and consciously downplaying their education and their worldly experiences in order to attract prospective employers or spouses. On the other hand, assuming that all prospective employers and spouses want "traditional" Asian wives or workers is also inaccurate.

Chinese employers in Hong Kong before 1997, for example, often expressed a strong preference for hiring Filipinas over rural mainland Chinese women as domestic workers precisely because Filipinas were conceived of as more modern, more Western, better educated, better versed in English (and could tutor children), and thus better at serving the needs of cosmopolitan employers (Constable 1997). Whereas many U.S. men seeking marriage partners hope to meet women with "traditional

family values" and expect to find such values in women from more remote and less cosmopolitan regions of the Philippines, others sought to correspond with and marry educated and professional Chinese women or Filipinas because they thought they would be a better match or better suited to the lifestyle of middle-class America. Some men expected such women to be less "desperate" to emigrate and to have more sincere marital objectives (Constable 2003a).

Another reason why the South to North migration narrative is troubling is because it lends itself too easily to the logic of a trafficking discourse, to a view of women as victims, and to a fundamentally anti-immigration stance. Such a narrative suggests overall that women are victims whether they know it or not, and it obscures some of the ways they express resistance, exert influence and create change. It thus makes it difficult to imagine any *good* migration. It also lays the foundation for an attempt to determine which women are innocent victims (deserving and worthy of protection by virtue of their "coercion") and which are not.

Jo Doezema's insightful argument that the twin concepts of forced versus voluntary prostitution have lost their utility because they constantly resuscitate the dichotomous notion of innocent and coerced women who deserve rescue, and immoral women who deserve what they get, can be applied to foreign brides as well (Doezema 1998). In the case of foreign brides, such dichotomous logic relies on a presumed distinction between naive and innocent brides who were lured or coerced into marriages on false pretenses but had pure marital motives, versus those who were active agents who voluntarily entered into marriage, knowing what they were getting into, and whose marital motives are deemed questionable or opportunistic.

In the United Nations Trafficking Protocol (article 3), trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other means of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability". This definition is sometimes interpreted so broadly as to include almost anyone who emigrates from global South to North. It can be used to support the notion that all women from poorer parts of the world have been, in a sense, "coerced" or are "vulnerable"—by virtue of fundamental global patterns of inequality—into migrating to wealthier parts of the world for work or marriage. This definition also begs the question of who exactly qualifies as "coerced" or "vulnerable". Such a question, however interesting, may be misdirected. A wealthier, better-educated woman in her forties from Manila or Beijing may be assumed to

be less vulnerable to exploitation than a very young, less educated woman from a poor rural village, but surely neither woman should be denied a visa or legal privileges and protections on the basis of age, education, or social background.

Several examples help to illustrate the way in which the concept of trafficking is uncritically applied to foreign brides. In *Mail-Order Brides: Women for Sale*, Mila Glodava and Richard Onizuka discuss what they consider an obvious connection between mail-order brides and trafficking. They applaud the 1990s spotlight on mail-order brides and explain, "this exploitation of women carries heavy societal consequences—the continued degradation of women and oppression of the weak, which can promote other forms of sexual exploitation such as pornography, pedophilia, white slavery and prostitution" (Glodava and Onizuka 1994: 6). Their argument is built on the assumption that correspondence brides are literally "sold" to Western men who "buy" brides. Such a definition, which highlights the commodification of women and blurs them with sex workers and slaves, is not uncommon. The Philippine Women Center of British Columbia (PWC) also defines mail-order brides as trafficked women, a category in which they include "domestic workers, mail-order brides, prostitutes and other Filipino women who are forced to emigrate *as part of globalization*" (PWC 2000: 1, my emphasis; Barry 1992).

According to the PWC, a "mail-order bride" is the result of a "formal transaction between a man and a woman from different countries, usually brokered by an agent, who is part of the mail-order bride industry, via catalogues or the Internet. The term…[applies] to situations where men go to the Philippines with the intention of finding a wife" and includes "Filipino women who have been introduced to Canadian husbands through informal networks of family and friends" (PWC 2000: 1). The PWC also counts as "mail-order brides" women who have met their husbands through computer dating in Canada and women who have married their employers (PWC 2000: 49). Their definition is so broad that it is difficult to imagine any form of Filipina migration that would not be trafficking. Like Glodava and Onizuka, the PWC makes no case for determining that some foreign brides are trafficked and others are not, nor do they attempt to distinguish between those who were coerced and those who were not.

Glodava and Onizuka cite several "unsuccessful" "case stories", all of which involve abuse and most of which end in divorce, to illustrate some of the difficulties faced by "mail-order brides" as trafficked women. These include the story of Chita, a 45-year old school teacher in the Philippines, who was "considered an old maid by her friends and colleagues and had

become increasingly anxious to get married" (Glodava and Onizuka 1994: 69). Chita envied her friends with U.S. husbands, hoped to meet a man who could help support her family, and she submitted her photograph to an introduction agency. After corresponding with Dean for a year and a half, they met in person and then eventually married. In the United States, Chita was faced with caring for three abusive stepchildren. The children "treated her like a maid" and Dean allowed it. Eventually she "ran away to a shelter" and, as Glodava and Onizuka explain, she is "now working and happy to be free of her abusive situation. She has divorced her husband and has acquired [U.S.] permanent residence" (Glodava and Onizuka 1994: 70). Catherine was "an unwed mother who had a very good job in advertising in Malaysia" when she decided—partly as a joke—to submit her name and photograph to a friend's introduction agency. After almost six months of correspondence with John, he came to Malaysia and they were married. In the United States, John began treating her violently, and "brought his mistress home". After a lengthy trial, she divorced John and "is looking forward to becoming a citizen and bringing her son and his wife to the United States" (Glodava and Onizuka 1994: 70-2). Amor "was 42 when she married a corporate lawyer named Don". She had been "a chemist working for a prestigious pharmaceutical company in Manila when Don saw her photograph in one of the mail-order bride catalogs". Like John, Don "started bringing home his mistress". When the mistress moved in, Amor decided to leave him, despite the stigma of a failed marriage. She moved to California and decided against reconciliation (Glodava and Onizuka 1994: 72-3).

The three cases are used by Glodava and Onizuka to illustrate the abuses and difficulties that mail-order brides face as "trafficked" women, but they also reveal other patterns that the authors do not discuss. Like many of the prospective Chinese and Filipina brides I encountered in the course of my research on correspondence introductions and marriage between 1998 and 2001, Amor and Chita were both considered "too old" to marry well in the Philippines and, like Rosie, a Filipina unwed mother I knew well, Catherine's status as an unwed mother reduced her prospects for a favorable marriage locally. Although Chita cited economic need as a factor in her desire to marry a wealthy American, Catherine and Amor had relatively good jobs. Like many of the women I encountered, it is difficult to reduce these women's motives to economic desperation. The women I met in the late 1990s had a number of reasons for seeking to marry foreigners. Economics were rarely the primary or the sole motivating factor. Their interest was tied at least in part to a desire to be married, and

to achieve marital subjectivity, since remaining single was looked down upon. Their non-material reasons included a desire for love and compatibility, and a desire to meet a man who would treat them as equals. Such reasons were not necessarily conceived of as separate from economic or material considerations.

Like the women I knew, Amor, Chita and Catherine all took the initiative to list their names and photographs with an introduction agency, and they made decisions about who to write to. Contrary to the common assumption that intra-ethnic marriages that are based on introductions by friends or family members provide a greater safety net than those based on impersonal introductions (Maher 2003: 15), women I spoke to pointed out the "freedom" afforded to them by Internet or printed catalogue introductions. As one explained, when a family member or friend serves as matchmaker, it is difficult to say no, but when you meet someone through E-mail or the Internet, you are free to say no, withhold your address, tear up his letter, give a false name, or never correspond again. Moreover women who marry within an ethnic community might find community support, but they can also be pressured not to air their dirty laundry at the risk of shaming not only themselves and their husbands, but also the wider ethnic community (Narayan 1995). Given the stigma associated with divorce in the Philippines, and the sense that it is the woman's responsibility to make a marriage succeed, had Amor, Catherine or Chita married an overseas Filipino, they could have faced greater community or familial pressure to remain in an unhappy marriage. Moreover, an intra-ethnic marriage, for example between a mainland Chinese woman emigrant and a Chinese American man, given the cultural, regional and possible class differences, would not necessarily result in greater compatibility than a marriage between a Chinese woman and a white American (Chin 1994).

Given the role that Chita, Catherine and Amor appear to have played in the process of seeking a husband, it is difficult to see them as passive. In the end, after facing difficulties in their marriages and receiving support from friends or women's activist organizations, all three women remained in the United States, found jobs and took the route of permanent residence and eventually, perhaps, citizenship. Yet Glodava and Onizuka use these cases to illustrate the plight of "trafficked" women who are "bought" and "sold". In such cases, I would argue, the notion of "trafficking" deters from a clear understanding of their situations. They experienced emotional and physical abuse, but they were not "bought or sold". A deeper understanding of their situations is gained from an awareness of structural factors (economic ones), gendered assumptions about work and the

vulnerability of immigrant brides. In such cases, a trafficking framework can obscure important factors underlying their decision to emigrate, and unnecessarily depicts such women as willing victims.

Discursive Blurs

Some authors, who do not utilize the term "trafficking", nonetheless highlight certain commonalities or connections between maids, sex workers and brides without adequately considering differences and variations and the implications of such blurs. Roland Tolentino's article, "Bodies, Letters, and Catalogs: Filipinas in Transnational Space", serves as an example of the blurring of boundaries between several categories of women workers and migrants (Tolentino 1996). The article is a fascinating and insightful discursive analysis of what he calls the "geopolitics of Filipinas in transnational space, specifically focusing on the problematics of the mail-order bride phenomenon as a social and political practice" (Tolentino 1996: 49). He analyses "mail-order brides" as "bodies in transnational space", alongside the bodies of Filipina maids or helpers, sex workers, sweatshop factory workers and nurses. As he explains, all are linked to Philippine political economy, colonial and post-colonial history, race relations and Western sexual fantasies about Asian women. Tolentino aptly observes that Filipino women's racial, national and gender identities are connected to their opportunities for mobility as wives, sex workers, and maids.

Insightful and important in many ways, contributing to a large body of literature that examines mainly "mail-order bride catalogs", (see for example Wilson 1988; Villapando 1989; Robinson 1996; Halualani 1995), and linking it to a wider concern about gender and transnationalism, the article also illustrates the risk of *unwarranted blurs* between Filipina workers of various sorts and wives. He focuses on discursive dimensions of "mail-order brides". His stated goal is not "to construct a rescue narrative nor a victim paradigm for the mail-order bride; both [of which] inevitably position women as oppressed, touting liberation as key to the questions 'What is to be done?...'" Instead, his hope is for "other interventions to occur which, in turn, may lead toward some theoretical and practical empowerment tactics for the actual marginalized bodies/voices who experience the effects of colonial and neocolonial histories in their daily struggles" (Tolentino 1996: 51-2).

One of the key threads that ties Tolentino's essay together is that of the sexuality of Filipina women. He suggests that Filipina brides (or more

specifically the discourse about Filipina brides) is linked to their sexuality as sex workers and "hospitality girls" in military brothels, and as maids and sweatshop workers. However, his study stops short of actual ethnographic analysis or any attempt to integrate the voices and discourses of women who would question, debate or dispute many of these commonalities. The essay thus conveys a generalized message about the overall commodification and exploitation of Filipina women. The "mail-order brides" in his article may be discursive representations of bodies in transnational space, but they are nonetheless depicted as commodities that are victimized by Western men, and that are primarily understood as little different from exploited domestic workers and abused entertainers and prostitutes.

Tolentino avoids the term "trafficking", but his work contains and reinforces a similar blur to that which is found in the work of activist scholars and activist organizations. The idea that mail-order brides, prostitutes and maids are trafficked women or that they are somehow alike as "marginalized bodies" in transnational space, reinforces the sense that their similarities are greater than their differences. Such studies, to borrow from Chandra Mohanty, homogenize and discursively colonize Third World women, rendering them all as victims (Mohanty 1991). Both the discursive analysis of catalogues and the trafficking literature on "mail-order brides" ignore women's own views of themselves as anything other than victims. Defined solely or primarily on the basis of their presumed victim status, maids, sex workers and correspondence brides inevitably—but inaccurately—blur together. It is hard to imagine how the "marginalized bodies/voices" of Filipina brides might enter such a discussion given that they would disagree with many of the ways Tolentino has described them.

Labels

As an ethnographer, I am particularly interested in people's own use of labels and their responses to the labels that others impose on them, and especially people's rejection or critique of externally imposed labels. In the course of research among Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong and among women involved in correspondence relationships, I noticed disjunctures between women's own labels, their understandings of themselves, and their roles as prospective brides and domestic workers on the one hand, and the labels that outsiders (including employers, government organizations, employment agencies and researchers) imposed on them. Politically active maids in Hong Kong preferred the term