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## **Women and Global Economic Migration in Asia – eroding borders, new fixities**

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Migration is often seen as an archetypal example of border-crossing. Highly-skilled migrants who cross international borders have come to be seen as placing different cultural and economic knowledge in contact, spurring economic growth (Beaverstock 2002). Other migrants have come to be seen as threats to borders, crossing them without appropriate papers and thus spurring a host of technologies for monitoring and controlling border crossings (Bigo 2002; Huysmans 1995). In these two narratives we can observe the juxtaposition of two versions of borders as they pertain to migration – one in which receiving state and society are seen as victim ('illegal' migration, typically involving the lesser skilled), in the other as beneficiary of 'foreign talents'. Thus, for some, it appears that borders have been transcended and mobility enabled. They are increasingly moving in a borderless world. For others, on the other hand, borders have gained in strength and significance in a securitized world (Ibrahim 2005).

Asia is one important crucible for both these kinds of migrant activity. In 2005, an estimated 53.3 million (or 28 per cent) of the worldwide stock of 191 million international migrants were in Asia (UN 2006: 29). A large number of these are economic migrants: the ILO estimates that of the 86 million migrant workers globally (excluding refugees), about 22.1 million were economically active in the Asian region (ILO 2004:7). Aside from economic migrants, most of whom are migrating within the region, Asia is also a major source region of permanent settlers (mostly family migrants) and students migrating to other regions. In addition, forced migration continues to play a part within the continent. These trends and patterns point to substantial numbers of Asians crossing international boundaries. Women form an increasingly significant part of these migratory flows. They play an ever more important role in certain sectors such as domestic work and nursing but are also present in considerable numbers within sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture (Yamanaka and Piper 2005).

In this chapter, we explore some aspects of these border crossings as they relate to the political, economic and social nature of borders. We suggest that migration studies that focus on women could explore the diverse and dynamic nature of borders as they are construed in the lives of migrant women. We use Asia as a specific example towards this purpose. It is important to state at the outset that this chapter does not provide a comprehensive review of the literature on borders as they relate to migrant women in Asia. Rather, we look at how borders manifest themselves in the lives of migrant women displacing some women, and conditioning experiences of both immigration and emigration for others. We thus move away from the tendency to see borders as pre-ordained or natural, as in so much of the policy-oriented literature on women and migration. In the section following this introduction, we provide a brief overview of

dominant paradigms that emerge from the literature on women's economic migration before moving on to explore how borders are being constructed and negotiated in border zones, in source countries and in destination countries. It is also worth iterating here that our discussion of Asia mostly refers to East, South and Southeast Asia as well as migrants from these areas who are in other parts of the world<sup>1</sup>. Although there is a significant amount of migration in the newly independent post-soviet countries of Central Asia, their proximity to Eastern Europe and their historical links with that region has meant that they are perhaps best considered separately.

By exploring of the issue of borders as they are played out in the context of female labour migrants within Asia, we outline some manifestations of the dynamic nature of borders and their role in constructing identities of female economic migrants through the use of examples. We highlight the porosity and the constructed nature of borders in our first example of the historical production of borders in Malaysia while the second on the experience of migrants at the Burma Thailand border suggests the productive nature of borders in producing new forms of labour and political subjectivities. The first case also exemplifies the fertile intersection between borders as metaphorical devices and borders as socially constituted practices showing how the latter invariably interrelates with the former.

We then explore practices of bordering as they pertain to emigration. Most literature on migration focuses on migration as an act of reception, and there is much less work on the devices used to monitor and control border crossings by source countries. We aim to address this gap by exploring how India uses regulations to limit who can find employment where, but in creating a legislative framework of protection, instates a border between the rights of those who are regular and those who are not.

In the last section we move to look at bordering within the context of sites of destination. Here, we explore two forms of borders, those between skilled and lesser skilled workers and those that are created in temporary labour regimes. We also briefly explore how systems of advocacy are reworking the territorial borders of migrant politics.

The small body of work that has explored the conceptual issues surrounding female migration and borders within Asia (see for instance, Devasahayam et al. 2004) has assumed the borders themselves as given, regarding borders as a frontier that women cross. Our approach emphasises the constructed nature of these borders, their dynamics and the multiple sites where bordering is played out. It suggests that borders can simultaneously enforce both mobility and enclosure (Cunningham and Heyman 2004).

### **Migrant women in Asia – dominant paradigms**

Economic migration of women from Asia (both within the region and without) is not new. Some of this movement can be traced to historical processes such as women's pull into plantation work under colonialism or as part of specific economic development

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<sup>1</sup> We have used World Bank definitions of different parts of Asia for this paper.

processes, such as exported industrialization and/or focus on investment in the tourism industry (Ball and Piper 2001; Oishi 2005).

However, in the past couple of decades there has been an overall feminisation of migration which is related to at least four phenomena: 1. improved statistical visibility, partly related to a changed perception of women-dominated migration as 'work migration' in its own right; 2. the increasing participation of women in most, if not all, migration streams; 3. the increasing inability of men to find full-time employment in the origin countries; and 4. the growing demand for feminised jobs in destination countries (Piper 2008a). The forms of migration depend on the particular situation in specific origin and destination countries, skill level and type of job.

These movements do not come easily. They are encouraged because of their importance to economic growth but are also regulated because of the securitisation of women's bodies and because of the negative effects that the 'care gap' that women's departure produces on both the household and the state.

Broadly speaking, there are two strands to the literature on female economic migration: one that focuses on intra-Asian migration (Chin 2003; Huang and Yeoh 2003; Grundy-Warr et al. 1996; Wickramasekara 2002) and another that follows the broad contours of migration, from countries of the global South to the North (McGovern 2003; Parreñas 2001). The extent of intra-regional migration in Asia, the conditions under which much of this labour is performed and the new forms of political and civil engagements that have emerged as a result have all evoked feminist attention (Barber 2000; Piper 2008b; Piper and Yamanaka 2003).

On the other hand, literature on female economic migration from Asia to Northern countries has heavily focused on the relocation of socially reproductive activities globally through the formation of global care chains whereby women move to provide various forms of care such as nursing, domestic work, childcare and so on to households in the richer global North. This relocation leads to a demand for such carework in the households of those who migrate spurring migration from other parts of Asia. In this way, the demand for socially reproductive labour (Kofman and Raghuram 2006) creates what Arlie Hochschild calls a care chain, "a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (2000:131). This form of migration shapes the border crossing of most female economic migrants in Asia today.

Research on the movement of women from Asia to work in OECD countries, particularly the US (Espiritu 2002; Parreñas 2001) and the UK (Anderson 2000) also echoes many of the same concerns as the literature on migration within Asia. In much of this literature female labour seems to primarily involve body work, work where the female body or 'femininity' are implicated in the nature of work provided (see for instance, Gulati 1994). For instance, most Asian women labour migrants move to take up jobs as domestic workers, sex workers and nurses, professions that are defined by notions of femininity. As Bowlby, Gregory and McKie (1997) argue such notions can act in oppressive ways to structure women's entry into occupations but also shape the form of international female

migration.<sup>2</sup> These patterns reflect global trends in terms of the scale of international migration and the entry of women into certain migration streams that used to be dominated by men, i.e. women as independent economic migrants and main income earners (UN General Assembly 2004).

Although women who move from the global South to the North as well as those moving within Asia are also taking part in the less feminised sectors of the labour market such as IT and business, where gender exclusivity and male dominance are the norm, such participation has received much less attention (but see for instance, Yeoh and Willis 2005; Raghuram 2004). At the same time, the demand in feminised sectors has become so strong that there is some evidence, mainly coming from the Philippines, of male migrants attempting to enter feminised streams (especially nursing) because of the legal channels and breadth of destinations ‘on offer’.<sup>1</sup>

In sum, despite the broadening of Asian women’s experiences, the bulk of research on female migration focuses on the experiences of domestic workers. For instance, a region-wide study on Asian women as transnational domestic workers by Huang, Yeoh and Abdul Rahman (2005) provides an update on an earlier work by Heyzer et al. (1994). Entertainers are another category of female migrants who have been widely researched. It has been argued that their migration has typically been subsumed under trafficking rather than migration for work (e.g., see Piper 2005), which is another large area of interest. International interest in trafficking has clearly led to the availability of funding for research on this field, and trafficking, particularly in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, and in South Asia has received particular attention (Asis 2008; Lee 2005; Piper 2005; Yea 2006). There has also been much interest in migrant women nurses (Ball 2004; Percot 2005), especially within the context of brain drain and brain waste through the deskilling of nurses who are employed as carers and domestic workers. Oishi’s (2005) work on 10 countries across the Asian region (which region?), covering both sending and receiving countries with its multi-level analysis (globalization, state policies, social legitimacy and individual autonomy) also provides an integrative and comparative perspective on female migration in the region. Such multi-sited, multi-level studies, however, are still fairly rare.

### **Borders in flux**

Historically, migration has been a central part of the development of Asia even in the pre-colonial period. South East Asia was a crucible where trading links between East and South Asia were played out and similar links also existed between South and West Asia. However, colonialism changed the nature and quality of migration with large scale redistribution of populations within the region through practices such as indentured

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<sup>2</sup> Arguably, similar processes are at work even in ‘marriage migration’, especially that between Asian women and western men where women are less skilled. Here marriage is often among the few options available for securing women’s migration status (Piper 1999; Piper and Roces 2003).

labour. Colonial authorities used indenture system such as the *kangany* & *maistry* to provide labour for the labour intensive plantations in South East Asia.

Women were always part of this arrangement. Many women were themselves indentured and undertook work in the plantations. Some women who were not indentured but had been allowed to accompany men entered domestic labour. Others migrated singly either as marriage migrants or in order to seek domestic work although these numbers were small. Thus, of the 74 454 Indian women in Mauritius 868 were reported as domestic workers, 549 as gardeners and 244 as laundresses. Domestic work was thus the largest single occupation for migrant women (Carter 1995). Similarly, Indian domestic workers accompanied soldiers and assistants in 1819 when Sir Raffles first went to Singapore to establish a base there (Ministry of External Affairs 2001). In these flows it is not always clear whether to name the migrants as Indians, or subjects of the British Empire. Their mobility is clearly shaped by both. At one point the borders of the British Empire meant that this migration was easily arranged but as the Empire dissolved borders between these countries were reinstated. Clearly then, borders are not static – they alter as the logic of bordering itself alters. Empires and nations provide different frameworks for bordering practices.

A historical approach to migration, thus, suggests that migrants do not necessarily transcend borders – rather borders are constructed underneath their feet. Moreover, the borders that women navigate simply find new shape in the post-migration situation. One example of this is offered by Bernard Wilson (forthcoming) in his reflections on K.S.Maniam's text *Between Lives* (2003). Wilson highlights some of the struggles that the texts' protagonists face in producing a polymorphous life within the context of an increasingly ethnicised Malaysia. They live through a range of historical formations, with their own particular boundary making moments – British colonization, Japanese occupation, Independence, Insurgency, and 'developmental change' in contemporary Malaysia. In these processes new borders emerge and have to be negotiated in independent Malaysia. One such is the changing status of ethnicity within independent Malaysia. By according Malays the status of *Bhumiputra*, i.e. children of the soil, a differentiation between different ethnic groups within Malaysia was given statutory recognition. Ethnic differentiation was strengthened so that bordering increasingly occurred within Malaysia. The lives of different ethnic groups became increasingly differentiated. This ethnic heterogeneity of the Malaysian population was an inheritance of the heterogeneity of the Empire, with labour being shipped from one place within the Empire to another, but the borderless Empire became bordered as many of the countries became independent. Indentured workers were stranded through hundreds of years of economic history in countries far away from those they thought of as home. This form of bordering is recounted by Maniam through the protagonist of his text, Sellamma, a Tamil migrant who came to work in Malaysia's plantations. Her life is a struggle to remember, to belong and to find representation. As a young professional urban woman, also of Tamil descent, coaxes Sellamma to adapt to urban development and to become part of the 'new Malaysia', Sellamma traverses a range of identificatory boundaries, temporal and spatial. She has to negotiate the borders of tradition and modernity as lived out through the processes of modernisation and urbanisation in an ambitious forward looking Malaysia.

But it is not only the territorial border that has altered but also the social basis of belonging as ethnicity comes together with the tropes of modernity to decide who belongs and where. Sellamma's life is bordered and rebordered in this history of Malaysia. Borders are emergent, physically and metaphorically.

The case of indentured Indian female workers in Malaysia provides one example of how the transformation of international geopolitical borders has shaped gendered subjectivities. It is also an interesting site for thinking about the transformations of borders between Empire, nation and ethnic groups. Colonialism laid the seeds for migration from Asia to Europe and in the Philippine case, the US, a trajectory that has continued into the postcolonial period. In many cases, current movements of women can be understood as an intensification of previous patterns of migration. The direction of labour mobility follows colonial links, Indonesia to the Netherlands, South Asia to the UK and so on. What has become international migration often has routes in colonial linkages. Borders have their own fluid histories while bordering as a process is lived out through the lives of these labour migrants as our first example shows.

In the second example, we will explore how these borders were not only dynamic but also continue to be volatile. In many instances, in postcolonial Asia, borders have not yet stabilised. Borders are often used to mark the limits of national sovereignty, but they also help to construct a socio-cultural imaginary. And in many parts of the world, geopolitical boundaries do not neatly overlie meaningful social and cultural spaces. Over time meaningful cultural boundaries were cut across by imperial boundaries which then influenced the borders of postcolonial states. On the other hand, different cultural groups were put together in producing other geopolitical entities leading to ethnic conflict within states. Boundary wars have resulted. In these areas borders are clearly not lines on a map; rather they may be better seen as broad zones where border skirmishes are played out. These border zones come to be seen as threatening the territorial integrity of the spaces on either side of the boundary. But they are also zones for population movements of refugees, of people fleeing to find work. Labour migration of women is also widespread in these boundary zones as the economies of these areas collapse through war.

The boundary struggles in eastern Myanmar offer an example of a boundary in the making and resultant forms of female mobility that mark this conflictual landscape. This border area between Thailand and Myanmar is a zone of movement, produced by the ethnic violence within the latter country and resulting in new forms of ethnicisation within the former. Historical affiliations, colonial agreements and postcolonial military dictatorship have together left a legacy of a wide range of political rights and recognition for the many ethnic minority groups within Myanmar. The Shan, the Karens and the Mons are amongst the ethnic groups for whom the search for statehood and national belonging have resulted in widespread displacement and search for new meaningful borders ((Laungaramsri 2006; Grundy-Warr and Wong 2002). The Karens, with their claim to territory, spanning international boundary between Myanmar and Thailand, imagine their own borders, of a nascent state which they call Kawthoolei. 'The processes of demarcating Thailand and Burma territory have established the two nation-states and simultaneously designated the Karens, as well as other ethnic nationalities and indigenous

peoples situated in the border zones, as unqualified forms of life. Through this inclusive exclusion, these peoples have been abandoned by the two sovereignties. Being lives without, for the most part, any protection, they are deprived of any possibility of appeal.' (Tangseefa 2006: 411).

This instability has found expression in diverse forms of labour migration from this border zone into Thailand. Domestic work and sex work (Grund-Warr, King and Risser 1996) and trading (Kusakabe and Mar Oo 2007) have been amongst the occupations in which women have found jobs. However, in a study of Mae Sot town in the Tak Province in Northern Thailand, Arnold and Hewison (2005) found that 95% of the workers in the approximately 200 factories were Burmese, and that about 70% of the migrants in the area were women. Thus, contested borders appear to dispel populations, particularly women.

Yet, these zones can also be sites for the production of new political subjectivities. One example is that of women from one of the large ethnic minority groups in Myanmar, the Shan. As part of the formation of a unified state, the military government in Myanmar has forcibly relocated many people in the Shan province, destroyed crops and has attempted to subjugate the border zones through a mixture of interventional development projects and military offensives (Laungaramsri 2006). In an insightful analysis, Laungaramsri suggests that Shan women find themselves caught between three nationalist discourses with these territorial imaginaries and socio-cultural borders. The Myanmar government has evicted Shan women as bearers of non-Burmese identity, the Thai government has refused to give Shan women refugee status and hence made them ineligible for humanitarian assistance, while the Shan nationalist movement has incorporated women as subordinates in a military conflict. The Shan Women's Action Network, set up in 1999, was an attempt by Shan women to find a voice in the marginal space between the three dominant nationhoods. Through research, advocacy and community based action they have attempted to forge a way of defining what it means to be a Shan. They have established educational opportunities, training, health centers and counseling centers for those who face the daily rigours of displacement and exile. In this, they have taken part in transnational networks that span many international borders. This type of work not only enables new forms of labour force participation for those whom they support, but is also in itself a source of employment for Shan women. It has become a site of emergent transnational political subjectivities.

### **Bordering devices in origin countries**

From the examples above we get a clear sense of the importance of the state in bordering processes and in creating borderless populations in a bordered world. States are often the architects of bordering device and the law the technology through which this bordering is achieved. States decide who should be eligible for protection from the state, and who amongst those within its borders should be protected. As such, we would argue that states continue to play a key part in producing borders.



But within the migration context which state should provide this protection, the state in the source country or the destination country, is also unclear. Moreover, in an increasingly 'networked state' (Cannoy and Castells 2001), most countries have some presence within the borders of other nations' territories. The role of consulates in dispensing protection and legislating on migrant welfare means that the borders of the destination state are interpellated by the juridical borders of the source states.

On the other hand, these juridical boundaries of who is eligible for such welfare may have been set well before any international boundary are crossed. One example of this is the distinction between regular and irregular migrants and the withholding of legal protection from those who are irregular by both source and destination states. Nikolas Rose argues that this process of exclusion is an example of a global shift from offering welfare to those who are citizens to those who are included within and have passed through (and thus reinforced the power of) contemporary legislative frameworks. Legal protection is often only offered to documented workers, rather than to migrant citizens irrespective of status. The border between irregular and regular migrants is thus enacted in the conditions of who can become documented and how. This process of recognition of the right to migrate is thus itself a bordering device that determines who can become regular, who is eligible for protection and for whom can the source state's protection be extended extra-territorially.

Below, we explore this issue through the example of migrant Indian domestic workers. The borders between regular and irregular migrants are particularly significant amongst domestic workers, many of whom are irregular and are therefore not protected by any laws. Moreover, India is only one of several Asian states which have placed limits on women migrating to enter domestic work, limiting the rights to mobility or forcing more and more women into an irregular status on the one hand, and creating new borders between those who are able to migrate legally and those who are not on the other.

There are a range of practices through which these forms of control are materialised. Until October 2007 the possession of skills (those holding graduate degrees, vocational qualifications), wealth (income-tax payers), nature of employment (those working in skilled and semi-skilled sectors, in diplomatic service), nature of employer (those employed as Gazetted government servants) and destination countries (migrants to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, all countries in North America and in Europe (excluding CIS countries) were all used to decide who required clearance from the government to emigrate and who did not. Moreover, women under the age of 30 were also not allowed to go abroad to take up domestic work. A range of bordering devices thus, operated to decide who could migrate easily, who on migrating would be considered legally eligible for Government of India protection and who would not. Moreover, for women age acted as a supplementary device making some people who are below that age, irregular and outside the remit of protection from the source country.

Since October 2007, these borders of acceptability around migration have altered. Those seeking employment in 18 Asian countries are now required to obtain emigration

clearance, while all other criteria for clearance have been removed, except for women. The symbolic border between those who require protection and those who do not has clearly shifted from those around class (and its proxy measures such as education and wealth) to geographical imaginations of safe and unsafe countries.

Women are, however, a special case, especially if they are entering domestic work. Until 2007, domestic workers were required to obtain emigration clearance through the Office of the Protectorate of Emigrants which is based in some of the major Indian cities.<sup>ii</sup> The offices in Delhi and Mumbai deal with the bulk of applications and as such they are of higher status, being lead by officials of the rank of Under Secretary (to the Government of India) rather than section officers. The Protector's office aims to determine that there is a demand for the worker and that the conditions under which the worker will operate will be adequate for the worker and equivalent to those that would have been given to local employees, particularly with respect to the period and placement of placement, wages and conditions.

The rationale for not allowing domestic workers to seek employment through recruitment agents is that recruitment agents will not have adequate control over employers due to the privatised nature of the employment. The Ministry of Labour aims to “strictly control” the emigration of domestic workers and to protect the rights of domestic workers by checking that there is a direct relation between the employer and the employee and ensuring that the regulations of the Protector of Emigrants are all being met. Domestic workers seeking emigration have, therefore, to be recruited directly by the employer and have to give assurance that they will only work for the foreign employer who has recruited them and will only be engaged in the job for which they have been recruited. Those seeking emigration clearances must come personally to the office of the Protector to make their application to emigrate. A letter stating that the employer will receive them at the point of destination must accompany this application. Domestic workers are also required to produce a medical clearance certificate testifying that they are fit for the job and an employment contract that has been attested by the Indian mission in the country to which the worker is destined. The Emigration Act requires that the employee will be paid at least the minimum salary of the country in which they seek employment and that they will be governed by minimum standards of condition of employment. For domestic workers the contract should stipulate that workers would only work for 8 hours a day, 6 days a week and eleven months of a year. The employees must provide medical insurance in the destination country. Clearly, then ‘there is a sense in which today the experience of crossing the border is, for many people, not unlike entering a large corporate building, government ministry, a university library, gated residence or computer network. In each case the subject is scanned, identified and profiled. A databank is accessed, a record created. An entry occurs, or perhaps access is denied. Such is the changing *texture* of borders.’ (Walters 2006: 197) Moreover, these borders clearly exist well inside territorial entities and not just at its limits.

In order to obtain clearance, the husband (if married) or parent of the domestic worker must accompany them to the office of the Protector of Emigrants. This practice removes the responsibility of the domestic worker from the office of the Protector to the

accompanying person. This form of infantilisation of gendered subjectivities is particularly problematic in a context, where it is precisely the failure of the patriarchal family, abandonment by husbands and hence by both the natal and new families that spurs migration.

Officially applicants who seek emigration clearance to be employed as domestic workers must also be at least 30 years of age, although this may be relaxed where the employer is themselves an Indian citizen. Apparently the border between employer and employee is muted by co-nationality! However, in such circumstances the office of the Protector seeks an affidavit from the employer to the effect that only they will employ this worker. Until 2002 this rule only pertained to women intending to migrate to West Asia but on the recommendation of the National Commission for Women, this regulation has been extended to those bound for all countries.

The Protector is required to check that the intending emigrant has been informed of any problems or issues that might arise in the country of employment. The prospective worker must deposit an application fee, as well as a sum of money equivalent to a one-way fare from the country of destination. The latter is deposited with the office of the Protector in the name of the employee by the employer in order to fund repatriation of the domestic worker in case any problems arise during the duration of the employment. The money is withdrawn on behalf of the domestic worker by the office and is sent to the Indian mission in the destination country under these circumstances. If no problems arise, this money is returned to the domestic worker once they return to India. In order to keep track of all these issues, the office of the Protector maintains a separate register for those seeking employment abroad as domestic workers.

Here we see a detailed example of how borders are kept in tact through a range of regulations. These are the borders of a mobility regime (Shamir 2005) as they ultimately operate to limit access and restrict movement. They are layered – with a range of actors: protectors of emigrants, male members of the household of the prospective domestic worker, employers and so on, well meaning members of the National Commission for Women and so on, acting to control women's cross border movements and to create and govern difference. We can also see some of the minutiae of how these actors find a role in such bordering activities. Given the context of familial abuse which prevents so many women from accessing familial support for migration and hence a legal route to migration, these processes may well be seen as the 'energies, the practices, the works of division that act upon persons and collectivities such that some ways of being, some forms of existence are cast into a zone of shame, disgrace or debasement, rendered beyond the limits of the liveable, denied the warrant of tolerability, accorded purely a negative value' (Rose 1999: 253).

In 2007, the ways of ordering female workers' mobility altered. Under the new rules, it is not only household service workers but, rather all women who require emigration clearance who will be subject to controls over migration. All women who hold passports requiring emigration clearance will be banned from taking up employment in countries with which India has not yet entered into bilateral agreements. The limits of legal

migration have closed in and new borders based on bilateralism have come to be implemented between those who are seen as legal and those who are not.

Moreover, gender has become a guiding principle in this form of bordering, working in consonance with other forms of differentiation. The need for emigration clearance now encompasses all women who require emigration clearance (and see above for how this operates across class boundaries), rather than just domestic workers. The distinction between men and women supersedes that of the conditions of work. Also, the state in taking up the mantle of protecting women appears to have excluded more and more women from state protection by making them irregular. Migrants are, thus, clearly subject to layers of gendered dimensions of state regulation 'at home' and 'abroad' and the borders between regular and irregular migrants are indelibly gendered.

### **Borders within**

In this penultimate section we want to explore some ways in which borders draw upon other social hierarchies, especially those between different parts of the population. Here, once again we see borders operate as filters, rather than as blockages, selecting out those whose movements will be enabled and those whose mobility will be withheld (Walters 2006). In the first part of this section we discuss the increasing differentiation between the skilled and lesser skilled and how certain versions of skills acts as a boundary marker between different populations. Although borders have always divided and sorted populations into the desirable and the undesirable, what is increasingly significant in the Asian context is the extent to which these borders are permanently in place. Asian migration is marked by a host of temporary arrangements so that settlement is never on offer, especially for women who are migrating within the lesser skilled sectors. Such women are only ever reluctantly and contingently admitted into destination countries. In the second part of the section we discuss the entrenchment of temporary migration systems and the 'stickiness' of the geopolitical borders of source countries in such systems. We suggest that many Asian countries have failed to expand symbolic or social-cultural borders in line with the resident population within geographical territories but that this is also being challenged by advocacy organisations.

### *Polarisation and stratification*

When the monolithic category of 'female migrant' is broken down to explore the differences between the various types of economic migrants, refugee or trafficked women and migrating wives (Piper and Yamanaka 2008), it becomes clear that the increasing polarisation between skilled and less skilled migration in the ease of migration between countries has gender implications.

The trend toward increasing diversification and polarisation results in highly stratified migratory movements. The notion of ‘polarisation’ highlights the differences between the skilled and lesser skilled. ‘Diversification’ refers to intra-group differences (e.g. ‘Asians’ in Australia constitute a highly diverse group too, see Khoo et al. 2008) as well as inter-group differences (more source countries have appeared on the migration ‘scene’; the number of destination countries has increased with more countries having shifted from being a purely ‘sending’ to becoming simultaneously destination countries).

Gender intersects with other social relations, such as class and/or caste, migration status, ethnicity and/or race, generational cleavages, etc. Taken together, a complex map of stratification emerges with its own dynamics of exclusion/inclusion and power relations. It is important to highlight these dynamics in both destination and origin countries to emphasize that migrants *leave and enter* gendered and stratified societies (with qualitative and quantitative differences depending on specific context, Piper 2008; as also recognized by Oishi 2005).

Thus, ‘stratification’ emphasizes the combined effects of gender, ethnicity, legal status, skill level, and mode of entry or exit. This is also played out geographically: migrants with high socio-economic status tend to go to higher income and more developed countries (i.e. the US, Canada, Europe, Hong Kong, Singapore) as the fees charged and the skills demanded are higher. Religion, and social norms associated with it, also plays a certain role with some Muslim countries giving preference, and being preferred, by migrants of the same faith (e.g. Indonesian domestic workers going in larger numbers to West Asia than elsewhere). Asian women migrating within Asia tend to be less qualified and many of them belong to the lower-middle class or working classes, hence many of them migrate to closer destinations within the region (Oishi 2005: 111). The gendered and geographic stratification of migration has implications on labour market experience, entitlements and rights. Thus, social and cultural identities as well as class backgrounds decide who migrates where as well as what rights migrants can then subsequently have. It appears that borders within the country are extended out into destination states, being mapped out onto where women can go and to define their employment and residence rights.

In opposition to the narratives of lesser skilled Asian women workers travelling around Asia is the finding that according to the OECD (2002), Asian migration plays a dominant factor in skilled migration flows and that women are a significant part of these flows. “Indian IT specialists and doctors, Filipino nurses or Chinese professionals are emblematic of this phenomenon” (Dumont et al. 2007: 10). When zooming in on women in specific, the Philippines take lead position as origin country for tertiary educated women in OECD countries (ibid).

Closer examination of skilled migration through a gender lens shows that ironically, many skilled women become less skilled migrant workers purely because of the lack of demand in the jobs they are qualified for – a phenomenon referred to as ‘de-skilling’ (see e.g. Mc Kay 2003; Dumont et al 2007). This has in particular been noticed in regard to two highly feminised jobs: nursing and domestic work. Despite their classification (by

immigration policies) as skilled migrants, de-skilling has been highlighted by existing studies as a common phenomenon experienced by foreign nurses. Women who enter skilled sectors such as nursing may become deskilled and have to work as say care home workers where their medical qualifications are devalued, yet their ability to get to the OECD countries has been dependent on accessing the right skills set prior to migration. Moreover, with domestic work constituting the major legal channel available to women in most regions of this world, including West and Southeast Asia<sup>3</sup>, it is not rare to find fairly well-educated women taking on this type of job which is categorised as ‘unskilled’ by immigration policies. Yet we note that very often the class stratification in being able to access higher education can be played out in the international borders that you can then subsequently get to cross, i.e. where you perform these lesser skilled jobs may well depend on the social borders of the home country.

At the same time, there are less skilled women who are turned into skilled migrant workers because of the otherwise controversial nature of their jobs or of their physical mobility. For instance, in the Philippines, the government classifies women departing to Japan, Korea and Taiwan on the entertainer visa as ‘professional overseas performing artists’. A recent study by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2003:65) describes the classification of entertainers as professional or skilled as an “anachronism” because most of the women are rarely trained as professional entertainers or performing artists. At the same time this raises a feminist concern about ‘reproductive’ or ‘care work’ often not being considered as requiring skills. Another example is provided by the case of Bangladesh: as the out-migration of less skilled Bangladeshi women is banned by the government, female factory workers in Malaysia are classified as skilled to allow them to migrate legally<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the official categories of ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ need deconstruction to expose their social embeddedness (Dodson 2008). Commonly used classifications do not always reflect or recognize the actual level of skills or professionalism but are rooted in the economic and gender disparities that exist between origin and destination countries as well as within societies.

This exploration of the distinction between skilled and lesser skilled highlights ‘the notion of unequal passages and delineates how power works through borders as distinctive spaces connecting and regulating movement across the different fragments of globalization’ (Cunningham and Heyman 2004: 300).

Moreover, these differences really matter because the emerging policies by destination governments also result in increasingly stratified rights and entitlements. Citizenship is becoming less important for the skilled who obtain most rights via permanent residency status. At the same time, changing citizenship is becoming easier for the privileged and the toleration of dual citizenship is increasing (Dauvergne, forthcoming). For the lesser skilled, citizenship is of less immediate importance than accessing overseas employment in general (Briones 2006). International migration of both, the skilled and lesser skilled,

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<sup>3</sup> Domestic work is the single most important job category in the Gulf States mostly taken up by Indonesians, Sri Lankans and Filipinas. There are 250,000 Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) in Hong Kong, and of 500,000 foreign workers in total, 150,000 in Singapore are FDWs.

<sup>4</sup> Personal e-mail communication with Dr. Petra Dannecker, November 10, 2005.

is set up increasingly as circulatory and, therefore, not closely in tune with citizenship. The skilled, however, enjoy overall a greater range of benefits and choices to do with unequal access to the permanent residency (PR) status and the (eventual) opportunity to settle (as in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in particular) which is largely denied to the lesser skilled, although it has been noted that even the permanence of PR is being affected by pressures of globalisation (Dauvergne, forthcoming).

### *Temporary migration*

As temporary contract workers with legal employment permits, both male and female migrants are often tied to one specific employer in one specific line of work – and when this is a job classified as ‘unskilled’ and is linked to the informal sector of the economy, this results in limited wage earning power, little if any upward or sideward mobility, and has thus implications for sustaining family members back home and for disciplining foreigners to become compliant and docile workers. This is compounded by the emergence of a complex ‘migration industry’ with the involvement of brokers and recruiters who often charge fees that exceed ‘legal’ ceilings (Verité 2005). Furthermore, labour laws are often not enforced, the freedom of association is widely violated, and undocumented migration is tacitly approved and legal status denied by many receiving states (Piper 2008b). While two of the male-dominated sectors are classified as the most dangerous types of work – construction and agriculture – domestic work has been recognized as one of the most vulnerable types of employment with high levels of isolation and widespread occurrence of abusive practices (ILO 2004). As women in lower skilled jobs often end up in (certain) reproductive spheres of the labour market (as domestic workers, sex workers), they work in jobs that are socio-legally not recognized as ‘proper’ work.

Temporary migration schemes, however, do not only concern the lesser skilled. Even when classified as skilled workers, this does not automatically come with a permanent residence permit. In Europe, many jobs in the health and education sectors are contracted and highly dependent on the labour market situation, as exemplified in the recent changes in the United Kingdom’s hiring procedure. Although family reunification is in principle an entitlement skilled migrants have, temporary status renders the uprooting of a family a complex decision to be made by individual migrants.

In Asia, where most receiving countries operate with strictly temporary migration schemes, research on the social costs of this type of migration has begun to expand, especially on the issue of transnational parenthood/motherhood and transnationally split family life. Also, there is more and more evidence of short-term stays turning into longer term arrangements, with migrants extending their contracts several times ending up being absent for many years, if not decades, yet without the prospects of uniting with their families at the destination (Piper forthcoming). Thus, in a world of temporary migration, crossing borders does not entail any rights to social inclusion. The social border of the nation is in many ways held intact while the territorial border is crossed.

Despite these physical and social borders, there are also rising forces from within society in both origin and destination countries to “deborder” states (Rumford 2006), and that is through ordinary citizens taking up advocacy on behalf of migrants and also by migrants’ forming their own associations. There is an evolving literature now on so-called ‘transnational political activism’ and ‘transnational advocacy networks in defence of migrants’ rights (e.g. Law 2002; Piper 2003). These groups are imagining and creating new territorial affiliations and networks that cut across both symbolic and territorial borders. Yet, even within civil society, there are borders between women of different classes and status (as for instance exemplified in middle class women’s organisations who represent the employers in destination countries not supporting the advocacy of foreign domestic workers, see Lyons 2005; Wee and Sim 2005) or boundaries between male migrants’ networks and female migrants’ (often unsuccessful) attempts to join or link up with their male counterparts (Dannecker 2005). The latter shows that ethnicity or common nationality alone is no guarantee for solidarity and inclusion at the destination. Stratified migration, therefore, results in stratified boundaries and borders.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have explored some aspects of how female migration in Asia challenges the notion of borders from not only the perspective of destination, but also origin, countries. The latter’s role in bordering has too often been neglected. Our main argument is that the discussion of borders and bordering has to go beyond the physical crossing of state borders which are typically depicted as fairly static. On the one hand, these border crossings suggest a decline in the strength of borders, while on the other, migration has been met by a system of increasingly securitised and militarised border reinforcements. Yet, when we look at the experiences of migrant women in Asia, we see that the idea of geographical borders must be supplemented by a recognition of the constructed and dynamic nature of borders. More importantly, borders are socially and culturally shaped and constitute gendered identities. In other words, spatial mobilities and political subjectivities are shaped by border skirmishes. Some of these skirmishes have historical roots in postcolonial Asia while others are more recent. Finally, borders are seen to enclose territorial entities that are in some ways marked by homogeneity or uniqueness but our chapter shows that this, too, is usually untrue. Borders have proliferated within geographic boundaries, as class and gender shape the female body’s migration within Asia.

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<sup>i</sup> There is some evidence of men taking up feminised professions in order to migrate (Manalansan IV, 2006). In the Philippines, for instance, cases of medical doctors have emerged who retrain as nurses in order to access the international labour market (personal communication, Dr. Maruja M.B. Asis, Scalabrini Migration Center, Manila).

<sup>ii</sup> The Protector of Emigrants does not involve itself with helping employees to obtain a visa or to meet regulations set by destination country.