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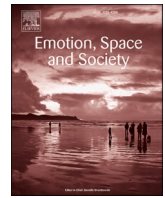
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Can the subaltern feel? An ethnography of migration, subalternity, and emotion

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on biographical and migratory experiences gathered from Chinese marriage-migrants in Taiwan, this paper investigates the link between migration, subalternity and emotion. We examine how emotions are socially, temporarily and situationally constructed by migrant women, positioned in a condition of vulnerability during migration. Conceptually, we advance that emotions can be turned into resources, practices and competences that sustain migrants' social, economic and cultural positioning in the society of arrival. Through the identification of three empirically-rooted *states of emotions* – imaginative, implosive and mutual – we claim that, in a context of social contempt, familial exclusion and economic marginalisation, migrants' individual and collective performance of emotions contributes to 'undo' a condition of subalternity. Such states are purposely experimental and incomplete. Whilst they are as temporary and mutable as migrant women's emotional experiences and practices, this paper proposes that they could serve as a methodological and analytical tool for future research on migration and emotion.

1. Introduction

I was almost falling asleep on a little mattress near her two children, when Haizheng, a young Chinese migrant spouse living in Zhudong (Taiwan), shook my feet, suddenly asking, 'should I get divorced?'. On the same day, we had a conversation about her vulnerability as a marriage migrant in Taiwan. 'I cannot sleep, come, come, let's have a drink', she said. Feeling sleepy, I stood up and followed her, ready to listen to her doubts, concerns and anxieties. Haizheng's experiences, her suffering and vulnerability as a Chinese migrant in Taiwan, were narrated through a dense kaleidoscope of emotions including unfulfillment, disillusionment, depression and misrecognition [Fieldwork notes, Hsinchu, December 14, 2016].

The title of this paper – 'Can the subaltern feel?' – may sound provocative. The verb 'to feel' perhaps seems more suited to psychological analysis. Furthermore, we may be more familiar with narratives on the voice of the subaltern, as she speaks but is not heard. Indeed, when Spivak (2010) questioned if the 'subaltern can speak', she focused on the ways their voices are silenced within hegemonic epistemic spaces. Curiously, subaltern actors' feelings and emotional states, produced in the context of a colonisation of their regions, languages, cultures,

memories, all the way down to their epistemic spaces, have remained relatively neglected in the social sciences. This is striking, since pain, suffering, grief, passion are inherent features of a condition of subalternity. Subaltern studies, so much focused on securing 'a better future for subaltern peoples, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalise them, documenting their past' (Ludden, 2002: 20), against the violence produced by hegemonic patterns of colonial modernity, have arguably concentrated on interpreting suffering through the subaltern's words, much less through her emotional and affective states. In asking if the subaltern 'can feel', we integrate the 'affective turn' (Ticineto-Clough and Halley, 2007) in the analysis. We recognise the capacity for sentiments' in human beings' humanity (Barreto, 2013: 112) and the role of discrete, inchoate, interior states in shaping the experiences of marginalised groups. With the aim to go beyond a mere appreciation of the emotional and affective states related to subalternity, this paper suggests that those considered as vulnerable can performatively transform feelings and emotions into resources which help them transcend a condition of subalternity inherent to their experiences of migration.

This article presents an analysis of the production and the agential performance of emotions by Chinese migrant women who are positioned

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in a condition of social, economic and cultural subalternity in Taiwan. Clearly, this choice of topic is not anodyne. Not only is the process of migration a powerful catalyst for change in an individual's emotional life (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015), but it also illuminates how social inequality and economic hierarchies are entangled with emotions and feelings of suffering, anxiety, distress (Christou, 2011). Within inegalitarian social, economic and familiar regimes, Chinese migrant women experience social contempt, cultural exclusion and economic marginalisation in Taiwan. Our case study suggests, however, that despite their subaltern positioning in the Taiwanese society, labour market and political discourse, Chinese migrant women have managed to make their voice heard in Taiwan. Not without significant emotional endeavor on their side, the emotions produced by this condition of subalternity can become resources to challenge the status quo. By disclosing this emotional struggle, our aim is to shed light on how emotions are entangled with social, cultural, familiar and political norms and convention (Athanasiou et al., 2008).

How do emotions, affections and feelings interplay within women's biographical and migratory experiences? How do they contribute to coping with a condition of political, social, economic, and familiar subalternity? Orienting questions for our analysis, they necessitate extending the purview of emotions beyond the private sphere of individual experiences or intimacy to the arena of interactions and socialisations. Importantly, emotions emerge throughout situations: individually and collectively constructed, they co-constitute social relations (Smith et al., 2016). To investigate the link between emotion, migration and subalternity, we draw on biographies, marriage-migration paths, social and familiar experiences of vulnerability and of resistance. We show how emotions and affections can simultaneously be *resources*, *practices* and *competences* for Chinese migrant women who face social exclusion and disqualification in Taiwan. Empirically rooted in the situations we observed on field sites, our understanding of emotional practices and experiences elucidates the constructed, agential and performative role of emotions (Illouz, 2006; Tappolet, 2016) and affections, especially when individuals are in a position of subalternity.

Comprehensively, this paper provides evidence of the ways in which marital and migratory experiences are constructed through heterogeneous repertoires of emotions which are complex, contradictory and whose intensity varies over time and space. To illustrate how emotions sustain experiences, and how experiences are constructed through emotions, the paper identifies three *states of emotions* commonly observed across women's experiences: *imaginative*, *implosive* and *mutual* emotions. In Ahmed's (2004) words, emotions are a form of cultural politics that shape the world and the individual's position within society. Therefore, this paper's goal is twofold. Firstly, we want to demonstrate how emotions are generated from and, in turn, sustain the making of women's biographical and mobility paths, as well as their interactions and social experiences in Taiwan. At the same time, we aim to illustrate how emotions, for their producers, can be a resource for transforming subaltern social, familiar and economic positionings. By introducing emotions into the analysis of Chinese women's mobilities, we put forward further empirical research on marriage migration studies in Taiwan, contribute to the emerging field of emotions and migration in social sciences and offer a potentially important corrective to the vision of the migrant as a necessarily 'vulnerable' actor.

To contextualise our study and its contributions, we first elucidate the substantive and theoretical framework, questions and gaps that have informed our work. Secondly, we situate the epistemological value and challenges of focusing on emotions as an important element in understanding the construction of experiences and practices by migrant women. An outline of our research methodology is then followed by the main empirical section of the paper in which we describe and substantiate the three emotional states identified. We then draw conclusions from this research not only for marriage migration studies but for future reflections in the wider field of migration and emotion.

2. Substantive and theoretical context: marriage-migration, subalternity and emotion

Marriage migration refers to combinations of marriage and mobility transnationally. Involving a majority of women, this phenomenon often operates within patriarchal logics, particularly the principle of hypergamy, also referred as to "marry-up" (Lu, 2008; Constable, 2005), by which a woman usually marries a man with a higher social status. In the context of transnational marriage, the hypergamic principle, for the bride, is met by the husband's nationality, rather than his economic and social status. This means that many marriage migrants, regardless of their social and economic level in their country of origin, end up marrying lower class, uneducated men, yet whose citizenship to a wealthier country operates as a major desirable factor in shaping marriage choices (Constable, 2005). This is a common phenomenon in various East Asian countries which have experienced a significant arrival of marriage migrants from neighboring developing nations (Jones, 2012). Taiwan has been one of the main receivers of marriage migrants from other Asian countries, particularly China and Vietnam. An emphasis on material considerations, along with the fact that many cross-border marriages are mediated by brokers, feeds into a negative perception of the presence of marriage migrants in the island. Moreover, media coverage has contributed to the stigmatisation of this social group by constructing marriage migration as a social problem, portraying marriage migrants as either passive victims or material 'gold-diggers', and their husbands as socially undesirable (Yang and Lee, 2009; Momesso, 2016). It is not solely a matter of public opinion. These concerns have also legitimised legal actions.

Legal restrictions have been constraining for Chinese marriage migrants. Since the People's Republic of China (PRC) is Taiwan's main antagonist and political enemy, the substantial arrival of migrants from the PRC has raised concerns about national sovereignty and security. Therefore, their movements are inscribed in a rigid mobility regime, where their access to social rights and citizenship has been restricted.

Scholarship has not only explored Chinese marriage migrants' subaltern position in Taiwanese social, economic and familiar orders (Lu, 2008; Friedman, 2010; Zani, 2020b) but also shed light on the actions that cross-strait marriage migrants have put forward in response to such treatment (Hsia, 2008; Momesso and Cheng, 2017; Momesso, 2020). Through these accounts we gain understanding of a group that have managed to carve their space in Taiwanese public debate and, through individual and collective actions, negotiate with oppressive and discriminative social and political regimes. It is curious then that scholarship has not explored *feelings and emotions* in the context of marriage migration in general and very little has been said with regard to the specificity of marriage-migration in Taiwan (exceptions are Momesso, 2016; Zani, 2018). That said, this neglect can perhaps be understood in relation to a long-term paucity of studies on emotions in the social sciences, only recently addressed by a growing body of research looking at the links between emotion and migration (Svasek, 2014; Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015; Alinejad and Ponzanesi, 2020; Zani, 2020b).

In relation to marriage-migration, and specifically the situation of Chinese marriage-migrants in Taiwan, how do such social hierarchies, gender disqualifications, as well as economic and political inequalities impact on women's production of feelings and emotions? To what extent do feelings and emotions contribute to the definition, or lack thereof, of strategies to cope with vulnerability? We assume that this is a mobility constructed through and, in turn, producing location and dislocation, alongside intimacies and marital experiences, imbued with multiple repertoires of emotions and affections. Our focus here is on emotions as an important element to understand the construction of experiences and practices by migrant women. As Grossberg (2010: 313) argues, everyday life, 'is not simply the material relationship; it is a structure of feelings'. By introducing emotions into the analysis of Chinese women's mobilities, we put forward further empirical research on marriage-migration

studies in Taiwan. Furthermore, looking at the mutual relationship between emotions and subalternity during migratory processes, we shed light on how, when turned into experienced and expressed emotions, feelings can also become resources to transgress, transform or even 'undo' (Butler, 2004) a condition of vulnerability. Consequently, contributing to the emerging field of emotions and migration in social sciences, this study of emotions may offer an important corrective to the vision of the migrant as a 'vulnerable' actor.

3. Epistemological considerations

Feelings and emotions can become an object of study: they can be observed and narrated through ethnography. However, mapping emotions is a delicate task which requires caution to avoid essentialism and arbitrary taxonomies. Therefore, our analysis is anchored in the situations observed. We have situated emotions within women's biographical, migratory and marital paths and multiple positionings within social, familiar and professional regimes through their narration.

Aware of the risk of 'methodological nationalism' (Glick Schiller et al., 1994) and of essentialism, we have tried to apprehend Chinese women's migratory and marital experiences through their own voices and narration, with a specific focus on their social and emotional practices. Along these lines, we consider that individual agency, *i. e.* a capacity for action, interplays with the structural constraints represented by normative regimes. Concurrently, such capacity for action is sustained by, and in turn, supports, the production of heterogeneous repertoires of positive and negative emotions. Feelings such as love, hate, disgust, joy or sadness do not, however, only represent what an individual feels within a precise spatial and temporal situation. These also reflect patterns of inclusion and exclusion, subalternity and oppression, and how the actors react to these.

If emotions are to be understood as emerging *in situ*, as a form of cultural politics (Ahmed, 2004) that shape the world and the individual's position within society, making sense of this needs to uphold their complexity and heterogeneity. Emotions cross, inform and produce the substance of individuals' social and lived lives (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990; Illouz, 2006), which include migratory and mobility processes (Bocconi and Baldassar, 2015). However, the connection between migration and emotion is subject to an ongoing debate. This concurrently derives from the heterogeneity of the empirically based research on the topic, but also from the fluid and rather contingent dimensions of emotions themselves. There is no doubt that migrant women's biographies and experiences are sustained by and, in turn, generate emotions. Yet, emotions are not universal. As suggested by Liz Bondi (2005), they are generated from the very experiences of the social, economic and familiar spaces women are positioned in during the different temporalities of their migration. They are thus fluid and vary according to the situations, the moments and the intersubjective ties in which they are constructed (Cronin, 2014).

With these concerns in mind, this paper seeks to demonstrate how repertoires of emotions are generated from and, in turn, sustain the making of women's biographical and mobility paths, as well as their interactions and social experiences in Taiwan. At the same time, we aim to illustrate how emotions, for their producers, can be a resource for transforming subaltern social, familiar and economic positionings. These are heterogeneous repertoires; complex, contradictory and whose intensity varies over time and space. Whilst amenable to study, such as this paper seeks to demonstrate, analytical grasp of emotions must keep in mind that they are neither immutable nor universalistic. On the contrary, they correspond to situations, moments and practices empirically observed *in situ*.

4. Methodology and field sites

Drawing from two separate projects with marriage migrants in Taiwan (one carried out between 2008 and 2015 and the other between

2016 and 2018), data was collected during fieldwork in different places in Taiwan, including major cities such as Taipei, Kaohsiung and Taichung, and rural areas such as Hualien, Hsinchu, Zhudong and Hukou. Exploring emotions requires access to qualitative data useful to provide an in-depth and thick picture of social phenomena. Hence, our main methods included in-depth interviews and life stories and immersion in our respondents' social setting through participant observation.

Through multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), we followed migrant women and observed them in their daily life and work experiences, social interactions, gatherings, and reunions with family and friends. The main spheres of interaction included their homes, workplaces (restaurants, markets, beauty centers, street shops, offices), civil society organisations established by and for marriage migrants, and the street. In both projects, a variety of strategies to reach migrant women and gain their trust were used, including attending professional make-up classes, dance courses, language courses promoted by the Taiwanese government, teaching free English classes to migrant women, and volunteering in local associations helping migrants. The contacts initially made through these informal activities were crucial to establishing our presence within the community of migrants and reaching other informants.

In total, we conducted in-depth interviews with more than 200 Chinese female marriage migrants aged between 18 and 72 and living in Taiwan, belonging to different social classes, education backgrounds and provinces of origin in China (Anhui, Sichuan, Henan, Shandong, Guanxi, Heilongjiang, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian provinces). We first developed a diachronic comparative analysis of the similarities and differences within the social, professional, and familiar situations experienced by women, as well as their biographical and migratory paths. Later, we sketched the common elements within the emotional experiences and practices produced and performed by women to identify the emotional states they commonly experience as Chinese marriage migrants in Taiwan.

5. Emotional states

Let us look back at the snapshot we started our rationale with. When Haizheng woke up in the night and asked one of us to have a drink and discuss her divorce, she expressed strong sentiments of disillusionment, unfulfillment and depression. She manifested dissatisfaction towards her current life and employment, as well as a desire to divorce and to leave Taiwan. Surprisingly, while speaking out her anger and frustration, such repertoires of negative emotions faltered. She looked perplexed. She said that she was a mother and that she had responsibilities. She explained that she was not ready to give up her life in Taiwan, no matter how frustrated she felt, especially in light of the fact that marriage-migration had been her individual choice against the whole family's resistance. After reflecting on all this, she started to also acknowledge her determination, and her value in this whole experience. Through this dialectical, yet emotionally intense, process, Haizheng seemed to change her mind. Ostensibly, she still felt melancholic and distressed, yet she seemed less disconsolate. The paralyzing emotions produced at the beginning were progressively transformed into reflexive competences.

Yet, this is not always the case. Feelings and affections can also inhibit action and limit the potential for biographical and status transformation. In a context characterised by multi-situated forms of oppression, emotions can bring about processes of subjectivation, cause intersubjective reactions, but also produce individual withdrawal and lead to paralysis of action.

In the following sections, we will provide evidence of the ways in which marital and migratory experiences, like Haizheng's, are constructed through heterogeneous repertoires of emotions. To illustrate how emotions sustain experiences, and how experiences are constructed through emotions, we have identified three *states of emotions* commonly observed across women's experiences: *imaginative*, *implosive* and *mutual* emotions. These *states* demonstrate the contingency, temporality and

variability of emotional situations and performances, and the potential for individual and collective transformation that is intrinsic to these states.

5.1. Imaginative emotions

Imagination, aspiration and projection (Appadurai, 1999) as resources and practices contribute to orient and shape migratory paths. Imagination means 'the capacity to make present what is absent' (Feagin and Maynard, 1997: 41) and may become a socially and emotionally constructed competence. Imagination has a creative capacity that not only arouses emotions but also engenders them. From China to Taiwan, women's mobilities correspond to different translations of their imagination and aspiration. Migrations within China have been made relatively easy since the opening of the country to neoliberal economics. An increasing number of people have been moving from rural to urban areas within and across provinces. The capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 1999) and the desire to access a modern, independent and autonomous status fuel women's rural-to-urban displacements in China, and to marriage-migration from China to Taiwan as a first or second step in the migration process. Marriage migration reveals how modernity intersects with traditions in Chinese society: on the one hand, the changes brought about by globalisation and neoliberal economy in the last thirty years have expanded the frontiers of Chinese women's imagination with regard to what it means to be a modern and independent woman (Zani, 2018); on the other hand, certain traditional expectations, for instance marriage, have remained deeply rooted in Chinese people, to the point that marriage remains an important element of Chinese people's life and ambitions (Lu, 2008; Momesso, 2016).

Haizheng's two-step experience of migration reveals this accumulation of desires. Thirty-four years old, from rural Guanxi province, she was the eldest daughter, hence her family was not willing to invest time and money in her education. At the age of fourteen, she migrated to Guangdong province to work in the local factories. Despite low salaries and poor working conditions, she enjoyed city life and was not ready to give it up. With her colleagues, she used her salary to go shopping or dancing in the city's nightclubs during her free time. Yet, as a low-qualified rural migrant, she experienced social and economic disqualification in the Chinese urban space, where upward social mobility was restricted. Moreover, like other rural women, she was supposed to move back to the countryside to get married and give up the modern and metropolitan lifestyle she wanted. Sad and worried, she explained more than once that she had no education, no rights and no money [Interviewed on December 16, 2016, Zhudong].

Oscillating between subjectivation, with her desire to become a modern subject in China, and subjection, with a lack of control of her life as a migrant in a Chinese city, Haizheng's aspirations constitute the pivot around which her projects of upward social mobility are constructed. These could, for instance, imply re-migration. In this scenario, the lift of certain movement restrictions between China and Taiwan provided her with novel resources and opportunities to re-migrate and to imagine alternative biographical paths. The construction of Taiwan as an 'imagined scape' (Appadurai, 1999) for many Chinese women flowed from the production of an imagery based on emotions. The fact that Taiwan scored well in economic development at least until the 1990s, have created space for imagination for Chinese citizens, many of whom aspired to start their life in a free and economically developed place. Yet, the only way to cross the border, for a majority, has been marriage.

For instance, like Haizheng, several women we interviewed explained that before marriage-migration, they considered Taiwan to be a place that would allow upward social and economic mobility. There they could fulfill their ambition of marrying and creating a family, obtaining a modern urban status unachievable in China or even escaping the stigma of their personal and family life related to rurality, poverty or previous divorce. Such projects are usually intertwined with multiple emotional states.

Minyi, an ambitious administrative assistant from Chengdu, was promised to a good-looking and successful man from Taiwan. She was one step away from her wish to create a family with the man she loved and to move to Taiwan with him, when he abruptly withdrew from his promise. Minyi was in despair: 'I had already planned everything; I was very sad! I wasted so many years with him, and all of a sudden all was gone!' [interviewed in Taipei, March 28, 2011]. Visibly, in Minyi's experience, imagination, as an emotional resource, contributed to the shaping and orienting of her marital experiences and to the strengthening of the foundations of familial projects. In this regard, imagination, as a resource for projecting a different social and family status, intersected with Minyi's experience of loss when she was left behind by her Taiwanese fiancé. In a society where most women tend to marry in their twenties, she knew she was too old to enter the local marriage market. Frustrated, she had to readjust her ambitions and life plans. Yet, in this pattern, imagination sustained novel action. Determined to go to Taiwan, she joined a chat room and opted to start a relationship with the first man who came along whom she felt was good enough to restore the dignity she had lost during her previous experience. When she met her husband-to-be in person, she immediately sensed that he had lied to her. Yet she could not bear the emotional pressure of confronting failure for a second time, and, above all, of facing her family, friends and colleagues, who all expected her to marry soon. These pressures required her to make apparently incomprehensible life choices: Minyi married this man, this time with the sole purpose to start a new life in Taipei.

Many of our informants regarded Taiwan as a place to start a new life. For instance, Mi Xian, fifty-five years old, Sichuan native, previously divorced in China, explained: 'When I met my future husband, I forgot about my past. I felt happy. I wanted to forget my previous husband and the painful divorce experience I went through. I felt free to reconstruct my life there. I felt lucky to be given the opportunity to rebuild a family. After I divorced, I was depressed. People looked down on me. People look down on divorced women in my village' [Interviewed on January 26, 2017, Taipei]. Previous suffering connected to stigma due to her condition as a divorcee, pushed Mi Xian to imagine ways to reinvent her life in a distant place where she could regain her dignity in the role of a married woman.

Marriage also meant specific objectives and expectations for Xiao Xue, a twenty-eight year old single woman at the time of her first migration. Yet, on her migration from her rural home in Henan to Guangdong province, she met her future husband in a Taiwanese factory in the city of Dongguan, where she was working, subjected to an exhausting industrial labour regime. Re-migrating to Taiwan opened unexpected possibilities for her: a migratory and biographical shift which, she imagined, would enable her to enter a new stage and would contribute to social and professional transformation. Through global imagination (Constable, 2005), transnational marriages are constructed by crossing not only geographical but, especially, social borders. As our examples show, social imagination of gender, sexuality and modernity can be supported by intense emotions, which support processes of formulating alternative life paths. Imagination becomes a catalyst for action.

Nevertheless, as soon as they moved to Taiwan, many Chinese marriage migrants had to face a reality rather different from the imaginations they had previously socially and emotionally constructed. Unhappiness, frustration, loneliness, distance, and humiliation are some of the feelings that they all experienced upon their arrival. In loco, the access to social resources and opportunities is strictly framed within the rights that marriage with a Taiwanese citizen offer, regardless of the individual's motivations and aspirations. On this base, we draw the state of implosion.

5.2. Emotions of implosion

If imagination can be a resource for making present what is absent (Illouz, 2006), this needs to be inscribed into the social worlds it is

produced. Disillusionment emerges when women experience a position of vulnerability related to legal restrictions and social stigmatisation, and this clashed with their original representations and expectations. The previously 'imaginary scape' of Taiwan is gradually dismantled by negative repertoires of emotions of unfulfillment, frustration, sadness and dissatisfaction which bring about what we define here as implosion.

Let us move back to Haizheng's experience. She explained that as soon as she got out of the flight in Taoyuan Airport, she felt astonished, melancholic and sad: 'I had thought Taiwan was heaven, but as soon as I arrived I realized it was earth, full of sand and roots, earth even deeper than the factory where I worked in China', she explained [Interviewed on December 16, 2016, Zhudong]. Like many other women, she realized that she was alone in an unfamiliar world. After spending 6 months at the mercy of her mother-in-law, taking care of the children and doing the housework, she had the impression that she was 'going mad', as she argued. She felt imprisoned, lonely and homesick. She did not know whom to talk with; she had no friends. Looking for work, she experienced social contempt and marginalisation: 'We are Chinese. We can only look for small, informal jobs in factories. They [the Taiwanese] do not want us. Some factories refuse even to employ us. They ask for Taiwanese ID'. Daily, she oscillated between strenuous factory work and stressful familiar responsibilities. She cooked for her parents-in-law, washed the dishes, did the laundry and was a good, devoted wife towards her husband at night. Such a condition was shared by many other fellow migrants, as Taiwanese society expected them to carry out their familiar duties rather than work towards their own personal and professional goals.

Similarly, Minyi, having accomplished her objective of marrying and moving to Taiwan, had to cope with a frustrating reality: her husband had deceived her as to his financial situation, lifestyle and occupation. She deeply regretted her decision of marrying that man. Yet, unwilling to divorce him, go back to China and face the consequences of another 'failure' -as she claimed- with her family and friends, she resigned herself to her destiny with that man: 'I lowered my expectations. Every day I wake up, I go out and, in the evening, I come back and go to bed. That's all. I do not want to keep on arguing with him. [...] but at least he doesn't beat me!'

Regardless of their social status, age, level of education or migratory and professional experiences, most of these women's narratives are characterised by a sense of strong belonging to their society of origin: China. Such attachment grows according to the intensity of the situations of exclusion in Taiwan. Curiously, but not surprisingly, despite the social inequalities and hierarchies they coped with in China, most women's experiences were sustained by feelings of anchorage, security, stability, and attachment to their home country, where their family, relatives, and friends resided. Yet, as soon as they switched the narrative to their experiences in Taiwan, such repertoires of emotions seemed to fade away to give space to feelings of insecurity, loneliness, dissatisfaction, unfulfillment, sadness, but also regret, disillusionment, and depression. Clearly, the positioning of women in a condition of social and cultural subalternity is not only socially but also emotionally constructed. Such feelings are not anodyne, and their transition and transformation over time deserve attention.

Implosion is therefore gradual. It emerges through a process of transformation where previous repertoires of optimistic emotions, such as joy, excitement and aspiration, turn into repertoires of pessimistic emotions, such as frustration towards the present, sense of misery and loneliness. These bring about new experiences of dissatisfaction, sustained by feelings of sadness, melancholy and nostalgia. Indeed, this is not the end of the story: what catches the eye is that this transformation of the women's repertoires of emotions, from positive to negative, can become 'fuel for action' (Ludden, 2002). If the literature suggests that emotions can sustain action, a legitimate question emerges: how is action constructed? To what extent can it bring about processes of transformation?

Following women's narratives, the realisation that they were

subjected to injustice also pushed many to develop novel strategies to transform their social positioning.

'I could not stand that life anymore; I cannot stand my life anymore even now. I did not come to Taiwan to become a slave; I wanted to improve myself, but I got no chance. I feel so frustrated and tired (she cries); I do not know what to do. I am still young: maybe I should consider having a better life. I still want a better life! That is why I am trying my best to improve, and I will succeed, but I need to abandon my husband's house to be freer'. [Haizheng, March 17, 2017, Hsinchu].

Haizheng's dissatisfaction brought about a rediscovery of her sense of worth and a reassertion of the reasons that brought her to Taiwan and the many steps she made to succeed. Therefore, Haizheng started spending more time out of her lodgings. Unemployed, fighting against boredom, she became a volunteer in her children's school. Also, she started looking for a job, for 'whatever unpaid or exhausting job she could perform in order to make a different use of her time and see her husband less and less' [March 17, 2017, Hsinchu]. Haizheng's emotions of depression, abandonment and discouragement shifted towards sentiments of tenacity and self-assurance.

In Minyi's case, she also found a way to transform the apathy she had been experiencing since her arrival in Taiwan. She joined a civic organisation as a volunteer, and this became the escape route from the pressures she had at home: 'Staying at home I feel very anxious. I do not earn any money when I come here, but I have a feeling as if I am going to work. [...] Here I can meet many new friends; I can help them. And the other sisters are all nice with me. So, since I started to join this place, I feel happier, I feel that something has changed. And helping other people is good too.'

What we discovered is that reactions to individual emotional states often emerged in a collective environment. It is a matter of mutual recognition of biographical and emotional experiences by migrants. As one of our informants once stated: 'All Chinese spouses who come to Taiwan have some kind of sorrow in their heart' [Liliang, March 3, 2011, Taipei]. This woman was not only referring to her suffering in China due to the stigma attached to her after she divorced, but also to her vicissitudes in Taiwan, after her first husband died and she had to marry another man, only on paper, in order to remain on the territory. One amongst many, she was scared that the second husband could pass away before she could obtain citizenship, which would have meant direct repatriation before the legislative reform of 2009.

It is this awareness, often repeated by several women interviewed, that pushed us to consider the significance and the role of mutual emotional states in defining Chinese marriage migrants' experiences in Taiwan. Indeed, we noticed that a process of transformation, first emotional (from negative to positive emotions) and then material (from subjection to subjectivation), often occurred as a consequence of opportunities of connection with other migrants who shared similar experiences and emotions.

5.3. Mutual emotions

The shift from the individual to collective levels of emotional discourse brings about new intersubjective practices of mutuality which, to some extent, represent responses to contest, and even 'undo' (Butler, 2004) the commonly experienced situations of subalternity.

In December 2016, sitting around the table of a Sichuanese restaurant, Haizheng helped Liyun, the owner of the restaurant, to cut garlic and green beans. Liyun, thirty-six years old, Sichuanese native, Feifei, thirty-two years old, Hunan native, also worked as waitresses there. These three women met in Zhudong, where they currently still live and work. As simple as it seems, they all met in a shop where Feifei was working, mutually recognising their common Chinese origin from their accent, which made their social identity visible. Soon, they became friends. Liyun and Feifei are both divorced. They decided to cooperate in this catering business to earn money for their children and families still living in China. Liyun said: 'Thanks again for your help, Haizheng, there

is still so much food to cook'. Then, she added: 'They are my family. Haizheng sometimes comes here for free. She brings food to me and helps me to cook and to clean'. Haizheng interrupted and answered: 'You do not need to say this. We are friends; we are sisters. I help you because I also feel comfortable here [...]. I feel at home sitting here. I feel more at home here than at in my lodgings with my husband. Here, I do what I wish. If I am hungry, I eat. If I want to smoke, I smoke. When I cannot stand my life anymore, when I am sick of my husband and of my children, I come here. They do understand me. As soon as we start talking, I feel better'.

Individually produced, Haizheng, Liyun or Feifei's emotions of implosion exceed the sphere of an individual performance. When women gather together to cook and talk, by sharing their suffering, they find consolation in each other. Through this process, migrant women do not only lessen their sadness, but also initiate a process of transformation from individual to collective experiences.

Here two points require attention. First, the intersubjective nature of emotions (Crossley, 1998) that becomes visible through the making of bonds of closeness (Bondi, 2005) and friendship relationships (Cronin, 2014). And secondly, the relational connection of such affectional ties to socio-spatial contexts (Bocchagni and Baldassar, 2015). Far from her lodgings where she feels uncomfortable and surveilled by her husband, in the restaurant, Haizheng's emotional state metamorphoses. Not only we can observe a transformation of the emotions she produces and shares with the other Chinese women, but we also need to look at how these challenge the perception of her vulnerable condition. New positive sentiments of ambition, satisfaction, but also of attachment and belonging are collectively negotiated within these novel affectional spaces. Crucially, these sustain the production of novel practices of mutual help, as shown in Haizheng's narration.

A few days after the above-described situation, Haizheng and one of us spent the evening with Liyun at her lodgings, cooking traditional Sichuanese hotpot and drinking wine. That evening, Liyun cried. She was exhausted by the pressures of life and needed a good talk with her 'sister', who could console and support her. 'We all came here from mainland China and faced the same problems. We are all Chinese women who married Taiwanese men and we need to support each other like a family. We must help each other because we come from a faraway place and have gone through the same difficulties. These sisters are my new family here'.

The emotional connection to the 'sisters' is not only composed of affections and of similar migratory and biographical experiences. Emotions are relational and mutualistic since they are actively generated within a specific space for friendship (Cronin, 2014) where the rigid social and familiar orders experienced by Chinese migrants are less likely to occur. Within the restaurant they work in, inside their lodgings or in the parks, far from their husbands and mothers-in-law, Feifei, Haizheng, Liyun's repertoires of positive and negative emotions mix and merge into daily practices of reciprocity that, as claimed by Haizheng, contribute to lessen the individual and collective condition of subalternity, at least to a certain degree.

Negative emotions of dissatisfaction, disillusionment, anger, or frustration which had been individually produced are not only collectively appropriated, but also transformed. These women generate mutuality and reciprocity, which are added to new affections and a dynamic sense of attachment to other women, what they call 'sisters' (*jiemei* 姐妹). Similarly, the 'all' above mentioned by Liliang here takes the shape of a sense of belonging which is simultaneously socially and emotionally constructed through interactions. By addressing each other as 'sisters', they gather together in an 'emotional community' (Rosewein, 2006; Zani, 2020a), composed of novel ties of reciprocity produced in the social and emotional spaces of women's daily lives and economic activities. As a way to minimise their personal sorrow and, in the meantime, to intensify it by turning it into a collective sentiment, Chinese marriage migrants' biographical and migratory paths in Taiwan are individually but also collectively constructed, oscillating between

ambivalent and transformative repertoires of positive and negative emotions. From the individual level of emotional experiences, when social resources are combined with affection for their peers, emotions undergo processes of collectivisation, which are synchronously produced from and supporting novel interactions, solidarity, and reciprocity (Zani, 2018).

The intersubjective production of novel repertoires of emotions amongst women may also engender a broader impact in terms of a reaction to an order considered as unfair, hence the creation of a narrative of social injustice (Momesso and Cheng, 2017). In this regard, it is important to reflect on another form of communality.

Indeed, although Haizheng, Feifei and Liyun's gatherings represent an informal daily practice of sociality, women's practices can exit the level of informality and produce novel subpolitics. In this respect, we observed the creation of civil society organisations, which, by providing support to mainland spouses, institutionalize mutualism as a tool for claiming fairer immigration policies, for negotiating social rights with local governments, and for ending discrimination. If informal social and affectional networks of 'sisters' provide a space for solidarity, the formality of civil society organisations enable migrant women to acquire greater negotiating power to deal with family members and the broader society up to the receiving state.

All in all, civil society organisations are not much different from informal social networks, and the two often intersect. Divergences relate to final objectives, as organisations often aim to broader social and political change, through social activities as well as political actions. Political actions, through social movements, are themselves a distinct setting in which emotions can be created or reinforced (Jasper, 1998: 417). For instance, emotions are crucial in pushing someone to join an organisation: frustration with the legal restrictions, insecurity in an abusive relationship, loneliness in an unfriendly society, were the main reasons identified by Chinese women seeking a sense of belonging to a group, support and protection in moments of hardship.

'You know, we arrive here in Taiwan and we are completely powerless. We don't know anyone, and the only place outside our family is the association. They help us dealing with things, otherwise how could you manage on our own? Over there in China, I have friends, I have family, I have contacts, so it is easier to deal with things. There are women who have very good situations at home, so for them it is easier. But what about those women who have problems at home? They have no one else except their husbands. Many women want to run away because they cannot stand the situation here anymore. So, to have a local network it makes a big difference! [Xiaoli, Taipei, July 1, 2011].

When Xiaoli arrived in Taiwan in 2011, she faced several problems due to the immigration office's suspicions about her marriage not being genuine. The civic organisation she joined became her safety net in the first ten years. This feeling of protection was shared by several other women:

'Through this organisation my life has changed a lot. By helping other I could feel happy. Have a look, they come here every day, and they stay together. [...] By coming here, we can take care of each other. You take care of me, and I take care of you. If you have to take care of yourself on your own, how can you make it? Isn't it sad? For example, if you face domestic violence issues, how can you deal with these things on your own? [...] A person alone cannot do anything. But through this organization we can achieve what we want. [Xiaoli, Taipei, 3 June 2011].

To define oneself through the help of a collective label, 'we', it entails an 'affective as well as cognitive mapping of the social world' (Jasper, 1998: 415). And this may eventually lead to other important outcomes. As Xiaoli emphasised, 'through the organisation we are a group, and we can raise our voice' (July 1, 2011). Indeed, in the intimate and safe environment of civic organisations, migrants not only have the opportunity to build a shared narrative of suffering and injustice but they can

also turn that narrative into political action, and, eventually, enact broader social and political transformation (Momesso and Cheng, 2017; Momesso, 2020). Both in informal daily frames of sociality and in the context of civic organisations, women fix their emotions into discourses which sustain the production of practices. From these, women bring about new affectional ties which support professional socialisation, practices of mutual help and even claims for social rights and recognition. In this respect, emotions, their construction and their performance, enable the multiplication of critical registers. These are in tune with the immediate experience of a social world which is perceived as unfair and inequalitarian.

Clearly, emotions are not solely 'about' the world, they also help to constitute it (Brenneis, 1990: 113) and to transform it. Repertoires of positive and negative emotions vary according to the situations, the circumstances and the timing of their production, and undergo processes of maturation, of transition and of collectivisation which can sustain action and a transformation of social, familial or moral orders. Emotions are revealed to be important resources which help with adaptation, negotiation and even resistance and subversion. They create the potential for new forms of visible or invisible action, on an individual and a collective level. Along these lines, emotions have the potential to alleviate the daily situations of fragility and precarity experienced by women and to improve their subaltern positioning through the design of new spaces of imagination and possibility.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried, empirically, to solve the conundrum raised in the introduction: 'can the subaltern feel?' The answer is positive. The subaltern can feel, and, above all, their individual and collective production of emotions, sentiments and affections proves to be an effective tool, individually and collectively performed, for transcending and transforming a common condition of subalternity. Nonetheless, feelings, emotions and affections are generated in situ, and cannot be extracted from the biographical, migratory, familial and professional experiences of the actors involved. The results of our research help to shed new light on the ways the production and the performance of emotions, at an individual and collective level, help Chinese migrant women to cope with the social, economic and moral inequalities and hierarchies they face in Taiwan.

We have outlined three states of emotions, *imaginative*, *implosive* and *mutual* emotions, which concomitantly give evidence of the ways Chinese migrant women experience a subaltern condition within their Taiwanese social and familial worlds after marriage-migration. In this sense, we have conceptualised emotions in terms of experiences, practices and competences to cope with vulnerability and precarity. Emotions proved to be not only important resources for inter-action. Crucially, their agential substance (Tappolet, 2016) sustains the 'undoing' (Butler, 2004) of condition of subalternity experienced in relation to rigid social, migratory, economic and familiar orders, at least partially. Socially constructed, emotions are translated into practices and vary over the temporalities and the spatialities of women's biographical and mobility paths.

Despite their friability, the analytical value of the emotional states we identified lies in the fact that these show the performative potential of the repertoires of positive and negative emotions in sustaining processes of transformation of the rigid order women are positioned in during pluri-migration experiences. Firstly an imaginative emotional state, characterised by feelings of ambition, of aspiration and of projection towards the future, sustain the making of marriage-migration to Taiwan. Later, implosion, that is to say, feelings of anger, regret, frustration, disillusionment or sadness, often emerge through women's narratives of their daily lives in Taiwan. Yet, if the subaltern cannot speak while being maltreated by their husbands and mothers-in-law, discriminated against at work or misrecognised in the public space, they can nevertheless 'feel' and transform such repertoires of negative

emotions into individually and collectively performed resources to cope with the inequalities and the hierarchies which characterise their migratory status. From implosion, emotions can become mutualistic, i.e. intersubjective practices of mutual help and solidarity, which sustain processes of negotiation of an alternative positioning in the society of arrival. The dialectics between emotion and subalternity become evident when migrant women 'can feel' and perform feelings as competences to 'undo' (Butler, 2004) a subaltern condition experienced along the different temporalities and spatialities of migration.

Broadly, our analysis could not aim at achieving exhaustiveness. Such states of emotions are incomplete, because they are situated and produced within friable and changing social worlds and according to the subjective and intersubjective ways migrant women feel a subaltern condition and perform emotions to 'undo' this. Something of an experimental analysis, proposing such a conceptualisation of emotional states may, in itself, be helpful to draw new ones within different spatialities, temporalities and experiences of migrants. All in all, they provide important insights into future possibilities for empirical research on migration and emotion and into questions regarding the most appropriate methods the social sciences can use for apprehending feelings and sentiments.

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