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The Making of an "Ideal" Live-In Migrant Care Worker : Recruiting, Training, Matching and Disciplining

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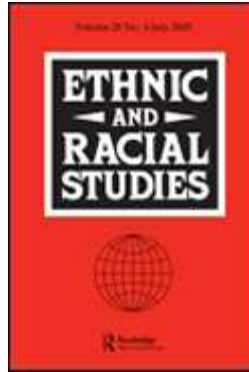
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**The Making of an "Ideal" Live-In Migrant Care Worker :
Recruiting, Training, Matching and Disciplining**

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The Making of an “Ideal” Live-In Migrant Care Worker: Recruiting, Training, Matching and Discipliningⁱ

Abstract

This essay investigates the contested processes through which gender and racial ideologies are practiced thereby place specific group of women in particular gendered and racialized labor markets. The migration of female live-in care workers to Taiwan exemplifies how gender and racial ideologies are embodied in everyday practices that justify the paid care work done by these women and that produce their subordinate status. In this essay, I take the problematic of representation of “migrant care workers” as a point of entry, to investigate how a gendered-racialized ideology is utilized to legitimate and naturalize the gendered-racialized division of care labor within the global capitalist context.

Key Word: labor migration, racial ideology, Asian, globalization, gender and immigration, gender

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3 A range of social agents are involved with the coordination of care labor migration in
4 the transnational context, including the state, policy makers, governmental officials,
5 employers, and private recruiting agencies. Amongst these institutional agents,
6 recruiting agencies perform a vital role in the processes of recruiting, screening,
7 training, and placing migrant workers in the segregated labor market (Bakan and
8 Stasiulis 1995; Constable 1997; Loveband 2004; Guevarra 2009). Because of the
9 complex bureaucratic procedures involved in importing live-in migrant care workers in
10 Taiwan, most employers rely on recruiting agencies to match workers to private
11 households. Taiwanese recruiting agencies act as gatekeepers in facilitating and
12 organizing the importation of migrant care workers. The interactions between recruiting
13 agents and employers in the matching processes, including the requirements for and
14 selection of potential workers, reflect not only how live-in migrant care workers are
15 perceived by recruiting agencies and employers, but also how these two social agents
16 participate in the contested discourses that legitimate the specific job performed by this
17 particular racialized group of women.

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39 The investigation starts with the pictures posted on the Taiwanese recruiting
40 agencies' on-line selection systems for prospective live-in migrant care workers. The
41 pictures represent the typical image of migrant care workers, who are originally from
42 Southeast Asian countries and then work in Taiwan. The Southeast Asian women
43 pictured are usually dressed in white shirts and aprons, with their hair short tied back.
44 They smile mildly in the pictures and look feminine and submissive. In this essay, I take
45 the problematic of the representation of "live-in migrant care workers" as an entry point
46 to explore how a gendered-racialized ideology is utilized to legitimate and naturalize the
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3 gendered-racialized division of labor in general, and of care labor in particular. This
4
5 study unpacks the concept of an “ideal maid”, which is mediated by the gendered-
6
7 racialized discourses and ideologies of migrant workers, and directs the processes of
8
9 coordinating migrant care labor in different spaces and at different times. To explore the
10
11 pivotal role of gendered and racialized ideologies, I aim to answer the following
12
13 interrelated questions, which are left out of the discussion of the global care chain
14
15 (Hochschild 2000), in relation to associating different racial groups of women with
16
17 carework: How does racial hierarchy work to create inequalities among women in
18
19 relation to carework in the context of transnational labor migration and the global capital
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21 economy? How are gendered-racialized discourses (re)produced to legitimate the
22
23 specific carework performed by a particular racial group of women?
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30 In this essay, I use the term “care workers” to refer to those who are employed under
31
32 the official category of care workers stipulated by the government. They not only
33
34 provide direct health care to the sick, the elderly and people with disabilities, but are
35
36 also asked to do household chores and to provide childcare. “Maid” is the more common
37
38 term used by the public, including private recruiting agencies, employers, care
39
40 recipients, media, and ordinary people to address this specific group of migrant women
41
42 in Taiwan. In the particular writing contexts of this study, I follow the term “maid” used
43
44 by the interviewees to emphasize the expectations of live-in migrant care workers
45
46 imagined by recruiting agencies, employers, and the public.
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50
51 Relying on interviews with ten recruiting agents, ten employers, and fifteen workers,
52
53 and an analysis of the agencies’ web sites, I investigate the processes of recruiting and
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55 training prospective workers, matching workers to private households, and disciplining
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3 and managing workers. The informants were recruited via a snowball sampling through
4
5 the informants' and my own social networks. First, this essay will delineate the
6
7 recruitment and training of prospective workers in the largest sending country of live-in
8
9 migrant care workers in Taiwan, Indonesia, to demonstrate how recruiting agencies
10
11 screen potential candidates and transform them into live-in maids who satisfy
12
13 employers' expectations and demands. Second, examining the processes of matching
14
15 workers to particular households will illuminate how those practices are mediated by the
16
17 gendered-racialized discourses imposed on migrant workers. Finally, I will show
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19 employers' cultivation of ideal maids through developing strategies to manage and
20
21 discipline their live-in migrant care workers.
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26 27 **Context**

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29 Since 1992, in order to satisfy demographic necessities—including the “graying” of the
30
31 population in Taiwan as fertility rates decline and people live longer, and an increase in
32
33 the number of double-salary families—the Taiwanese government has allowed the
34
35 immigration of domestic workers and care workers as part of a short-term contract labor
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37 force to shoulder the responsibilities of caring for the elderly, people with disabilities,
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39 the sick, and younger children.
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44 In December 2009, the number of migrant workers in Taiwan reached a stunning
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46 351,016, compared to 151,989 in 1993. Of the total migrant workers, female workers
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48 numbered 222,414—more than half of the entire population of migrant workers.
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51 According to the official categories, most female migrant workers work as care workers,
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53 while the rest work in manufacturing. The number of care workers has reached 174,943
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55 (including the institutional care workers and 1,840 male workers, but excluding 2,296
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3 domestic workers), almost half of the population of migrant workers. Although the
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5 Taiwanese government applies the “Rule of Limited Amount” to regulate the
6
7 importation of migrant labor, the number of migrant workers has grown rapidly in the
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9 past decade, from 248,357 in 1997 to 351,016 in 2009, and the number of care workers
10
11 has increased almost six times, from 26,233 in 1997 to 174,943 in 2009. The
12
13 demographic landscape of migrant care workers has shifted gradually in the past decade.
14
15 The previous dominant group, Filipina, has been replaced by Indonesian workers. Now,
16
17 Indonesians make up the largest group, with a population of 121,058ⁱⁱ by 2009.
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20 21 22 **The Politics of Labor: Gendered and Racialized Carework in the Global Context** 23

24
25 The concept of flexible accumulation elucidates the strategy used by many transnational
26
27 corporations to increase their profits and expand their economic power in the context of
28
29 global economic restructuring. In the global economic recession in 1970s, corporations
30
31 started searching for cheaper labor in Third World or developing countries that
32
33 promoted domestic labor to attract foreign investment and improve economic
34
35 development. The off-shore production sites and free trade zones in these countries
36
37 attracted an abundance of young female workers, who were commodified as “nimble
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39 workers” by the nation-states, to serve the interests of transnational capitalists as soon as
40
41 the women were incorporated into the global capital system (Sassen 1984; Ong 1987;
42
43 Salzinger 2004). The incorporation of women’s labor into capitalist expansion is
44
45 associated with local patriarchal systems and a gender ideology that not only confines
46
47 women’s roles to reproductive labor, but also devalues women’s status in both spheres
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49 of production and reproduction. Chandra Mohanty (1997) further elucidates the
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51 gendered and racialized ideologies that legitimize the capitalist exploitation of Third
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3 World women to increase profitability. The gender ideologies of femininity and
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6 masculinity intersect with racialized images to facilitate specific gendered and racialized
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8 divisions of labor that construct Third World women as desirable workers who are
9
10 docile, cheap, and disciplined—easy for the transnational corporations to control and
11
12 utilize (e.g., Salzinger 2004).
13

14
15 In the past three decades, Third World women have become a new commodity,
16
17 exported by their home countries as a strategy for improving economic development. At
18
19 the other end of the exchange, they are imported by the host society to resolve labor
20
21 shortages in low-paid service industries such as domestic work, carework,
22
23 entertainment, and the sex trade. The theoretical concept of the “global city” (Sassen
24
25 1991) elucidates the increasing significance of the service sector, including domestic
26
27 and care labor, which satisfies the physical and emotional needs of white-collar and
28
29 professional workers by exploring the relationship between global capital mobility and
30
31 the flows of labor migration. The theoretical framework of the global city has been used
32
33 to understand the increasing flows of migrant domestic workers in places such as Hong
34
35 Kong, New York, Los Angeles, Rome and so forth (see also Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001;
36
37 Parrenas 2001), but it provides no explanation of the strategy of the global capital
38
39 economy, which is grounded in the gendered and racialized ideological discourse of
40
41 labor control. Jan Pettman (1998) observes how these Asian women are incorporated
42
43 into global capital: ‘...[I]t is not only gender which marks women’s bodies for particular
44
45 kinds of work, but also processes nationalizing and racializing gendered bodies,
46
47 especially the body of the Asian woman’ (p. 392). The gendered-racialized ideologies
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49 are continually placing these specific groups of women in a segregated labor market in
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3 the context of international labor division.
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6 In the early development of feminist scholarship, the discussion of carework was
7
8 anchored in addressing male privilege in the gender regime. Feminist scholars pointed to
9
10 the gendered nature of carework and how it becomes women's burden when the nation-
11
12 state imposes the responsibility of carework on the private household. The analyses of
13
14 class and racial inequalities (e.g. Glenn 1992; Abel 2002) complement the discussion of
15
16 gender relations in terms of care and carework. Increasingly, feminist scholars have
17
18 noted that the gender lens is not enough to explain the inequalities in women's
19
20 experiences of carework. They argue that analysis of carework needs to be situated in
21
22 gender, race, and class contexts (Glenn 1992; Duffy 2005). These lines of power
23
24 grounded in the history of colonialism and reinforced through the development of global
25
26 capitalism, also contribute to the unequal division of care labor in the transnational
27
28 context, especially in terms of the flows of migrant care workers.
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34 Arlie Russell Hochschild (2000) proposes the concept of the "global care chain" to
35
36 develop a theoretical understanding of the relationship between care and migration
37
38 within the context of globalization. The "global care chain" is a term for the 'series of
39
40 personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of
41
42 caring' (2000: 131). This concept embodies the daily practices in global cities addressed
43
44 in Sassen's theoretical work. Hochschild develops the concept based on the
45
46 phenomenon of the international migration trends of domestic workers in general, and
47
48 Filipina workers in particular (Constable 1997; Chin 1998; Chang and Ling 2000;
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50 Parrenas 2001). The flows of migrant domestic workers are explained through the
51
52 unequal relations of economic development between wealthier and poorer countries,
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3 especially in regard to domestic labor supply and demand. The concept of a global care
4 chain evokes the multiple oppressive systems affecting women by describing women's
5 experiences of providing/consuming care work in various local settings. Although the
6 concept of a "global care chain" provides a theoretical understanding of the politics in
7 carework between women of different class status and nationality, it is grounded in
8 empirical studies of child care that have limited its potential application to various types
9 of carework, such as health care and the elderly care (Yeates 2004a, 2004b). Besides the
10 limitations of these empirical data, the concept of the global care chain does not address
11 the way that racial hierarchies shape carework. But the discussion of carework cannot be
12 separated from the global hierarchy of gender, class, nationality, and race-ethnicity
13 (Mary Zimmerman *et al.* 2006; Guervarra 2009).
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29 Built upon the current literature on transnational carework and domestic labor, this
30 study aims to shed light on gendered-racialized ideologies used to mobilize the flows of
31 particular groups of women, to deploy them in the gendered-racialized labor market, and
32 to match them to particular households as live-in care workers.
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39 **Recruiting and Training**

40 The processes of recruiting and training live-in migrant care workers are directed by the
41 concept of an "ideal maid" who conforms to the requirements of submission, discipline,
42 and docility. Through investigating these processes, I will elucidate how particular racial
43 groups of women are transposed onto the body of an "ideal maid." The discussion on
44 recruiting and training is mainly based on the experiences of Indonesian workers. The
45 recruiting processes vary slightly based on sending countries' policies and regulations.
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3 across workers' nationalities.
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5
6 *Targeting and Recruiting "Ideal Maids"*
7

8 Most Indonesian live-in care workers depended on *Calos* (local brokers) to contact
9
10 recruiting agencies, which are usually located in big cities. *Calos* are usually respected
11
12 people in a local community, such as a village head, a successful local businessperson,
13
14 or a religious leader (Rudnyckyj 2004). A few of them are previous overseas workers
15
16 themselves. Daromir Rudnyckyj (2004) indicates the importance of *Calos* in facilitating
17
18 transnational labor migration from Indonesia. He uses the phrase "patron-client
19
20 networks" to describe the relationships between *Calos* and prospective migrant workers
21
22 and how these relationships work to help local recruitment.
23
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26
27 The system of *Calos* not only facilitates the local recruitment of prospective
28
29 workers, but also contributes to the control of workers through local social networks and
30
31 financial dependencies. Recruiting agencies usually do not recruit workers directly.
32
33 Instead, they rely on *Calos* in local villages to target the group of women with less
34
35 financial support and education, who are viewed as easy to manage and control
36
37 compared to their counterparts in urban areas. An Indonesian recruiting agent explained
38
39 the criterion she used in interviews to screen ideal workers: 'the ease with which their
40
41 mind could be opened' (cited from Rudnyckyj 2004: 416) and whether they have the
42
43 "mental capacity" to be domestic laborers. Taiwanese recruiting agencies that share
44
45 similar criteria of selecting workers assert that those women who have innocent and
46
47 childlike characteristics are better for doing carework and household chores. The
48
49 Taiwanese recruiting agent, Lee, drew an analogy between Indonesian women and the
50
51 indigenous community in Taiwan to describe labor recruitment in Indonesia, making a
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3 distinction between migrant factory workers and care workers:
4

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6 Generally speaking, people migrating as factory workers usually had
7 better education and financial ability compared to care workers. The care
8 workers from Indonesia usually lived in the remote countryside, with
9 fewer job opportunities. The labor brokers preferred the countryside when
10 hunting for workers. It's quite similar to the situation in Taiwan decades
11 ago. We went to the mountain areas to recruit the indigenous people to
12 work in urban areas. Women from the countryside were more naïve and
13 childlike.
14

15
16 The adjectives *naïve* and *childlike* describe the perceptions of essential personalities
17 associated with workers who are capable of being transformed into “ideal care workers”
18 after training. The goal of recruitment is to screen the candidates who possess the
19 potential for being administrated and coached by recruiting agencies rather than
20 screening for their work skills or learning ability.
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28 After interviews with candidates, recruiting agencies decide which trainees they will
29 accept. These prospective migrant care workers or domestic laborers have to stay in
30 training centers run by recruiting agencies for a couple of months. The training period
31 varies, depending on the agencies' policy and the timing for the trainees to be picked out
32 by employers. The day after arrival at the training centers, the trainees are required to go
33 through a medical assessment that is regulated by both the Indonesian government and
34 the receiving states. Those who fail to obtain the medical certification are repatriated
35 back home. Those passing the medical assessment are brought to the Bureau of Labor
36 Training, a unit of the Department of Manpower and Transmigration, for a short state-
37 run training program designed to certify the qualifications of prospective migrant
38 workers for performing as domestic workers or care workers (Rudnycky 2004). The
39 state-run training program targets women specifically, to promote women working
40 overseas, which contributes to the feminization of labor migration in Indonesia (Silvey
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3 2004) but also confines this group of women to specific occupations.
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5
6 *Training Ideal Maids*
7

8 The training centers represent a form of total institution (Goffman 1961), where
9
10 prospective migrant workers are subject to the rigorous control of recruiting agencies
11
12 and experience the processes of resocialization, through which they are transformed into
13
14 an ideal live-in maid by learning the required skills, attitudes, and ethics. The days in
15
16 training centers are routine and regular. A day usually starts at five o'clock in the
17
18 morning and begins with morning exercises that discipline the trainees' bodily strength.
19
20 After exercises, according to the rotation of duties, the trainees in charge are responsible
21
22 for cleaning the facilities and preparing breakfast. Personal activities, including bathing,
23
24 dressing, and eating breakfast, have to be finished before eight o'clock, the time the first
25
26 class starts. The main lessons are comprised of three parts: lecture on the proper
27
28 attitudes and ethics of a live-in maid, skills and application, and language classes. The
29
30 long day of formal training lessons ends at ten o'clock in the evening. At night, the
31
32 trainees share bunk beds in dormitories. If there is not enough space for all of the
33
34 trainees, some have to sleep in the classrooms using sleeping pads. When the workers
35
36 recalled their numerous nights in dormitories, the first scene they remembered was a hot
37
38 and humid scent permeating the air: 'I usually could not sleep well at night. It was too
39
40 crowded. So many people were jam-packed in a room. The ceiling fan did not work at
41
42 all. It was so muggy.' One Indonesian worker, Umi, recollected the sleepless nights in
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44 the training center and the collective life she underwent.
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52
53 Recruiting agencies provide the necessary training, which transforms the trainees
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55 into a subject that conforms to the concept of an ideal maid. When Foucault (1997)
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1
2
3 discusses the specific technologies for creating governable subjects, he asserts that
4
5 'modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of
6
7 acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes,' (p. 225) are
8
9 necessary. Rudnyckj (2004) utilizes Foucault's concept of governmentality to propose
10
11 the technologies of servitude, which 'refer to the rationalities that are intended to endow
12
13 these women with the capacities necessary to conduct domestic labor in countries
14
15 outside Indonesia' (p.419). The technologies developed by recruiting agencies ensure
16
17 not only the skills required for a care worker or a domestic worker, but also, more
18
19 importantly, the disciplined body and mind (including ethics and attitudes) required for
20
21 the specific job.
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27 The recruiting agents usually describe the training program in two dimensions: work
28
29 skills and spiritual education, referring to workers' ethics and attitudes. They emphasize
30
31 the intensive lessons, severe training circumstances, and strict management they provide
32
33 to guarantee workers' quality in both dimensions, particular the latter one. The
34
35 recruiting agent, Wang, outlined the trainees' regular life in the training center and how
36
37 the trainees were subject to the administration of the agency:
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39
40

41 During the training period all the trainees have to live in the center and
42 followed the administrative rules. Their daily routine schedule is divided
43 into three sections, 8:00-12:00, 1:30-4:30, and 7:00-10:00 ... the trainees
44 need to live in our dorm to have a collective life. They are required to
45 follow the administrative rules we set up. All of them have to wear the
46 uniform, which signifies order and discipline. The trainees are not allowed
47 to leave the facilities or go home, even on Sunday, the day off from the
48 lessons. They can only have visitors who met with them in the training
49 centers.
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53 Wang emphasized the administrative rules that guided the trainees' daily activities and
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55 regulated their behaviors in the form of collective life. The technologies of routine
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3 schedules, uniforms, and collective life are imposed on the trainees to achieve the goals
4
5 of making docile bodies through everyday practices. Similar technologies have been
6
7 used in other sites, such as manufacturing factories that control and discipline female
8
9 workers by patriarchal-capitalism in the economic South (Ong 1987; Ong and Peletz
10
11 1995). The recruiting agencies produce an atmosphere of strict hierarchy and tight
12
13 control through the daily practices of administrative staff and trainers in training centers.
14
15 Another Indonesian worker, Tari, had vivid memories of the high-tension life during the
16
17 training period.
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22 The Taiwanese manager, Miss Wu, had a very bad temper. She shouted at
23
24 us. She scolded us frequently even without any reason. Sometimes, she
25
26 banged at the desk to show her anger.

27
28 This way of interacting with trainees is one part of the training program, which aims to
29
30 discipline workers to be more submissive and obedient, as is required of an ideal maid.
31
32 Tari also learned from interacting with Wu the principle of keeping silent and
33
34 performing docility, which she adopted in her employment as a live-in care worker.
35

36
37 The Taiwanese recruiting agent, Wang, was proud to describe his facility's "semi-
38
39 military" training in order to demonstrate his absolute authority over the trainees:
40

41
42 We taught them proper manners regarding how to stand up, sit down,
43
44 listen and talk to people, and so forth. Do you know the military training
45
46 in Taiwan? Yes, we used similar means to discipline the trainees. That
47
48 was why our workers were different from the others. They were polite and
49
50 disciplined. They knew how to behave in a proper way.

51
52 The military metaphor Wang used to describe the training program reveals the thinking
53
54 he applied to the trainees, and why submission and discipline, two important
55
56 characteristics in military culture, are prioritized in the training center. After one of my
57
58 interviews with Wang, he brought me to an employer's home where he had placed a
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3 care worker; he showed me the “product” he had made in his training center. After the
4
5 visit, Wang talked to me proudly about how successful he was at training workers to be
6
7 ideal maids:
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9

10 Did you see the way they spoke to me and stood up in front of us? See,
11 they were so polite and paid respect to us. They knew how to behave in
12 the proper way (as a maid).
13
14

15 During the interview and the visit, Wang emphasized numerous times that it was
16
17 important to discipline workers who were too smart, to train them to fit in with the
18
19 image of the “ideal” maid. The workers also left the training center knowing how to
20
21 behave as an ideal maid in order to please brokers, Wang, and their employers.
22
23

24 The concept of an “ideal maid” directs the processes of coordinating migrant care
25
26 labor, from local recruitment to the practices of the training programs. The women
27
28 recruited are viewed as potential candidates for live-in maids after proper training.
29
30 Through the training processes, not only do these women acquire the skills of
31
32 performing carework and household chores, but their bodies and minds are also coached
33
34 to be docile and disciplined in order to develop the essential ethics and attitudes of a
35
36 live-in maid.
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40 **Matching Workers to Private Households: The Practices of Gendered-Racialized** 41 42 **Discourses** 43 44

45 After communicating about the requirements for live-in migrant care workers with
46
47 prospective employers, recruiting agents screen the potential workers for pairing. The
48
49 recruiting agencies either provide on-line selection systems (including workers’
50
51 resumes, and sometimes including video clips of self-introductions) or paper copies of
52
53 resumes for employers to pick out workers. Some agencies also offer web interviews
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3 with prospective workers. The development of the worldwide web and relevant
4
5 technologies contributes to global circuits of labor in general and to gendered and
6
7 racialized patterns of labor migration in particular (Tyner 1998). The design of the
8
9 resumes includes a large photo, picturing almost two third of the person's body,
10
11 accompanied by personal information, physical or health conditions, work experiences,
12
13 specialties, a statement of the worker's willingness to cooperate with employers, and a
14
15 column for selection reports done by the recruiting agencies. The workers' resumes
16
17 indicate little information on workers' profession and skills as care workers. Instead, the
18
19 resumes are designed to demonstrate workers' capacity for and willingness to do
20
21 household chores and obey employers' particular requests, such as no days off, sharing
22
23 accommodation with care recipients in the same room, and eating pork (for Muslim
24
25 workers).

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32 The column listing health conditions on the resume is not set up to inquire about the
33
34 worker's physical health. Instead, it asks about skin tone, pimples, body odor, and so on.
35
36 The inquiry into skin tone is associated with an ideological code, which is defined as
37
38 *colorism* by Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2008). The concept *colorism* means 'the preference
39
40 for and privileging of lighter skin and discrimination against those with darker skin,
41
42 [which] remains a persisting frontier of intergroup and intragroup relations in the
43
44 twenty-first century' (p. 281). Based on empirical studies in different geographic regions
45
46 (Hunter 2005; Maddox 2004), lighter skin is viewed in prevailing systems of racial
47
48 formation as a symbol of superiority, intelligence, trustworthiness, mobility, and
49
50 attractiveness. Recruiting agent Wang's explanation of why he started importing
51
52 Vietnamese workers demonstrates the employers' preference for lighter skin, which
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3 exhibits a similarity with, and allows for more inclusion in, local Taiwanese society:
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5
6 My clients complain a lot about the skin color of the Filipina. They think
7 that the Filipinas are darker; they speak a language that we could not
8 understand. I think that the Vietnamese look more similar to us. It is also
9 easier for them to learn Mandarin.
10

11
12 Furthermore, the preference for a lighter skin tone illuminates the stereotyped
13 associations between skin color and individual personality. Most recruiting agents I
14 interviewed mentioned employers' complaints about workers' skin tones, as in this
15 observation by recruiting agent Wen:
16
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20
21 Many Taiwanese employers do care about the maids' skin tone. Dark is
22 dirty. The idea is difficult to change. I think that is ethnicity. It is the
23 superiority of our ethnicity....
24

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26 Darker skin is not only associated with dirtiness, but also with stupidity and ugliness.
27

28 Differences of skin tone signal a demarcation between the superior "us" and the inferior
29 "Other." They also justify reasons given to dismiss workers. Wen talked about an
30 employer's dissatisfaction with her Indonesian care worker because of skin color:
31
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35 In the first week of employment, the employer phoned me many times to
36 request a refund for the worker. I went to the employer's home and tried
37 to work out the situation. I asked the employer, a grandmother in her
38 sixties, the reason for dismissing the worker. She told me that the worker
39 didn't know how to do the work. But I noted that the maid did a good job
40 in cleaning and cooking. I responded to her that the maid was doing well
41 and was very submissive. Finally, she told me the real reason. She said
42 that she felt shameful when she went out with the maid. The others' maids
43 were smarter and had lighter skin, while her maid looked stupid with a
44 darker skin tone.
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48 The biological assumptions of ethnicity are used to describe "inherent" characteristics
49 and personalities of specific racial groups, which are determined by the destiny of skin
50 color.
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55 Based on a qualitative analysis of twenty-seven recruitment-related web sites in
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3 Asia, James Tyner (1998) indicates that the provision of workers' photographs and bio-
4
5 data and the emphasis on workers' personal traits in resumes are more common in the
6
7 deployment of domestic workers than other professional positions. The format of these
8
9 resumes was developed to market the "product," live-in household workers (including
10
11 care workers and domestic laborers) to its potential buyers (employers). The details of
12
13 workers' appearance, including skin tone, not only reflect colorism embedded in
14
15 employers' preference for workers, but also objectify the specific group of female
16
17 workers as a commodity that is ready to be sold in the trade of live-in household
18
19 workers (Constable 1997).
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25 The recruiting agencies frequently use the term *ethnicity* to analyze the
26
27 characteristics and personalities of migrant care workers with different nationalities and
28
29 races. In this way, gendered and racialized discourses are produced and replicated
30
31 amongst recruiting agencies. The web sites of recruiting agencies share similar charts
32
33 that compare Filipinas with Indonesian and Vietnamese care workers. Despite the fact
34
35 that the workers are portrayed with different characteristics associated with their
36
37 nationality and racial category, they all are viewed as good for doing housework and
38
39 carework. The recruiting agents argue that their observations of workers are grounded in
40
41 their long-term experiences in recruiting migrant labor. They utilize gendered-racialized
42
43 discourses to market workers of different nationalities. The characteristics of different
44
45 nationalities are regarded as background knowledge to be applied by employers with
46
47 different demands, first to select workers, and later to manage and discipline them. For
48
49 example, the recruiting agents promote Filipina workers as better "maids" and
50
51 Vietnamese and Indonesian workers as suitable "care workers." The segmentation of
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3 recruiting agencies as labor niche specialization (e.g., care workers, domestic workers,
4 entertainers, and so forth) results from a combination of factors (Tyner 1998). It works
5
6 along with gendered and racialized discourses to (re)enforce these discourses attached to
7
8 workers with different nationalities in the segregated migrant labor market.
9
10

11
12 Although employers seek certain characteristics of live-in migrant care workers in
13 the processes of communicating with recruiting agencies and selecting workers, they
14 usually associate workers' characteristics with their nationalities. The practices of
15
16 gendered-racialized discourses linked to workers' nationalities are (re)produced by
17
18 recruiting agencies and their interactions with employers. The recruiting agent, Wang,
19 compared Vietnamese and Indonesian workers in a way that was consistent with the
20
21 gendered-racialized discourses circulating on the recruiting agencies' web sites:
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29 Those Indonesians are from the countryside. Most of them are stupid and
30 it is difficult to train them to use technological stuff. The Vietnamese are
31 smarter and they are able pick up things more quickly. But the Indonesian
32 maids are more submissive and obedient.
33
34

35 The gendered-racialized images of workers associated with workers' nationalities
36 are not only shared by recruiting agencies, but also are spread amongst employers
37 through communication with recruiting agencies, exposure to media reports, and
38
39 daily practices. In addition, James Tyner's research (1998) indicates that the
40
41 operation of the worldwide web also facilitates and contributes to gender-based
42
43 and ethnic-based stereotypes of workers, especially in the deployment of live-in
44
45 household workers.
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51 One employer, Huang, described how she negotiated the requirements for the
52 prospective worker with her recruiting agent:
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55 I told the recruiting agent, 'I want a migrant maid who is smart, but not too
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3 smart.' She is smart, so it is easy for me to train her. She cannot be too
4 smart to be out of control. I do not want a Filipina maid. Usually they are
5 too smart. They play tricks on employers.
6
7

8 Huang indicated the concern for employing a smart maid. The characteristic,
9
10 "smartness," is not always an advantage applied to some contexts. Both recruiting
11 agents and employers emphasize the "right" smartness of workers, which is
12 represented as "the right stuff" in the qualification of being employed
13 (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997). The educational degrees of the Filipinas are not
14 always "the right stuff" in the context of employment. Education is viewed as an
15 advantage for their care taking of children and learning skills, but is interpreted as
16 a flaw for being an "ideal maid." The recruiting agent, Chia, told his experiences
17 of pairing Filipina care workers with employers:
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29 If the care recipient's condition is really serious, which need more
30 complicated caring skills and knowledge, I usually recommend the
31 employer to hire a Filipina maid. They usually have better education and
32 pick up things quickly. But most employers have low willingness to hire
33 the Filipinas, who are regarded as troublemakers.
34
35

36 Because of their education, the Filipinas are described as "out-of-control" workers who
37 are conscious of labor rights and are difficult to manage. Furthermore, their emphasis on
38 legal rights marks them as less submissive and prone to exhibiting unreasonable
39 behaviors, such as being "picky about jobs and employers" and "accusing employers of
40 violating contracts." The bias against Filipina workers is commonly shared by recruiting
41 agencies and employers, and is circulated in Taiwanese society. A recruiting agent,
42 Chia, explained the reason why the majority of Taiwanese employers consider Filipina
43 workers to be troublemakers:
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55 Most Taiwanese feel that the Filipinas are troublemakers and difficult to
56 deal with. It is because of employers' attitude about using workers. For
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3 example, she is hired to care for grandfather, but you order her to do
4 household chores, even to do work somewhere else. She was not willing to
5 do it, and that was the cause of conflicts.
6
7

8 This consciousness of working rights and benefits is not tolerated by employers and is
9 interpreted as a fault in an “ideal maid.”
10
11

12 The demographic landscape of live-in migrant care workers in Taiwan has been
13 continually shifting since the government first allowed the importation of care workers
14 in 1992. The Filipinas were the majority of live-in migrant care workers for a decade,
15 and the term, “Filipina maid” was the label for migrant care workers and domestic
16 laborers in Taiwanese society. However, Vietnamese and Indonesian workers
17 substituted for Filipinas as the dominant group of migrant care workers respectively in
18 different periods. The importation of Vietnamese workers was first allowed officially in
19 1999. After that, Vietnamese live-in care workers became popular in the migrant care
20 labor market. The cultural and ethnic sameness shared by Vietnam and Taiwan was
21 emphasized when recruiting agencies marketed Vietnamese care workers. However,
22 recruiting agencies changed their marketing strategy after the importation of live-in
23 Vietnamese care workers was suspended in 2005. The Taiwanese explain the
24 suspensions as a measure to prevent the high rate of runaways. Vietnamese workers
25 were described as “communist other[s]” who were more familiar at playing with various
26 kinds of craftiness, according to Taiwanese politics and history, which opposed
27 Communism particularly that of Communist China (Lan 2006).
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50 Indonesian workers now become the “ideal” maids, and are marketed by recruiting
51 agencies, becoming the largest population of migrant care workers in Taiwan.³ Their
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3 the “ideal” maids to employers. The population of migrant care workers in Taiwan is not
4
5 only influenced by structural factors such as state policy and political relations, but also
6
7 by the gendered-racialized discourses about workers with different nationalities.
8
9

10 Compared to “out-of-control” Filipinas and Vietnamese “communist others,” Indonesian
11
12 migrant care workers are submissive and tame and better fit to be “ideal” maids. The
13
14 gendered-racialized discourses of migrant workers with different nationalities are
15
16 manipulated by recruiting agencies in advertising, marketing, and matching workers to
17
18 attract prospective employers with various needs and considerations. Gendered-
19
20 racialized discourses produced by recruiting agencies reflect how the local society
21
22 stereotypes workers with different nationalities. In addition, these discourses are
23
24 continually reproduced by employers and are circulated in society.
25
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28 29 **Control at a Distance: Disciplining and Managing Workers**

30
31 The Taiwanese state regulates live-in migrant care workers’ temporary status and
32
33 restricts their mobility to achieve the state’s goal of governance. The state sets up
34
35 restrictions of new employment for employers whose workers are runaways. The
36
37 employers are not allowed to submit a new application for another worker within six
38
39 months from the time that a worker runs away. The state’s regulation imposes the
40
41 responsibility of managing workers on employers, and contributes to employers’ severe
42
43 discipline and strict control of workers (Cheng 2003). The state exercises its sovereignty
44
45 by intervening in the practices of employers in private households. Besides the state’s
46
47 policy, the gendered-racialized discourses about migrant workers contribute to
48
49 employers’ anxiety about controlling workers to guarantee compliance with state
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51 regulations. Employers develop their own strategies of disciplining and controlling live-
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3 in care workers, but are also instructed by recruiting agencies.
4

5
6 In most cases, live-in care workers are usually alone with care recipients at home
7
8 during the day when their employers and other family members are out at work or
9
10 school. Some workers even live with care recipients by themselves without others.
11
12 Monitoring workers' time and behaviors becomes the first issue that most employers are
13
14 concerned about. Recruiting agencies develop technologies for employers to oversee
15
16 workers at a distance. The time-task-distribution sheet is the most popular one used in
17
18 the management of workers. The recruiting agents usually show the employers a sample
19
20 of the sheet, which details the time distribution of physical tasks defined by employers
21
22 as a measure to manage and control workers by regulating workers' schedules. One
23
24 employer, Lee, explained the reason for creating a chart for her care worker Lisa's work
25
26 tasks and a schedule in which to do them:
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30

31
32 When she was new to our family, she did not know anything. I had to teach
33
34 her a lot about her job duty. I did not have much time. It was a good
35
36 strategy to use such a chart. What she had to do was just follow the items
37
38 and schedule on the chart.

39
40 However, the tasks Lee listed on the sheet were not able to capture the work Lisa was
41
42 actually doing, especially the invisible labor required to accomplish all of this physical
43
44 work (DeVault 1991).

45
46 Some recruiting agencies commend employers for using digital technologies, such
47
48 as pinhole cameras, to monitor workers, especially for those employers who live at a
49
50 distance from care recipients and workers. Lai was going through the processes for
51
52 hiring a live-in migrant care worker at the time I interviewed her. The prospective
53
54 worker was to be employed to care for her mother-in-law, who was in her eighties,
55
56 paralyzed, and confined to bed due a rapidly degenerating health condition caused by a
57
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3 brain tumor. Lai's mother in-law lived with her father in-law, who was in his early
4
5 nineties, in a bungalow about half an hour's drive from Lai's family. Lai worried that
6
7 the worker might be lazy, not responsible for her job, and even abuse her in-laws. She
8
9 recounted the suggestion by the recruiting agent, who proposed the idea of setting up
10
11 pinhole cameras in her in-laws' house:
12
13

14
15 I did not think that it was a ridiculous idea. It might sound funny at the
16
17 beginning. But later I really took the suggestion into consideration. There
18
19 were so many mistreatments done by live-in migrant maids in the news
20
21 reports. Did you remember the incident? The TV news showed the clip
22
23 recorded by the pinhole camera in an employer's home. The Vietnamese
24
25 worker was biting the grandma she cared for in the video. It was scary...

26
27 Pinhole cameras and schedule sheets are technologies adopted to regulate live-in care
28
29 workers in order to monitor their time use, movement, and activity.

30
31 Restrictions on using mobile phones, going out alone, and off days imposed on live-
32
33 in migrant workers share the same goal of control by isolating workers. One employer,
34
35 Huang, related the restrictions set up to regulate her Indonesian care worker, Yangti.

36
37 I did not let her to have any day off. Many migrant maids were well-
38
39 behaved in the beginning. But when they started knowing other people,
40
41 they were easily seduced by others. It (no day off) was good for her. She
42
43 was here for earning money. She could earn more money if she did not
44
45 have days off. She was not allowed to have a mobile phone neither. I
46
47 bought her phone cards. If she had to talk with her family back home, she
48
49 could use the phone card via the land phone.

50
51 Huang justified these restrictions she imposed on her care worker, Yangti, as her
52
53 consideration for Yangti. It was to "protect" Yangti from temptations that might get in
54
55 the way of her duty as a responsible live-in migrant care worker. The ostensible
56
57 protection of workers is another form of controlling workers practiced by employers.
58
59 The power of employers is veiled in the myth of maternalism that treats workers as
60
immature and helpless children (Romero 1992: 110) who need regulation and discipline.

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2
3 In addition, employers do not treat the work performed as real work and live-in migrant
4 care workers as real workers who are entitled to working rights. This is how employer
5
6 Chen delineated her expectation of a live-in care worker, and how she rationalized the
7
8 working conditions of her Indonesian worker, Ah-Di, working without days off:
9
10

11
12
13 When I applied for a live-in migrant maid, I told my recruiting agent that I
14 preferred a maid who was willing to have no days off. I did not permit Ah-
15 Di to have days off. It was easy for her to have temptations if she had
16 contact with others. She was not allowed to go out alone. Usually I was the
17 person doing the grocery shopping. We accompanied my mother doing
18 rehabilitation in the city hospital every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
19 She could meet other Indonesian maids there. It was the rest time for her
20 (Ah-Di).
21
22

23
24 Employer's management of their live-in migrant care workers is mediated by the
25 concept of an "ideal maid" who is required to be docile, disciplined, and submissive.
26
27

28 **Conclusion**

29
30 This essay intends to understand on how a gendered-racialized labor market is created in
31 the labor migratory context in general and in the construction of live-in migrant care
32 workers in particular. I rely on the example of live-in migrant care workers in Taiwan to
33 explore the deployment of gendered-racialized ideology in the everyday practices of
34 recruiting agencies and employers. The labor flows of migrant care workers are not only
35 explained through the inequalities of economic development amongst countries. In
36 addition, gendered and racialized discourses and ideologies need to be considered to
37 understand the processes that facilitate specific gendered and racialized jobs, such as
38 that of care worker, for female migrant workers with different national affiliations. The
39 concept of an "ideal maid" proposed by recruiting agencies and employers directs the
40 processes of recruiting, training, matching, disciplining, and managing workers that aim
41 to transform particular racial groups of women into ideal maids who are required to be
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submissive, disciplined, and docile. Through investigating these processes, this study indicates how gendered-racialized discourses are activated by recruiting agencies and employers to justify the work performed by live-in migrant care workers, to pair workers to particular households, and to rationalize control over workers.

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Notes

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ⁱⁱ The second largest group of migrant care workers is Vietnamese, with a population of 29,914. Followed by this are the Filipina (22,676), and Thai workers (1,295). These statistics were issued by the Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, ROC (2009).

³ The Taiwanese government declared the suspension from importing Indonesian live-in care workers on August 1 2002, and reopened the importation on December 20 2004.

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