Graduate School

Marrying from 'Asia' to Singapore

Gendered and Ethnicized Citizenship

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is to look into media representation on issues that involve female marriage migrants, in particular, in relation to citizenship, in Singapore, one of the most popular destinations of marriage migration in Asia. Categorized and labeled as "foreign brides" in Singapore, these foreign-born women have long suffered from biased or one-dimensional representation in the local media, particularly, when the representation denotes to their citizenships. The purpose of this study is to unveil stereotypical narratives and discourses underlying local media coverage that portrays and/or reinforces these women as "others", and to explore how issues of citizenship are gendered and ethnicized, through media communication, in the case of *foreign brides*. Three research questions are raised in the study: 1) How are narratives of female marriage migrants' life trajectories (re)narrated by local media? 2) How have female marriage migrants been represented in Singaporean media in relation to reproduction, labor and the nation-building? and 3) How is citizenship centralized in these representations?

Empirical materials this study resorts to include eighteen pieces of newspaper articles and two images – all published on mainstream newspapers in Singapore during 2009, as well as the webpage of a Singapore-based matchmaking agency. Studies on these materials consist of a narrative study and discourse analysis. One typical pattern of media narrative and three problematic discourses are observed: 1) Narratives on *foreign brides* are constructed in accordance with normative values and conventional imagination about women's "marrying up" in transnational marriage. They tend to be one-dimensional and reflect the lack of women's self-agency in the narration. 2) A "third-world" Asia representing poverty and backwardness has been constructed as opposed to Singapore, and serves as the ideological basis of state control in citizenship entitlement of foreign-born spouses. 3) *Foreign brides*' citizenship is subordinated to the definition of desirable "mothers of the nation", in which foreign-born women from "backward" countries are considered to represent the bottom of women as a whole. 4) Various institutions analogize marrying Singaporean men to an "occupation", which further disadvantages *foreign brides* in marriage and familial affairs during the economic recession.

Keywords: *Foreign bride*, Citizenship, Reproduction, the Nation, Economic difficulties, Narrative, Discourse

CONTENT

1 Introduction

> What should happen to those members of the civil society who cannot or will not become full members of that 'strong community', which is the national 'imagined community'?
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> —Nira Yuval-Davis, *Women, Citizenship and Difference* (1997)

The question quoted above, is raised by Yuval-Davis in her opening article for *Feminist Review* (1997, Volume 57 Number 1): *Citizenship: Pushing the Boundaries*. Those she mentions excluded from the national community denote both "old" and "new" minorities, be them disadvantaged citizens, migrants and refugees etc.. Inspired by her questioning, this study is designed to look into female marriage migrants' life stories in Singapore – one of the most popular migrant destinations in Asia and where marriage migrants have constituted an increasing proportion of its newly arrived population. As new minority, and as women, their survival in this new country has become part of the Singapore Story, though with their roles in this story frequently subjected to biased narrations, due to their gender, ethnics, or countries of origin etc.. Deciphering various narratives and underlying discourses in the mainstream media of the so-called *foreign brides* is therefore a fruitful approach to find out how their relationship to citizenship has been gendered and ethnicized, through "the Mouthpiece of the Nation". Although Yuval-Davis's question might not find its answer here, this study aims to be one that brings eyes closer to the issue and inspire further solution-seeking.

2 Background

2.1 Brief History of Singapore[1]: The Nation Built on Adversity

Since citizenship is a form of recognition towards one's membership of a national collective, and thus connotes one's belongingness to a shared culture, it would be necessary to briefly introduce the history of nation-building in Singapore. The story of Singapore from a colony-

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[1] History of Singapore in this chapter refers to the entry for Singapore in the *Library of Congress*' Country Studies handbook (electronic version): Lepoer, Barbara Leitch (ed.) (1989). *Singapore: A Country Study*, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress. Hyperlink: http://countrystudies.us/singapore/. Accessed on 07 May 2010.

state to an independent nation has been one full of conflicts and crises, as it is officially narrated. The history of the land has been written by various foreign settlers, including Chinese, Malay, Japanese, and later, by European colonial powers. It came into being a Crown Colony of the British Empire in 1867 and was later shortly taken over by the Imperial Japanese Army between 1942 and 1945 when the Japanese surrendered to the Allies on 15 August 1945. A political awakening of anti-colonialism and nationalism was however stirred by the failure of Britain to defend Singapore during the war. Singapore became a colony-state with self-governance and once merged with Malays, Sabah and Sarawak as part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, until its final independence in 1965. The separation of Singapore from Malaysia was a result of racial tensions due to discrimination against the Chinese in Singapore by the federal policies of affirmative action, which granted special privileges, including other financial and economic benefits, to the Malays. Racial riots occurred frequently, and conflicts between the Chinese and the Malays in Singapore were also increasing as the rally led by Lee Kuan Yew and other Singaporean political leaders and the federation's accusations were both going to a culmination. The bloodshed ended with the federation's decision to expel Singapore on 9 August 1965. On the same day, Singapore came into being a new sovereign, independent nation-state, the Republic of Singapore. The story of building a prosperous Singapore nation in thorns hereby began.

The making of common vision to build a nation became a new challenge that came along with the state's sovereignty. The current population of Singapore consists of Malays, Chinese and Indians, whose settlement in Singapore can be dated back to the early days of the territory, Europeans since the colonial era, and other smaller ethnic groups, such as descendants of Europeans who married Asians and Arabs who married Malays[2]. As a newly established republic of multiple ethnic groups, in particular, with a history of racial conflicts, Singapore has been faced with the urgent need of forging a national identity among its diverse populations of immigrants, now citizens of the Republic.

One of the strategies of building a nation-state of Singapore has been constructing common enemies to the nation. Dayang Istiaisyah bte (2001) has reviewed the historical narrative selected by the authorities, of Singapore's constraints and vulnerabilities, crisis and survival, since its claim of sovereignty from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965. The sacrifices that the

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[2] Refer to www.sg: Your Official Gateway to Singapore, a government-hosted profile website of Singapore. Hyperlink: http://app.www.sg/who/41/Early-Immigrants.aspx Accessed on 31 March 2010.

nation's founders have made for, and the sacredness of, the founding history of Singapore, have been passed on through the implementation of a National Education Programme (NEP, since1996) called "The Singapore Story: Overcoming the Odds" (Dayang Istiaisyah bte, 2001), and become a national discourse. And it continues to serve as the national ideology in which Singaporeans are oriented in coping with crises, for instance, the economic downturn and population crisis. The highly centralized state power has been essential in the construction of "multiracial" nation[3]. The Parliament of Singapore was dominated by the People's Action Party (PAP), which was also the leading party in Singapore's independence movement, for 15 years between 1966 and 1981. Although the government underwent several significant changes since the middle of 1980s, the PAP returned to power in 2006[4] and continues to enact strict regulation of political and media activities, which exert further influence on the political construction of the Singapore identity in contexts such as globalization, and more recently, counter-terrorism and the ongoing financial crisis.

2.2 Population Crisis & the Immigration Society

According to *Population in Brief 2009*[5], Singapore continues to face significant population challenges despite of a cheerful five per cent growth in 2008 over the previous year. Prior to the onset of the economic downturn in late 2008, the total population in Singapore has reached 4.84 million, with a major increase in the number of Permanent Residents and non-residents[6]. The challenges are ascribed to years of low fertility rates[7], an ageing population[8],

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[3] Differing from the ideology of building a "multiracial nation", which aims to tie up its diverse immigrant citizens, the state has constructed a distinguished discourse in relation to some newly arrived immigrants, who are considered potential obstacles, if not all threats, to the nation's prosperity. Counterpart discourses related to this point will be further discussed in later on discourse analysis.

[4] ibid.

[5] *Population in Brief 2009* is a joint publication by National Population Secretariat, Singapore Department of Statistics, Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration & Checkpoints Authority, and Ministry of Manpower. Data in the report was obtained by June 2008 and published in June 2009.

[6] *Population in Brief 2009*.

[7] Resident total fertility rate in 2008 is 1.28 children per female resident. (*Population in Brief 2009*)

[8] The proportion of residents aged 65 and above increased from 6.8% of the resident population in 1998 to 8.7% in 2008. (*Population in Brief 2009*)

and a growing trend of people not marrying or marrying at a later age, especially among the females[9].

The report literally points out the need to "encourage more Singaporeans to get married and have children, facilitate the naturalisation and integration of suitable foreigners, as well as engage our Overseas Singaporeans, to ensure that Singapore will continue to have a viable population" (*Population in Brief 2009*, 2009: 5f.). The Straits Times, which is the most read newspapers in Singapore, has reported on efforts made by "the national matchmaker"- Social Development Unit-Social Development Service (SDU-SDS). This governmental department has been targeting on polytechnic students since 2007, and on a total number of over 50,000 high school[10] students and more university students from 2009 onward, to promote the idea of "getting married and having children sooner rather than later" (Tan, 2009[11]). Quoted in the same report, Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) Yu-Foo Yee Shoon said: "We want to tell students: don't wait until you have build up your career. Sometimes, it's too late, especially for girls." (ibid.) Among the state's various population-encouraging policies are also welcoming migration policies to attract "suitable foreigners". *Population in Brief 2009* shows that in 2008, the country granted 79, 167 new Permanent Residents and 20, 513 new citizens. In particular, more than half of these new residents aged 20 and above had post-secondary education (*Population in Brief 2009*, 2009:5f.).

Besides the new population that come to Singapore alongside the increasing foreign workforce, another major component of the incoming population results from trans-national marriage migration. According to *Population in Brief 2009*, marriages involving a citizen and a non-citizen have grown by 2.9% between 1998 and 2008, while marriages involving two citizens have declined by 9.2% over the same period. In particular, nearly one-fourth of the total number of marriages in 2008 were between a male citizen or PR and a female non-resident, while there were only 1,642 cases, out of the overall 24,596 marriages of the year, that involved a male non-resident to a female citizen or PR,. In other words, marriages that involve a male resident and a female non-resident have constituted the major trend of

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[9] The general marriage rate for citizen males decreased from 47.9 married males per 1,000 unmarried males in 2008 to 42.1 in 2008, while that for females decreased from 49.0 to 39.3 married females per 1,000 unmarried females over the same period. (*Population in Brief 2009*)

[10] High school is called Junior College in Singapore. In this report, the targeted groups also include the Institute of Technical Education.

[11] See *Matchmaker targets teens too*. By Theresa Tan. The Straits Times, 4 August 2009.

transnational marriages in Singapore. Statistics also indicates that 6,160 out of 6,360 non-citizen brides in 2008 were of Asian origin[12].

Foreign brides, has thereby been termed in general discourse to refer to foreign women who marry male citizens and reside in Singapore with whichever residency status. *As* the most attended group generated by the trend of marriage migration, they have been widely represented in local media. Underlying various representations of this group is the issue of their citizen status, particularly when the marriage becomes a problem. When more and more media coverage in 2009 appeared on increasing marital crisis due to financial difficulties, marriage and subsequently citizenship of *foreign brides* have been brought to the surface of media narratives.

2.3 Immigration Policies in Singapore

Immigration policies in Singapore are driven by population, talent attraction and all-important economic objectives. Different statuses of citizenship or residency admission – full citizenship, permanent residency, work/student permit and social visit pass, etc.- are granted according to the immigrant's potential in value production. Immigration admission criteria that base mainly on educational and financial qualifications, make it nearly impossible for people from developing countries to acquire residence, and then citizenship, in Singapore (AWARE, 2006).

Restriction on female immigrants is generally even harsher. As suggested by Piper & Roces (2003), the thriving of marriage migration to receiving countries in East and Southeast Asia is partially due to their rigid citizenship policies by which the granting of permanent residency to what is commonly defined as "unskilled" labor is not allowed. Marriage to a local man may therefore constitute an important strategy for the woman in "unskilled" work to achieve economic and legal security in the receiving states (ibid.). Due to the Government's restriction on Work Permit Holders' family formation, more obstacles are encountered by women from Asian developing countries who intend to migrate to Singapore for work.

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[12] Refer to *Population in Brief 2009.*

As the Ministry of Manpower (Singapore)[13] has produced a hierarchy of "foreign talent", different types of Work Pass are granted to foreigners accordingly on the grounds of their skill levels, including Employment Pass for foreign professionals, S Pass for "mid-level skilled workers", Work Permit for "unskilled or semi-skilled foreign workers" and Work Permit for "foreign domestic workers". The state has strict control in marriage and family formation intended by especially Work Permit holders, who are defined as unskilled or semi-skilled manpower. According to "Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (Chapter 91A)[14], Fourth Schedule", "[t]he foreign worker shall not go through any form of marriage or apply to marry under any law, religion, custom or usage with a Singapore citizen or Permanent Resident in or outside Singapore, without the prior approval of the Controller, while he/she holds a Work Permit, and also after his/her Work Permit has expired or has been cancelled or revoked" (page 8). Given the application for approval of a marriage is rejected by the Ministry of Manpower, the foreign spouse-to-be will be banned to enter Singapore. Stated in the same Chapter is that "[i]f the foreign worker is a female foreign worker, the foreign worker shall not become pregnant or deliver any child in Singapore during the validity of her Work Permit/Visit Pass, unless she is a Work Permit holder who is already married to a Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident with the approval of the Controller" (page 8). There is however no such act that applies to Employment Pass holders who are assumed to be skilled professionals. Although the Ministry claimed to have approved over 85 per cent of application of Work Permit holders to marry, the then Minister for Manpower, Dr. Ng Eng Hen in 2004 stated in his speech the continuing need for the *Marriage Restriction Policy* for Work Permit holders in order to ensure that the more than 500,000 Work Permit holders[15] "do not sink roots in Singapore"[16] (Ng, 2004). Being a *foreign bride* in this context may have been a more likely approach for a woman to seek for a living in Singapore.

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[13] Ministry of Manpower.
Hyperlink: http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/work_pass.html Accessed on 13 March 2010.

[14] *Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (Chapter 91A).* Downloadable via hyperlink: http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/work_pass/work_permit.html Accessed on 13 March 2010.

[15] Statistics released by 2004 when the speech was given.

[16] See MOM Speeches 2004: *Committee of Supply: Responses by Ag Minister for Manpower, Dr Ng Eng Hen to Members of Parliament on Attracting Foreign Talent to Work Pass System.* Hyperlink: http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/press_room/mom_speeches/2004/20040319-attractingforeigntalenttoworkpasssystem.html Accessed on 13 March 2010.

The current *Marriage Restriction Policy* in Singapore has also generated a hierarchy of international marriages "characterized by their relative potential contributions (especially economic) to Singapore, ease of social integration, and their perceived likely demand on the public welfare and social system" (Tan, 2008:13). In other words, legitimatization of the marital union between a Singapore citizen and a non-Singaporean is based on the foreign spouse's potential productivity. "Driven by abiding concerns as to an individual's ability to contribute economically to Singapore", foreign spouses who are poorly educated may have more difficulties in obtaining Singapore citizenship or permanent residency, comparing to those well educated (ibid.). *Foreign brides* being granted only renewable 90 days social visit pass in their first three years in Singapore, per se has manifested their status in this citizenship hierarchy. So is their presumed productive competence. And their partial citizenship leads to various limitations on their social rights.

3 Major Concern

Foreign brides are a population at the bottom of the hierarchy of international marriages. According to the revelation by Community Development, Youth and Sports Minister, one-third of 24,596 marriages recorded in 2008 in the city state were between Singaporean grooms and non-citizens [17]. Although no record concerning the brides' ethnic, economic and educational backgrounds has been released, this population has been attributed certain collective and stereotypical characteristics: vulnerable, poor women from developing countries, who use marriage as merely a tool to remain in Singapore, hoping to improve the living standards of their own or of natal families back in their home countries (*AWARE report*, 2006: iv).

For years, *foreign brides* have been in the centre of media coverage and social debates surrounding transnational marriage whilst foreign spouses of other transnational marriage unions such as *foreign grooms* and foreign wives from developed countries living in Singapore as dependants are mostly left behind. According to Ministry of Manpower (MOM)

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[17] See *More Foreign Brides Suffering in Silence*. By Genevieve Jiang. The New Paper, 13 March 2009, page 12-13.

spokesman, there have been at least 200 Bangladeshi ex-work permit holders who married Singaporean women and eventually settled in Singapore[18]. However, no further details have been covered in this exceptional piece. This probably has referred to the state's family planning where man is still presumed to be head of the household (Tan, 2008). Similarly, "western" wives who follow their husbands to Singapore as dependants, which according to an ongoing AWARE research, is an increasing group, can rarely be seen in local media. The underlying assumption could be that "western" wives, if not productively contribute to Singapore, do not consume the local welfare resources thanks to their or their husbands' economic capacities. In a sense, discourse on dependency in marital relationship is both gendered and ethnicized. So is it on citizenship of *foreign brides*.

The aim of this study therefore will be to continue the academic exploration of gendered and ethnicized citizenship in cross-Asia marriage migration, with a case study of Singapore as the host country and a perspective in media representation. The major concern of this study will be: How has gendered and ethnicized[19] citizenship among marriage migrants in Singapore been produced and reproduced through local (Singaporean) knowledge (represented in the media) about gender, family, reproduction, labor and the nation? The concept of "media" in this study is referred to in a broad sense, including print press, images and internet resources etc..

Analysis of empirical materials will be organized according to themes (reproduction, labor, the nation, etc.) instead of types of the media, and aims to answer the following questions:

(1) How are narratives of female marriage migrants' life trajectories (re)narrated by local media?

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[18] See *Looking for Love Far from Home*. By Nur Dianah Suhaimi, The Sunday Times 15 February 2009.

[19] While the term "ethnicity" originally refers to people of the same race and share a distinctive culture, "ethnicity" and its derivation in this thesis will follow the modern usage of the term, which designates to subordinate groups such as immigrants or colonized subjects who stand in opposition to the "nation" and have become subjects in this foreign state through migration or conquest. (*Oxford English Dictionary* Second edition 1989, online version. Item "ethnic, *a*. and *n*.") Singapore is a multi-ethnic sate where four ethnic groups: Chinese, Indian, Malaysian, and Other, are officially recognized. New immigrants and residents who came in recently along with globalization are however different from the four original ethnic groups in terms of cultural, economical and class backgrounds. For instance, "foreign brides" who come from China to Singapore are differentiated from ethnic Chinese in Singapore in every way. It is therefore reasonable to define these marriage migrants of China origin as a distinctive ethnic category in this study. Meanwhile, "ethnicized" is considered a better term than "racist" or "racialized" where rights and identity of "foreign brides'" are discussed.

(2) How have female marriage migrants been represented in Singaporean media in relation to reproduction, labor and the nation-building? And,

(3) How is CITIZENSHIP centralized in these representations?

4 Previous Research

The rapid increase in international marriage across several countries within Asia in recent decades has brought cross-border marriage migration into vigorous scholarly attention and debates. Earlier studies focused on the political economy of gender and global division of labour (Wijers & Lin, 1997; Piper, 1999, 2002, 2004), as well as the feminization of migration (Piper, 2003, 2008; Yamanaka & Piper, 2005). Through these academic studies, marriage migration has been understood within the framework of globalized economic systems and local marriage markets in both sending and receiving societies. The problem with most contemporary researches on international marriages lies in that portray of the women remains one-dimensional. As pointed out by Piper & Roces (2003), "brides" are forever labeled "brides" and never become "women". Even less do they become laborers, or active agents such as political actors, or cultural mediators. Only recently, academic attention on marriage migration has shifted to questions of gendered and ethnicized citizenship among marriage migrants, which approaches marriage migration issues from a historical perspective of nation-building in host countries (Toyota, 2008) and the gendered identities of females in marriage and migration.

Many scholars begin to research on experiences and patterns of Asian women in migration as an example of increasing diversification of women migrants' experiences and the situations leading to, and arising out of, marriage. Willis & Yeoh (2003) have introduced the normative principles of marriage as an institution, reproduction and family expressed by the law as Singapore's collective values. These values and perceptions have been keystones to its regulations on citizenship issues where marriage migrants are involved. Constable (2005) has edited a volume of researches on issues involved in cross-border hypergamy/ "marrying up" to South Korea, Japan, and the United States (Freeman, 2005; Abelmann & Kim, 2005; Suzuki, 2005; Thai, 2005), and gendered mobility within and beyond China (Oxfeld, 2005; Chao, 2005; Schein, 2005). Her volume sheds light on issues of maternal citizenship

(Abelmann & Kim, 2005) and a new body of highly educated female marriage migrants whose decisions on marrying abroad go beyond a solution to poverty, but rather, relate to desires for mobility, opportunity and more (Constable, 2005; Thai, 2005). These studies on the new migrant populations and their mobility well illustrate that migrant women's agency can be, and is worth to be, approached from a wide range of perspectives, as suggested by other scholars such as Nicola Piper, Mina Roces, Tomoko Nakamatsu, etc., who have paid special attention to the Asian experiences.

Piper & Roces (2003:9) suggest a different axe, rather than viewing women as "victims" of sociolegal and economic process, of analyzing Asian women's experiences in international migration or transnational marriages, to explore the potential for women as "subjects" or "agents", that is, as "a social force capable of acting in their own interest".

Long (1992) has well summarized the various levels and extents of agency: "[t]he notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist, social actors are 'knowledgeable' and 'capable'" (in Moser and Clark 2001:4; in Piper and Roces, 2003:9). This definition of agency has allowed the study on a disadvantaged group such as female marriage migrants to be performed in a wide range of social spaces and to start from the women's world views and values.

The notion of the woman as "agent" suggests interpretation of the woman's role in her host country as potential contributor not only to the economy but also to the social and cultural life (ibid.). Roces (2003)'s research on Filipino women married to Australian men in Mount Isa, Rockhampton, and Yeppoon indicates the diversity of the women's roles as workers, citizens and cultural mediators, while at the same time, as mothers. Their roles as citizens and mediators are performed through active engagement in voluntary or civic work for charity or for social and cultural activities (ibid.).

"Community engagement" has been suggested by Piper & Roces (2003) as an important form for migrants of contributing to their host societies, and as an important aspect in the discussion revolving around citizenship. This aspect has however not been explored sufficiently enough, either in scholarly discussion or in social debates, whilst more attention has been paid to more rights- and obligations-related aspects of socialization. As in Singapore, "community engagement" is never the subject of media representation on female migrants.

Piper & Roces (2003) also suggest that in many instances the line between "victim" and "agent" is blurred. In cases where the women themselves are proud of being the breadwinners to their natal families by marrying abroad, they can not be labeled as victims. Yet, at the same time, the woman's active decision to migrate can also subject her to different types of victimization, for instance, to the husband's "slave mentality" (McKay, 2003), to racial discrimination (Roces, 2003; Nakamatsu, 2003), or to the host country's immigration policies (Nakamatsu, 2003).

Nakamatsu's study on "foreign wives" in Japan also lays emphasis on "the complexities and ambivalences that indicate women's decisions that seem to both challenge and endorse patriarchal relationships" (Nakamatsu, 2003:187f). As well illustrated in his study of six Filipino women, the women's autonomy reflects ambivalence in that these women, on the one hand, challenged the patriarchal family institution in their societies over them, and on the other, were still mentally subordinated to the patriarchy describing how they were waiting to be "chosen" as brides by foreign men (ibid.).

Despite of a vast volume of researches on Asian women's diverse experiences in a changing context of Asia, few studies has been conducted in relation to the mediated contexts. Constable (2003)'s ethnographic studies on globalized romance via an imagined virtual community is one of those attentions given to marriage and migration in the era of New Media. Representations on migrant women's issues in mainstream media, where knowledge concerning gender, migration, citizenship and the like is fed to the audience via mass production and reproduction, is however rarely seen in scholarly concerns. This study, therefore, targets at mainly mainstream media's role in local knowledge production and distribution about cross-Asia marriage migration and its subjects – the so-called *foreign brides* in Singapore, which is a popular locale.

5 Theoretical Framework

The following chapters will introduce a theoretical framework that consists of theories concerning "postcolonial" feminism, gender and citizenship, and the application of Galician's media literacy theory on critical media studies. These theories that usually overlap one

another will guide the later on narrative analysis and bring out analysis and critiques on underlying discourses in media representations on *foreign brides*.

5.1 The "Postcolonial" Women

The term "postcolonial" is one subjected to ongoing debates. It has been fiercely contested in that the closure of an age of colonialism does not necessarily in every respect proclaim the demise of colonialism. Loomba (1998:7) points out that "a country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent), and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time", as the contemporary imbalances between "first" and "third" world nations exemplify. The postcolonial subject cannot be treated in isolation, as an undiluted subject. The colonial subject, according to Gandhi (1998), submits to the 'compelling seductions of the colonial power' and finds itself in a process of identity negotiation, albeit one that is fraught with the angst to fulfill the legacy of the colonial rule. This postcolonial limbo, she describes, is where identity is transient. New meanings are created, but without erasing traces of other meanings. This limbo, the site between arrival and departure, independence and dependence can be seen in Singapore, which sees economic, cultural and political influence from the western world, whilst still emphasizing the importance of the Asian family 'unit' as the building block of the society.

Complicated as it is, the concept of "postcolonial" has been suggested to be understand "not just as coming literally after colonialism, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba, 1998:7). "Postcolonial" subjects in this broad sense include people of pre-colony origins who continue to be affected by (neo-) colonialism, in whatever cultures they currently reside. The understanding of "postcolonial" women will, thereby, have to look into both the inheritance of colonialist views on women, their bodies and identities, and the contemporary variations of or newly generated elements in these views, in particular, in contexts of a new global order.

Colonization emphasized on the 'heterogeneity' of the colonized subject and constructed it as a cultural and ideological opposite. Oyewumi (2006) argues that colonial customs stemmed from a world view that assumed the superiority of the masculine over the feminine. She posits that the women in the third world suffered a 'double colonization'. They suffer one from the colonial domination, and another, by the indigenous traditions imposed on them by the men of their own country. This section will focus on the postcolonial state's control in women.

Women in postcolonial nations are seen to constitute a coherent group with interests and desires that transcend class, ethnicity, race; a certain universality and cross cultural validity imposed on their being. As postcolonial revival moves from reform movements to a cultural come-back, modernity is defined not in terms of technology, but in its implications on women (Young, 2003:157). Women in most cases embody the cultural identity of the nation; they are the keeper of its values, the nurturers of its culture, and the makers of its identity. Young (2003), in fact, goes as far as saying that while from the masculine perspective, independence offered the ushering in of the condition of post-coloniality, for the woman, the condition was just a shift to being ruled by elites who inherited the system of legislation, governance and judiciary. In a contemporary context of regional and global migration, the issue of "postcolonial" women becomes even more complicated when it comes to a nation-state like Singapore, which is a previous colony and nowadays economically and culturally "developed".

As exemplified in the Singaporean nationalism, a crucial notion of "difference from within" has been covered up by the propaganda of Singapore as a nation that was and continues to be built on *adversity*. The category "women" is in itself homogeneous and tends to marginalize certain groups of women categorized based on other social divisions such as class, 'race', disability, age and nationality. These divisions, especially in the contemporary context of globalization and migration, have further excluded certain women from citizenship whilst women as a collective were historically excluded. At the same time excluded, or racialized, are the women's bodies and their biological and cultural reproduction which is usually considered as their solely form of serving the nation-building.

Anthias and Yuval Davis (1992) have put forward the notion of "reproduction of the nation" to articulate the crucial role played by women in the building of a nation and nation-state, and to furthermore reveal differences within "women" as a constructed collective category. "Reproduction of the nation" refers to both biological reproduction of new generations and cultural reproduction which is meant to pass on the constructed *essence* of the national culture (ibid.). Differences among women are manifested, and an internal hierarchy is produced, where, for instance, biological reproduction may be encouraged or discouraged for different groups of women according to the "national interest" (Lister, 2003), and when effectiveness of the transmission of culture in early childhood is assumed to be affected by the

mothers' cultural backgrounds. For instance, whether and how well immigrant women can be "mothers of the nation" (Collins, 1999) becomes a crucial question in contemporary nationalisms.

Women are constructed as "mothers of the nation" not only through birth-giving but more importantly through their role in the young generation's socialization and education, be it "fostering relations across generations, cooking and nurturing, playing and educating" and equally importantly, training to be a citizen (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999:14). In other words, women's positioning and identities in the public, both the social and the political, are much determined by their bodies and reproductive abilities, being their performance in the private sphere. On the other hand, their socioeconomic positions are also considered to be determining how much their reproduction is desirable, or not. Who give birth to and cultivate the nation's future generation hence bears crucial importance. It is in this context that women's role in both biological and cultural reproduction is subjected to a hierarchy established on grounds of the women' class, ethnicity, religion, cultural and political identity. At the bottom are undesirable women, often as well as their children, for instance, uneducated[20] and disable women, and migrant women who are culturally outsiders and/or potential traitors of the nation due to their origins or their lack of sharing the nation's *adversity[21]*.

The conceptualization of "proper" "mothers of the nation" in postcolonial nationalisms is a process of constructing the *Other*. Particularly in the construction of national identity in a post-colony, the history of compelling colonization and colonial power does not imply that its identity can be constructed without relating to what is beyond itself. The function of the ideological *Other* is inevitable. As exemplified earlier in the construction of a Singapore nation, an imagined national community of adversity[22] has been constructed to conflate the

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[20] In Singapore, population planning policies were modified in 1983 to reshape demographic configuration. Better-educated women were encouraged to have more children while the less-educated discouraged from having too many.

[21] Interestingly, women who marry foreigners are sometimes considered undesirable and even traitors to the nation. In Singapore, children with foreign fathers were not granted Singapore citizenship until 2004. Paternal citizenship was conceived of alongside with male-headed household management where women, even those as bread-winners, and children were registered as dependants of the men. It has, however, also implied an orthodox transmission of national culture which is highly patriarchal.

[22] The "community of adversity" is termed by Aihwa Ong in her anthropologist study of the politically conflated Asian American community in California, the US. In her observation, the political construction of such an

ethnically and culturally diversified populations who reside within its geopolitical boundaries. This shared adversity constructed is both historical and contemporary. Significant in its construction of national identity, or simultaneously in the construction of the *Other*, are two seemingly contesting ideologies: the legacies of colonialism (as exemplified by its view of "third-world" women) and the distinctive "Asian values" promoted to maintain existing power relations, i.e. gender relations, in familial and other social spaces. Migrant women, usually from the "third" world, being constructed as undesirable or less desirable mothers, serves as an instance of how certain group of women in a postcolonial nation suffer a doubling subordination to both the long existing patriarchy and a nationalist discrimination towards their identities, bodies and reproduction.

5.2 Gender and Citizenship

While many, especially European, literature on migration claims that national citizenship has lost its importance in the age of globalization and proposes instead "global citizenship" (Turner, 1990; Roche, 1992; Dahrendorf, 1994, 1996; Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999; Delanty, 2000; Soysal, 2001; Lister, 1997, 2003) or "transnational citizenship" (Bauböck, 1994; Lister, 1997, 2003), female migrants' experiences in East and Southeast Asian receiving states show evidence for the centrality of (national) citizenship. As Piper & Roces (2003:4) point out, "being a non-citizen, either married to a citizen or not, puts any migrant in a vulnerable relation to the state". This unequal relationship is ascribed to immigration/citizenship policies in the receiving state where immigration matters are treated as "a system of laws, regulations, and practices by which it is decided who can live within a territory under what kind of conditions, as documented or undocumented" (Benedict Anderson, 2000; in Piper & Roces, 2003:15). In most receiving countries, a foreign spouse is required to be married and reside in the host country for some years before becoming eligible to apply for citizenship. In Japan, for instance, the foreign spouse of a national has to reside in Japan for at least five years before applying for naturalized citizenship, and three years before applying for permanent residency. The woman is not registered as part of the Japanese household until she becomes naturalized citizen, "a lengthy and difficult process that hardly

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immigrant community on the ground of shared adversity is an appropriation of "the American historical tradition that ethnics can gain equal citizenship only through suffering" (Ong, 2003:254-73). This historical ideology of citizenship based on suffering and crisis can be also seen in another typical multi-ethnic nation-state, Singapore. What makes it unique in the Singapore case, is that social stratification is more based on class identity, which in particular marks new immigrants from early immigrants who have become nowadays "native" Singaporeans. Discrimination against ethnics is also a mirror of economic and political power relations among Asian states.

ever happens" (Nakamatsu, 2003:195). In Singapore, spouse of a citizen has to be married and reside in Singapore as a permanent resident for a minimum of two years in order to be eligible for citizenship application, whilst application for permanent residency usually takes years. In addition, a foreign spouse would not be able to work legally in the country until s/he obtains permanent residency. Through marriage to a male national, "migrant women aim at achieving secure residential permits before embarking on the still bumpy road to gain full citizenship rights" (Piper & Roces, 2003:16).

Who is a citizen?

Mainstream conceptualization of citizenship lays emphasis on rights and obligations. The rights, deriving from the liberal political tradition since the seventeenth century, refer to civil, political, and recently, social rights for the individuals that should be guaranteed by the state (Lister, 1997, 2003). Citizenship as obligation, which is inherited from the more ancient civic republican tradition, refers to political participation as a civic duty, and contemporarily, to work obligations of the individuals (Roche, 1992; in Lister, 2003).

A more contested yet widely employed definition of citizenship is provided by the British sociologist T. H. Marshall (1950:28-9; in Lister, 2003:14), who has added membership of the nation-state as a community, and equality, as two new elements into the definition: "Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed". His definition is but criticized on issues around membership that a shared culture or "civilization" was taken for granted as associated with the citizen identity (Turner, 1997; in Lister, 1997, 2003), which becomes problematic especially in the contemporary contexts of international migration. The usually homogeneous culture of the national community constructed in processes of nation-building will be actually the focal point of critiques in the later on discourse analysis. Discussion surrounding citizenship in this study will definitely take into consideration these critiques, in particular, of the newly added elements, while employing Marshall's definition as the conceptual basis.

Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1999) further develop the concept by bringing it beyond formal attributes of voting or passport carrying, rather, articulating the concept in a more encompassing set of relations and across different layers of boundaries which can be local, ethnic, national or global, as exemplified by their articulation of power and migration. Women's citizenships that are affected by their different positionings suggested by Werbner

and Yuval Davis (1999) also provide crucial perspective to this study. Differences among women from within that lead to both discourses and practice of inclusion/exclusion will be an underlying theme of the later on discourse analysis.

The approach to understand citizenship in terms of membership and identity underlines the participatory dimension of membership in a community's social governing (Petersson, 1989:16; in Siim, 1991; in Lister, 2003). Being a citizen, therefore, is on the one hand, a status that prioritizes the rights; on the other, is a practice that serves for the interests of the community, be it the wider society (Oldfield, 1990; Heater, 1990; in Lister, 2003). Feminist scholars on citizenship have pushed this perception of citizenship as both a status and a practice in especially discussion of women's citizenship, particularly in the welfare-state regime.

Welfare-states rely on the contribution of their citizens to the welfare and in return entitle certain rights to citizens according to their contribution. Citizenship rights hence are accorded basing on who contributes to, and how much s/he contributes to, the state's welfare system. Such a regime has primary relationship with citizens' work obligations, and has invented a hierarchy of work by which work in the public, specifically, wage-earning work or military service is usually privileged over work in the private sphere such as caring and mothering. Feminist scholars suggest that motherhood has both historically and contemporarily shaped women's relationship to citizenship. So have women's other responsibilities that have long framed them in the realm of the private. Although women should not "be subsumed under the one interest and identity of motherhood" (Lister, 2003:175), motherhood, as well as their caring roles in the households, looms large in many women's life-courses (ibid.).

Classic model of citizenship justifies that social rights derive from social functions. There hence brings up the question as to "what forms of activity would properly be considered citizenship functions" (Pederson; in Lister, 2003). Whilst soldiering and waged-working are traditionally legitimate citizenship functions, housekeeping, caring and mothering have generally been marginalized when it comes to citizenship entitlement. The gendering of citizenship in even the more progressive Scandinavian welfare states has its theoretical backup from debates around the public and the private, more specifically, around the privilege entitled to wage-work over other forms of work, especially, care-work (Leira, 1992; in Lister, 2003). Such privilege would be, and has been, translated into the privilege of citizen the-wage-earner over citizen the-career unless the importance of care to society is recognized in

the concept of citizenship (ibid.). Evidence from today's globalized economy has suggested the indispensability of care work. The international caring chain has on the one hand transported migrant domestic workers or careers from, for instance, Southeast Asia and West India, to more developed countries/regions, i.e. the US; on the other, care work within these sending societies has also been transformed internally (Colen, 1995; in Ginsburg & Rapp ed., 1995). The question as to care work is "to be done by whom and on what terms" (Lewis, 2000:61; Daly & Lewis, 2000; in Lister, 2003) has profound meaning to women's social citizenship rights.

Lisa D. Brush (1996) criticizes the gendered nature of the benefits of citizenship, which places "women on par with male soldiers and workers" (Brush, 1996:446, 430-1,453-4; in Lister, 2003), and consequently devalues mother work in either the market or social policy (Lister, 2003:175-6). The call that derives from such criticism for translating women's private responsibilities, i.e. mothering and caring, into public citizenship claims has been central in twentieth-century debates (ibid.). Lister (2003:176) however warns that the call for recognition to care work bears a risk in locking women further into a private caring role and as a result excluding them from the public sphere of the economy and the politics. Linking recognition towards care-giving work and women's citizenship is itself to some extent, though inevitably, enshrine care-giving as women's work. This is especially the case when it comes to Singapore where male foreign "low-skilled" workers, let alone the issue of their citizenship rights, are much less frequently represented in public concerns while specific immigration policies have been constituted towards *female* domestic workers as low-skilled labor immigrants – an act that assumes "low-skilled" domestic labor as female immigrants' work. Lister (2003:177-8) has well presented such a dilemma: when wanting to validate and support the caring work, for which women still take primary responsibility in the private sphere, as equal to paid work in representing a contribution to citizenship, articulation of the various concerns of women as mothers and careers, roles that usually reduce their participation in the public, will be weakened (Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Lister, 2003).

Discussion around citizenship of *foreign brides* in Singapore will focus on their social citizenship, such as work, healthcare, welfare, instead of their political citizenship, which reflects more on i.e. the right to vote, political representation in civil institutions. Lister (2003:194) stresses "the significance of social citizenship not only as the locus of important rights but also as an arena for women's citizenship as practice". Especially in welfare states, "the social citizenship rights of married and cohabiting women are mediated by their male

partners" (Lister, 2003:171), means-tested benefits, pensions, and tax credits provided to the couple as a unit rather than the individual (ibid.). When it comes to female marriage migrants, whose citizenship will be discussed here, their dependency on the men, particularly on their road to obtaining citizenships, tends to be more significant. The very prerequisite for the woman to either claim for citizenship or be entitled partially citizenship rights is the validity of her marital relationship to a male citizen. In other words, whether or not the woman will be recognized as a social citizen eventually relies on the recognition of their relationship and support from her citizen-husband, prior to that from any other agencies or institutions in the hosting state.

The hesitance to approach issues of political citizenship in this study lies in the complexity of *foreign brides*' status in the host society. For instance, some of the women have been granted citizen identities while others may remain permanent residents, or even Long-term Social Visit Pass holders[23]. Discussion on political citizenship is difficult to be applied on this group also due to the absence of relevant representations of this aspect in media coverage. Even for those who attained Singapore passports, their representation in political obligations and rights is hardly visible in public concerns, and therefore not valid for media analysis conducted here.

5.3 Migrant Women and Exclusionary Citizenship

Following Marshall, to understand citizenship from a "membership" perspective will lead discussion to simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion in the building of a nation-state. As in the construction of the Singapore nation, the making of the *Other* inherently in the concept is as important as defining who are included through citizenship rights and obligations. More contemporary literature on citizenship tends to portray citizenship as "a force for exclusion" (Lister, 2003:43). Recent migration flows have blurred the boundaries drawn and regulated by nation-states within which citizenship, as well as inclusion and exclusion, has been negotiated. The exclusionary characteristic of the concept becomes much more visible and essential in face of an increasing trend of migrant populations moving, or attempting to move between nation-states, or living within the borders as non-citizen residents (Lister, 2003).

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[23] In cases where the women have not yet obtained citizen identities, discussion and analysis will be more around discourses towards their potentials in attaining Singapore citizenship, as well as what would happen once the citizenship is granted.

While the mainstream migration literature tends to assume migration as male-dominated experiences, more recent literature has acknowledged that "women play an increasing role in all regions and all types of migration" and that "the migrant is a gender subject" (Castles & Miller, 1998:9, 34; in Lister, 2003:45). Nevertheless, the construction of women as dependants, either of their accompanying male migrants or of their citizen partners in the destinations, and non- or low recognition to the contribution they make to their countries of destination and origin still prevail the majority of literature, nationality laws and discourses (Kofman *et al.*, 2000; Gibson *et al.*, 2001; Lister, 1997, 2003). Particularly in the context of social function-oriented citizenship discourses, migrant women's disadvantaged economic position usually results in their limited access to, if not entirely excluded from, certain social rights, as the experience of *foreign brides* in Singapore exemplifies. Following the citizenship ideology that devalues unpaid labor within households and mothering[24] as major contribution to the nation-state, these women are portrayed, either explicitly or implicitly, as burdens or intruders rather than contributors to the nation-state, especially in face of economic difficulties.

Castles and Davidson (2000) suggest that both the legal and sociological level of exclusion and inclusion should be understood as a continuum operation rather than an absolute dichotomy (Lister, 1997, 2003). Lister (2003:44) has well elaborated this continuum approach:

> "Exclusion and Inclusion operate at both a legal and sociological level (Moore, 1993) through 'formal' and 'substantive' modes of citizenship (Hammer, 1990). The former denotes the legal status of membership of a state, as symbolised by possession of a passport, the latter the possession of rights and duties within a state. Certain rights and duties can apply to those who are not formal citizens. At the same time substantive citizenship, in the sense of 'full and equal rights and opportunities' does not automatically follow from formal, as the experience of New Commonwealth immigrants to Britain exemplifies. Racial discrimination, harassment and violence are themselves exclusionary processes that undermine the substantive citizenship of Black citizens and residents." (two references added by the author.)

In other words, different groups within the nation-state enjoy different degrees of substantive citizenship, which consequently forges a hierarchy between different groups of citizens and non-citizen residents. Although Yeatman (1994:80; in Lister, 2003:43) defines partial citizens as "those who are excluded from within", and non-citizens as "those who are excluded from without", to understand exclusion and inclusion from the perspective of

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[24] *Foreign brides*' contribution to the Singapore nation-state through reproduction is a complex locale where foreign women are racially differentiated from the women-citizens. So are their mothering and child-rearing. This is an issue of significance especially under the context of the nation-state's deep worries in population decline and its propaganda of "Baby Bonus".

substantive citizenship, be it partial rights and duties concerning citizenship that are designated to various subordinated groups residing within the nation-state, seems more suitable in the context of a highly immigrant society. The subjects of citizenship discussed in this study are *foreign brides* who are either granted Singapore passports[25] or non-citizen residents, including permanent residents and Long Term Social Visit Pass holders. They all are entitled partial citizenship rights and at the same time subjected to certain duties, at their current statuses. Narratives and discourses concerning their citizenship will be therefore analyzed in more a sociological, rather than legal, perspective.

Lister (2003:170f) has pointed out that welfare states as "deeply gendered institutions", "in their various forms they can simultaneously strengthen women's citizenship and reinforce unequal gender relations". For instance, the relationship between motherhood (and care work) and women's citizenship becomes even more sensitive and complicated when it involves the women who migrate to an economically more affluent country for better lives, through either work or marriage. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, female migrant workers in "low-skilled" or "unskilled" labor, i.e. domestic workers, are restricted from mothering during their stays in Singapore. These women, who come to fill the most undesirable posts and take care of children, the elderly and families of Singapore not only have little possibility in attaining Singapore citizenship but are kept from the right of mothering. As to female marriage migrants, their reproductive rights are not restricted; yet their claims for Singapore citizenship have been obstructed by the doubt that how much they can potentially contribute to the state through reproduction and unpaid domestic labor. Lister (1997, 2003) exemplifies the case of Black immigrant women in postwar Britain, who were recruited to fill the least desirable posts in the health service, yet not constructed as social citizens with health needs of their own. Similar situation continues to occur on female immigrants, either for work or marriage, in a wide range of receiving states under the more recent globalization and migration. The sociological analysis of *foreign brides*' citizenship intended by this study will therefore be conducted in an intersected framework of gendered labor division and contribution-oriented citizenship conception.

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[25] These *brides* can only be considered partial citizens according to Yeatman's definition in that the accessibility of citizenship rights is limited to them, mainly because of their economic position.

5.4 Application of Media Literacy Theory to Gendered Media Representation

Media Literacy scholars have characterized the mass media as "powerful socialization agents that rely on simplification, distortions of reality, and dramatic symbols and stereotypes to communicate messages from which consumers learn and model many behaviors – both healthy and unhealthy" (Bandura, 1969, 1971, 1977, 1986; Galician, 1986, 2004, 2007; Galician & Vestre, 1987; Gerbner *et al.*, 1986; McLuhan, 1964; McQuail, 2000; Potter, 2001; Silverblatt, 1995; Sparks, 2002). Such attribute of the mass media can be found in the entire media spectrum (print press, popular music recordings, movies, television, and the Internet) and all three major media functions (entertainment, advertising, and news/information) (Galician, 2007). Galician (2007:2f) further criticizes that the socialization process that the mass media impose on the audience happens without the latter's knowledge and consent, and that unrealistic portrayals and stereotypes are usually normalized and adopted by the public as models. Among various normalized portrayals are mediated images of women and men, and that of sex, love and romance (Carstarphen, 2007; Galician, 2003, 2007; Mazzarella, 2007; McClanahan, 2007; Slagle, 2007) where abundant aspects of gender relations between the two sexes are implied. The social conception of knowledge also suggests an inheriting pattern of knowledge (Karl Mannheim, 1936; in Berger, 2000) which means that education, the media, our families, and other parts of society play a major role in people's thinking and giving individuals the ideas they hold.

To reveal aspects of the reality concealed in the media, it is crucial to have the vision of a media literate. As Elizabeth Thoman and Mary-Lou Galician (in Galician, 2007:7) advocate, "the heart of media literacy is informed inquiry". Inquiry into what is being told is to raise questions with critical thinking skills rather than to memorize facts or statistics about the media (Galician, 2007:7f). Media Literacy advocates to view educating the audience towards being a media literate an empowering process, "an alternative to censoring, boycotting, or blaming 'the media'" (ibid.), without denying many genuine benefits from media consumption. Galician (2007) envisions an enlightened audience body that is immunized of false messages. American Media Literacy Movement pioneer Elizabeth Thoman (2003; in

Galician, 2007:8) suggests a critical thinking framework centered on five key questions to ask while reading[26] the media:

1. Who created this message?

2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

3. How might different people understand this message differently from me?

4. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in – or omitted from – this message?

5. Why is this message being sent? (Thoman, 2003:25-7)

The above five layers of questioning in media reading actually present not only media literacy skills (Thoman, 2003; Galician, 2007) but initiatives of narrative studies (as by question 1 and 2) and critical discourse analysis (as by question 3, 4 and 5) of the media. Critical thinking of the media texts from these five aspects will therefore be applied as theoretical guidelines to navigate the later on narrative and discourse analysis in this study. Galician (2004:106-7, 2007: 8-9) otherwise provides a more technical *Seven-Step Dis-illusioning* [27] *Directions* model for media criticism. The seven steps include detection, description, deconstruction, diagnosis, design, debriefing, and dissemination. She critiques that most media criticism goes only as far as Step 4 (Diagnosis) and advocates incorporating more dynamic elements of the audience's reflection and action (Galician, 2007:9), which is crucial to researches where the audience are presented as subjects. This study however has to limit its reach to only the first four steps, which is exactly what criticized by Galician, in that what it mainly concerns is to examine narrative models and discourses embedded in media representations of the issue, rather than the audience's reflection and responsive action.

One significant theoretical attempt of this study is to incorporate two critical thinking approaches – media literacy theory and critical feminist thinking of gender – to understand "gender" in mediated contexts. Although the two thinking approaches represent different domains – the former is more a theoretical body of critical thinking techniques whilst the latter a body of knowledge, corporation between the two is expected to generate not only analysis but criticism – both stressed by Galician (2007) in the concept of *dis-illusion* - on the specific issue of gendered and ethnicized citizenship, aimed by this study. The rest of this

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[26] "reading" is used here in its broad sense, which can mean reading, watching or listening to- any means of consuming media products.

[27] Galician (2007) considers *dis-illusion* a richer synonym for analysis and criticism.

chapter will hence devote to introducing theory of gender and communication, and its alliance with Galician's media literacy theory.

Bonnie J. Dow (2006:264) introduces gender and communication in mediated contexts in *The Handbook of Gender and Communication* by stating that "all experiences of gendered are mediated in some way". Spurred by the rise of the second wave of feminism in 1960s' the United States, feminist studies of women and/in mass media started to recognize the power of mass media to define gender roles (Valdivia & Projansky, 2006:273-96). During the last five decades, scholarly endeavors in gender and media have evolved from a liberal feminist perspective that held inadequate or negative representation of women's lives a form of discrimination (Dow, 2006:265) to examining the topic from a more complex and critical perspective. The performative turn in studies of gender emphasizes that gender comes into being and takes on meaning through communicative practices in various contexts, including mediated context, and that gender is always contextual and in the process of construction, performance and reiteration (Dow, 2006:264; Consalvo, 2006). Mediatedly constructed gender is frequently analyzed and critiqued on its intersection with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality (Dow, 2006:264) and with focus on the symbolic qualities of gender representation, in both traditional and new media (Consalvo, 2006), and their relationship to ideology (Dow, 2006:266).

Theorization of gender and media has been operated in diverse directions by different academic schools. Early scholars of gender and media viewed the relationship between mass media and the audience in a more interactive ways, comparing to the way of media advocates looking at mass media. For instance, Tuchman (1978) concludes that the mass media on the one hand reflect dominant values and attitudes in the society; on the other, act as agents of socialization (Tuchman, Daniels & Benét, 1978; in Dow & Wood, 2006). Gender norms and stereotyped gender relations are therefore not originally generated by mass media; rather, they are reinforced and passed on from generation to generation through production, dissemination and consumption of mass media (ibid.). Similarly, Dow (2006:268) summarizes a shared theoretical concern on media's hegemonic function. Messages and technologies are considered hegemonic to various degrees, and they thereby create and/or sustain "oppressive gender ideologies and gendered subjectivities for their audiences that ultimately serve racist, classist, heterosexist, and patriarchal interests" (ibid.). Another group of theorists that she concludes hold more optimistic arguments that media texts contain progressive meaning

possibilities that active media users can use to serve their own interests, be it to resist dominant norms and to further their own marginalized subjectivities (ibid.).

With no intention to negate media's progressive potentials and active media usage by the audience, theorizing of gender and media in this study will primarily follow critical theories of media's hegemony as well as of its functioning on reinforcing oppressive gender ideologies and subjectivities. The alliance between such theorizing and the critical examination of media texts advocated by media literacy theory is expected to lead to more profound understanding of gender and/in media representation by exploring underlying initiatives, norms and values.

6 Methodological Description

Media representation study in Singapore as a host society will be around knowledge reproduction on themes such as reproduction, family, labor, women and the nation. Flick's concept of triangulation leads understanding of the most fruitful approach to this topic. Triangulation comprises the use of, for instance, different methods in the process of understanding a phenomenon. In comparison with individual methods, triangulation has gained acceptance due to its ability to enrich and complete the knowledge about a topic and to transgress the potential of the individual methods. Flick (2009: 445) sees triangulation as an alternative to validation that "increases scope, depth, and consistency in methodological proceedings". As one approach to triangulation, the study of media representation here will suggest a combination of narrative studies and discourse analysis. Typically stereotyped narrative of a *foreign bride*'s life in Singapore will be presented basing on narrations by local media. The purpose of presenting narrative as such is to examine the way(s) of telling and retelling of *foreign brides*' life stories in Singapore, so as to provide a grand picture of how the women's life is produced and reproduced by the media and then consumed by the public. Discourse analysis, specifically, critical discourse analysis (CDA) that is employed in a wide range of feminist works, will be later on employed to interpret relevant texts excepted from various empirical materials in order to reveal meanings and ideologies behind these narrations. In addition, analytical techniques from semiotic studies may be used to interpret images but will not be presented here as one single methodological section.

6.1 Narrative & Narrated Narration

José Angel García Landa (2008) describes narrative as a rearrangement of existing narratives in order to articulate a new one, which is "more complex or more to the point in a given interactional exchange" (Pier & García Landa, 2008:17; García Landa, 2008:419f). He further elaborates that retold by a different narrator, the same events can generate a new significance or perspective, and sometimes the initial act of telling - the way some event were told by someone - is itself narrated and "a peculiar doubling is produced" (García Landa, 2008:419f). This doubling ("narrated narratings/narrations[28]") is frequently produced in the media narrations of *foreign brides'* stories, while their stories are usually retold by the authors/journalists[29]. In such a way that the story is to be represented, certain discourses would emerge from the new narrative and follow the perspective of the new narrator's. To study how the narrative concerning *foreign bride* is produced in the local media will thereby unfold the process of meaning-adding to the original events, and then discourses that underscore the narrative and the narrating.

It is necessary to mention that the study of narrative here will not identify from texts narratives according to its strict definition. Gerald Prince (2008: 2008:19f) defines narrative as an object which "is taken to be the logically consistent representation of at least two asynchronous events that do not presuppose or imply each other". And "the formal and contextual qualities distinguishing narrative from non-narrative, or marking the degree of 'narrativeness' in a discourse" are called narrativity (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2005:548; in Pier & García Landa, 2008:8-9). Some narrative scholars also understand the value of a narrative as the "reportability" or "tellability" of a given event and social contexts in which the "reportable" event happened, and how it happened (Fludernik, 1996; Norrick, 2005; Labov, 2007, in Bamberg, ed., 2007). Prince (2008:22f) however points out later that the degree of narrativity of a text is beyond any strict definitional considerations, meaning that a text with certain textual components that might not satisfy this or that definitional condition required for any narrative, can be more narrative than narratives. In this study of *foreign brides'* life

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[28] A "narrating" is the act of producing a "narrative", while "narration" can act as a synonym of both "narrating" and "narrative" as defined in the *Routledge Encyclopedia* (Herman/Jahn/Ryan, 2005:338-339; quoted in García Landa, 2008:439, Note 60).

[29] García Landa (2008) also argues that the initial telling itself can be considered an act of reformulation of the event and various contextual factors contribute to the representation. There is therefore no originality in the telling. "The experience we reshape is always already […] narrativized." (2008:444)

story/stories narrated by the media, more attention would be paid to the narrativity of a text, or more specifically, its narrative value in a certain context, instead of identifying whether or not it is a standard narrative. As suggested by Prince, context in which a given text is produced and which makes it worth producing has significant influence on the narrative value/narrativity (as distinct from the narrative identity) of the text (ibid.). The articulation of a *foreign bride*'s life story in the local media is itself with more contextual instead of textual value due to the attribute of media.

Besides the narrative value, of equal importance is the role of a narrator. Labov (2007) discusses a recursive pre-construction process of a narrative, conducted by the narrator. He follows Labov and Waletzky (1967)'s framework of narrative construction, which defines narrative as "a particular way of reporting past events, in which the order of a sequence of independent clauses is interpreted as the order of the events referred to" (Labov, 2007:27, in Bamberg, ed., 2007). Following this definition, not only the event that *happened* has to be reportable, the narrator will also locate other events that were prior in time to the reportable event, one after another, and stand in a causal relation to it (Labov, 2007, in Bamberg ed., 2007). This recursive process of construction is essential in a narration since it was in the hands of the narrator's that certain events are decided to be included in or excluded from the final narrative. The significance of the role of a narrator also functions in the way that s/he uses disnarrated elements, which explicitly refer to what did not take place but could have, to emphasize the quality of what did happen (Prince, 2008:23-4). The narrator can also state the point of the narrative more directly by giving commentary during his or her narrating (ibid.).

In addition, the influence of representational media on narrativity is also of significance. Prince (2008:25) points out the importance of the medium and circumstances of manifestation by exemplifying that "two different manuscripts of the same narrative may be at different stages of disintegration; or the radio transmission of a story may be more powerful in the attic than in the cellar; or a narrative painting may be more visible in the morning light than in the evening". In this term, narratives produced, reproduced and delivered by the media not only have their values and meanings dependent on the media as narrators but also on the media as forms of communicative mediums such as newspapers, pictures, Internet, etc..

Narrative analysis in this study will try to explore various narratives represented in the media about *foreign brides* in accordance with their narrativity, the function of the narrator (as individual narrators and as narrator media), and the "doubling" effects of these narratives.

6.2 Discourse Analysis

Taylor (2007) has suggested two social constructionist ways in which a discursive analysis can approach narrative, that is, to understand narrative as a discursive resource and as a construction. The former refers to an accumulation of ideas, images, associations and so on, or in other words, the wider social and cultural contexts from which the narrators' identities are derived. A narrative is given certain meanings, rather than others, and these meanings are taken up or resisted, as the narrators position themselves and are positioned by others (Taylor, 2007:113f). The latter, on the other hand, refers to that the narrator constructs continuity between events that occurred or occurs in the past, present and future, and at different locations, even when their own experiences did not obviously correspond to this continuity (ibid.).

The employment of discourse analysis as a method of empirical study of media representation of *foreign brides'* issues will follow a social constructionist understanding of the "reality". Discourse analysis has always been recognized and employed as a theoretical and methodological whole, instead of merely a method for data analysis. Jørgensen *et al.* (2002:1) proposes a preliminary definition of a discourse as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)". Their introduction to discourse analysis is one based on social constructionism which bears the starting point that the world, identities and social relations are not neutrally reflected through our ways of talking but, rather, being created and shaped, or even changed, by them (ibid.). This understanding of what constitutes the reality means that the study needs to be directed towards the constructions of *foreign bride* as an identity and furthermore as a *lifestyle* in public space and the ways in which these are created and maintained. The purpose of analyzing one or more discourses here is thereby to bring about a critical approach to any taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; in Jørgensen *et al.*, 2002), widely spread by the media and consumed by their audience, about a group of foreign women who marry to Singapore men and reside in the country.

To be more precise, discourse will be employed in accordance with the conceptualization by Potter (1996:105), namely as the "business of fact construction", a social practice through talks or various forms of texts that construct and circulate descriptions and accounts that further construct the world/reality (Potter, 1996:97-8). To study discourse is thus to study how knowledge can be produced through various social practices. When approaching the texts, in

this particular study mediated texts, discourse is viewed as in Wetherell and Potter's interpretative repertoires, namely as "broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images" (Wheterell & Potter, 1990; in Jørgensen *et al*., 2002:107-8). Texts will therefore be read by identifying how certain descriptions and accounts are put together and which are the results of this, or in other words, patterns in and across statements (Jørgensen *et al*., 2002:21). In accordance with what Jørgensen *et al*. (2002:104) suggest about discursive psychology, the aim is to identify how certain accounts are constructed as meaningful in discourse.

Among different approaches of the broader social constructionist discourse analysis, this study tends to follow but not limit to the theoretical and analytical patterns of critical discourse analysis (CDA). As texts investigated in this study are all mediated texts, be them newspaper articles as well as news photos, and webpage, the concept of intertextuality introduced by Fairclough's critical discourse analysis – that is, "how an individual text draws on elements and discourses of other texts" (Jørgensen *et al*., 2002:7) – has to be taken into account. As exemplified in mediated texts, the journalist might have quoted or rephrased different individual statements, from citizens, experts or authorities etc., and at the end put forward a completely new version of the reality by combining elements from all these different individual discourses. The way in which this new version of discourse is constituted and put forward is the so-called discursive practices described by Jørgensen *et al*. (2002) to have *ideological* effects on the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups. To investigate discourse practices in and across a text is therefore to look into social and power relations among various social institutions and/or individuals, that are partly discursively constituted, but, at the same time, have fundamental influence in the construction of certain discourses (Jørgensen *et al*., 2002:63). This approach of critical discourse analysis not only suggests that discourse is both constitutive and constituted but also that texts should be empirically analyzed within its social context. And "power" and "ideology" are often terms that accompany a critical discourse analysis.

When applying critical discourse analysis, the empirical study will refer, though not strictly, to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework which covers "(1) the linguistic features of the text (text), (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice), and (3) the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice)" (Fairclough, 1992b:73; in Jørgensen *et al*., 2002:66-8). Besides, complexity and

variability of the relationship between discursive practice and social structures across time will also be taken into account in the analysis.

Employing critical discourse analysis requires the study to be more methodologically self-reflective. Not only is the above-mentioned relationships between discourse and society, be it social and cultural structures, itself a factor securing power and hegemony (Fairclough, 1993:135; 1995:132f; in Jørgensen *et al*., 2002:63). The researcher's standpoint and his or her particular way of selecting and interpreting texts are also both constituted and constitutive, and possibly adding new elements to the existing discourses. Being aware of this risk is necessary in that critical discourse analysis is "critical" in the sense that it aims to reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal relations of power and "to contribute to social change along the lines of more equal power relations in communication processes and society in general" (Jørgensen *et al*., 2002:63-4).

7 Empirical Materials

Empirical materials from which the main analysis will be made consist of eighteen newspaper articles, along with two images published in newspapers that feature *foreign brides* (and their husbands), and homepage of one international matchmaking agency. The eighteen news reports covered include fourteen pieces on cases happened or issues raised related to *foreign brides* in Singapore, two pieces that focus not merely on *foreign brides* but women/mums in general, yet will serve as comparative cases in discourse analysis, and another two pieces concerning marriage migrants in Taiwan and from the Philippines, respectively. All pieces were published in 2009 on Singapore's two most widely circulated English-language daily newspapers: The Straits Times and The New Paper, with seven pieces from The New Paper and ten from The Straits Times.

Established as early as in 1845, when Singapore was still under the British colonial rule, The Straits Time is the country's highest-selling newspaper, with a daily circulation of 388,500 in August 2006. As of 2008, it had an estimated readership of 1.23 million[30]. It is also the only English-language newspaper with an active Internet forum in Singapore.

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[30] Refer to The Straits Times homepage/"About Us".
Hyperlink: http://www.straitstimes.com/About%2BUs/About%2BUs.html Accessed on 09 April 2010.

Following The Straits Times is The New Paper, with daily circulation of around 110,000 and an average daily readership of about half a million[31]. In comparison with The Straits Times, it tends to focus more on local issues and events. Both owned by the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) to date, The Straits Times and The New Paper can be seen to be voices of Singapore. Founded in 1984, SPH is publishing seventeen newspapers in four languages: English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil[32]. Like all newspaper companies in Singapore, SPH is regulated by the Government. There have also been close ties between the directors of SPH and the Singapore Government[33]. As to the reader groups of the two newspapers, according to a news released by The Straits Times itself in 2006 on Nielsen Media Index survey, four in then or 40.2 per cent of readers aged 15 and above turned to the "flagship publication" of SPH for their daily news feeding[34]. On the other hand, The New Paper was said to be more youth-oriented than The Straits Times, and have young males in Singapore as its core audience[35].

The two newspapers are chosen due to their wide and persistent coverage on local and social issues, comparing to other either business or entertainment oriented newspapers. By searching on Singapore newspaper archive database *Newslink*[36] with the keyword "foreign bride", 29 relevant articles can be found published in 2009, all in either The Straits Times or The New Paper. Full-texts of thirteen out of the overall twenty-nine relevant news articles are

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[31] Refer to Singapore Press Holdings homepage/"Our Products/Newspapers/The New Paper". Hyperlink: http://www.sph.com.sg/ourproducts_newspaper_tnp.shtml Accessed on 09 April 2010.

[32] Refer to Singapore Press Holdings homepage/"About SPH". Hyperlink: http://www.sph.com.sg/aboutsph_profile.shtml Accessed on 09 April 2010.

[33] "S. R. Nathan, Director of the Security and Intelligence Division and later President of Singapore, served as SPH's Executive Chairman from 1982 to 1988, and the first President (1995–2002) of SPH was Tjong Yik Min, former chief of the Internal Security Department. The present Chairman of SPH, Tony Tan, was Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore from 1995 to 2005."
(Wikipedia. Hyperlink: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore_Press_Holdings Accessed on 18 March 2010.); or refer to Page 145, Yap, Sonny, Lim, Richard, & Leong, Weng Kam, 2009. *Men In White – The Untold Story of Singapore's Ruling Political Party*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings Ltd..

[34] Boo, Krist, 2006. *SINGAPORE:Straits Times keeps No. 1 spot, drawing 1.35m readers*. Hyperlink: http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=55810 Accessed on 18 March 2010.

[35] Sudhaman, Arun, 2005. *The New Paper revamp raises identity crisis concerns*. Media: Asia's Media & Marketing Newspaper, 4 August 2005, p18-18, 1/4p. Hyperlink: http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/delivery?vid=4&hid=12&sid=cb1614fc-98ff-4aa0-9785-d4760973b8f9%40sessionmgr12 Accessed on 18 March 2010.

[36] Newslink (Hyperlink: http://newslink.asiaone.com) is Singapore's first online archival news information service that allows paid access to a whole archive of Singapore Press Holdings' newspapers stretching as far back as 1989. Only subscribers have accessibility to full extracts, a fact that unfortunately limits this self-funded study from reaching all relevant newspaper clippings.

successfully located and obtained through *factiva.com*[37], with photocopies of another five pieces collected in Singapore. On the other hand, the two images are accessed through *Newslink*, with consent of use from the *Newslink* team. Time span of the relevant media coverage is restraint within 2009 in that effects of the financial difficulties which began in late 2008 started to show up in various social respects and in individual life. Marital relationship, in particular, that involves a Singapore citizen and a foreigner, has been one of the most affected and also most attended aspects in the local media. Moreover, the issue of the foreign spouse's citizenship has been frequently brought up alongside with discussion of household economics during the economic downturn. Analysis on media coverage during this period is thereby expected to lead to understandings differentiated from that generated from studies prior to the financial crisis. The fact that less than a half of all relevant news reports have to be left out in the analysis due to limitation in accessibility, may affect the interpretation of these coverage. This study however does not aim to perform a full-scale narrative analysis or ideological criticism.

Life Partner Matchmaker will serve as a case of international matchmaking agency in this study. According to data released on the official website of Accounting & Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA)[38], Singapore, there have been 211 registered business entities that have "marriage" as a keyword in their entity names. Only 41 out of the total of 211 marriage and/or matchmaking agencies are "live". Statuses of the rest are displayed as "ceased", "terminated", "cancelled", "rejected" or "struck off". Live Partner Matchmaker Pte. Ltd. is one of those "live" agencies registered. The homepage provides information about the agency and its services in both English and Chinese, and describes the agency as "majored" in Vietnamese brides[39]. Vietnam is also the most popular origin of *foreign brides* in Singapore's international matchmaking market. The context in which the marriage market is popularized with Vietnamese women will be brought up in later on discourse analysis.

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[37] *factiva.com* is a business information and research tool owned by Dow Jones & Company and provides access to more than 28,000 sources, such as newspapers, magazines, journals, etc., from 157 countries and in 23 languages. Hyperlink:http://global.factiva.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/sb/default.aspx?NAPC=S&fcpil=en. (Nanyang Technological University Gateway).

[38] Accounting & Corporate Regulatory Authority (Singapore). Hyperlink: http://www.acra.gov.sg/ Accessed on 8 March 2010.
[39] The homepage heading says: "Life Partner Matchmaker is the largest Singapore cupid in matchmaking marriage for beautiful virgin Vietnamese brides…". Hyperlink: http://www.lifepartnermatchmaker.com/ Accessed on 8 March 2010.

8 Narrative & Discourse Analysis

The following chapters will continue to present findings of narrative analysis and discourse analysis on empirical materials. Critiques on these findings will also be presented. A narrative analysis will be first conducted on stereotypical media narratives of *foreign brides*' life stories found in relevant news articles. Discourse analysis, specifically on the "othering" discourses, will be later on employed and findings will be presented in accordance with themes.

8.1 Narrating A *Foreign Bride*'s Life Story

The story of "Ms. Bride" in 2009:

She was born in a poor family, and there seemed no hope for a better life, except for

Marrying to a better country, like Singapore.

The Singapore man appointed to her by the matchmaking agency was much older than she was.

She first came to visit her groom-to-be in Singapore through the agency.

A low-cost wedding was arranged by the agency soon after they both agreed on the marriage.

She moved to live with her husband in Singapore. Every three month her Singaporean husband renewed her Long Term Social Visit Pass so that she could continue to stay in Singapore.

She was gentle, obedient and working hard to take care of her husband, her parents-in-law and the household.

Her husband gave her a monthly allowance – not much but better than her life back home.

She got pregnant and they finally had a child.

until

The financial crisis came and her husband lost his job.

He became abusive and she got abused from time to time.

He decided to send her back to her country. He forced her to sign divorce papers before packing her off to the airport.

[Ending 1] She was forced to leave her child behind.

[Ending 2] She was sent back with their child. She can not support her child back home now without enough maintenance payments from her ex-husband.

The script presented above is created basing on the eighteen pieces of relevant news, in which one homogeneous narrative has been constructed and reproduced again and again. By presenting such an invented script, this study does not attempt to either generalize or stigmatize cross-border marriage; nor the media. Among the eighteen pieces published in 2009 are definitely deviant versions of a *foreign bride*'s story, or to be more precise, stories that have not gone into those two endings, yet. Behind these few deviant narratives is however anxiety expressed, either implicitly or explicitly, by the authors, towards the brides' fate. The repeated narrative shown above can also be delivered by the following two posed photos in sequence: from happy wedding with a suitcase to miserable wife's life. The fact that the two pieces are both posed photos for *foreign brides*' stories of corresponding themes has manifested that how a stereotypical narrative is constructed by photographers. Of course, placing the two independent images in such a sequence is another kind of narrative construction, though based on actual mediated narratives. This chapter will analyze the to-a-great-extent repeating narratives of a *foreign bride*'s life story produced in the local media. On the other hand, deviant narratives will also be shown in order to avoid reproduction of stereotypes by this study. Analysis on these narratives will be conducted towards the following aspects: narrativity/narrative value, the doubling effects of "narrated narrations", influence of the narrator's identity, and potential effects of the representational media through which these narratives are disseminated.

Picture 1.: Posed photo for story on why foreign brides are hot.

By: WANG HUI FEN, The Straits
Times (In) 29/06/2009 Page 14**.**

Picture 2.: Posed photo for *More Foreign Brides Suffering in Silence*.

By Genevieve Jiang, The New Paper Fri, 13/03/2009.

Photo owned by The Straits Times. Source:http://www.divaa sia.com/article/2656.

The narratability of a story frequently depends on the context (Prince, 2008). As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2.1, one-fourth of total marriages in 2008 were between Singaporean groom and foreign bride, and nearly 97 out of 100 of these brides were of Asian origin. A booming number of mainly female marriage migrants seeking to build a family in Singapore have brought the public great interest in this body of newly arrived population, who are generally labeled as *foreign brides*. It is not hard to understand that increasing public concern has a lot to do with the media's interest in these women's stories. Nevertheless, what makes a new prime in 2009 of spotlights on *foreign brides*' life stories seems to be the lately financial difficulties which widely affect the local society. The news frequently refers to financial reasons when narrating stories of *foreign brides* who are abandoned. As in one article, the author concludes, after telling an abandoned *bride*'s case, that *not only are banks and finance companies feeling the credit crunch, the troubled economy is also claiming another group of victims – foreign brides* (*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. Yen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5). S/he further quotes a lawyer who handles legal disputes between *foreign brides* and their husbands that the number of cases increases by week since September 2008.

When looking closer to the narrative construction, the narrativity of these stories can be refined in the process of their (pre)construction. Lavok *et al*. describes narrative construction as arrangement and rearrangement of a "reportable" event and other relevant events that might have causal relations with the "reportable" one (Fludernik, 1996; Norrick, 2005; Lavok, 2007). Two "reportable" events can be generally found in these stories: (1) an old Singaporean groom weds a much younger bride; (2) a turning point (usually breakdown) comes up in the marriage. Particularly when both events happened one after another, it makes a more

"reportable" event. Meanwhile, a range of relevant events that either cause or are caused by the "reportable" ones are arranged around them in certain sequence in time to make meaning out of the whole narrative. In a typical *foreign bride* narrative, such relevant events include (3) the young bride comes from a poor foreign country (explains why she marries a much older man to Singapore), (4) quick wedding is arranged through a matchmaking agency (explains the lack of love in the marriage and the easily happened marriage breakdown), (5) the *foreign bride* is obedient and dependent (explains why she is easily abused by the husband but never speaks out), and/or (6) the financial crisis comes (explains why the *bride* is easily abandoned). Narrative as an arrangement of these various events brings out it narrative value by making sense out of one after another causal relations.

To what extent a narrative that combines event (1) and (3) and (4) is attractive is vividly shown by Picture 1. - a smiling wedding couple with the bride in wedding dress handling a old black suitcase, is itself very eye-catching, and more importantly, implying further and very possibly unexpected development of the story, because of the suitcase. Though posed, the photo has delivered the photographer's very concisely construction of the story. And the black suitcase in front of everything – the red background that represents happiness, the two smiling faces, the wedding dress – is just too strong to be ignored and it implies so many clues that possibly pointing to Picture 2. In this term, an ordinary event such as "wedding" could become newsworthy when it involves a *foreign bride* in that it may later bring a "divorce", and then, not only cause deportation of the woman, loss of her child's custody, requirement of legal assistance, NGO engagement, but also bring back a recursive narration about her stories dated back to her pre-marital life in another country, so on and so forth – all of which bear higher news value than a "boring" happily-ever-after. The following paragraphs will exemplify a very typical text of such stereotypical narratives *Imported Wives Left in the Lurch* (byYen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5) to demonstrate the "doubling" effects of a narrative and impact that the narrator(s)' identity has on the narrative.

Another significant feature of the media's narrating of *foreign brides*' life story/stories is reconfiguration and retelling, also called by García Landa (2008) "narrated narrations" (also called "doubling"). He points out that the formation of a new narrative is a process in which "already narrativized elements are reinterpreted, reconfigured and retold", while retelling produces an intensification of certain meaning (García Landa, 2008:419f). Following is an example of how the initial narration by a *foreign bride* has been reconfigured, twice, by organizations and by the journalist, in the news.

[Narrator 1: *foreign-born women*; Narrator 2: *organizations*; Narrator 3: the journalist]
Various organizations report a rising number of foreign-born women who say the same men who spent thousands of dollars to bring them here are now withholding cash, threatening divorce, and in some extreme cases, dumping them at the airport with a one-way ticket home. [*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. Yen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5.]

The women seem to be speaking for themselves here, which is not true. They are represented, though not entirely muted. What hidden in this narrative are individual stories of this *rising number of foreign born women* who say […]. Omitted are voices of each of them, telling stories of their own version – these stories may have similar themes such as suffering and seeking for help but with different causes and solutions. They are nonetheless assumed as one by the media narratives and thus deliver one message of a collective life trajectory as *foreign brides*. The organizations construct such a generalized narrative in order to deliver their missions and the journalist further reconfigures the narrative by embedding it among other narratives or meaning-making messages. The absence of individual woman's voices and individual stories in media narrative has to some extent put forward a "universal image" of all *foreign brides*, in front of the Singapore public, in the same way the "universal sisterhood", which is lately much criticized, is put forward in the second-wave feminist movement.

The lack of women's agency presented in the news can also be detected through identifying the narrators' identities. Note also that the narrator's identity may well affect the audience's response to a given narrative (Prince, 2008:25f). The following four excerpts are all components of the telling of *foreign bride* Ms. Chen Yanfei's story of legal dispute with the Singapore husband who abandoned her and their child. Throughout the report, four narrators' words – from the journalist, a lawyer, a matchmaker, and the husband - are either quoted or written (in the case of the journalist as a narrator) to different extent concerning the woman's story, whilst none of them are from the woman herself.

1. [Narrator: the journalist] For the first time in seven months, Chinese national Chen Yanfei, 31, came face-to-face with her missing husband-in front of a court judge last Monday.

    The Shenzhen resident asked him to cough up some money for their four-year-old son. Singaporean Tan Jiak Hee, 59, is alleged to have abandoned both Ms Chen and their son last year. [*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. Yen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5.]

2. [Narrator: Lawyer Mr. Cheng] Mr Cheng said he expects this number to rise even further as more jobs are lost. "These men think of their wives as expendable objects, like furniture," he said. [*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. Yen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5.]

3. [Narrator: Matchmaker Ms. Fu Xi Bin] Ms Fu Xi Bin of Heng Mei Matchmaking Services, which specializes in recruiting Hainanese brides, called the men's actions as "cost-cutting

measure". [*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. Yen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5.]

4. [Narrator: the husband] "I don't know how much longer I can work. I have exhausted my very limited resources and my CPF savings and so I cannot continue to provide for my child," he claimed. "As the cost of living is fairly low in Shenzhen, my contribution of $50 per month should be more than enough to see to the child's needs." [*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. Yen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5.]

These four narrators are apparently more empowered than the *foreign bride* in a conventional society, which makes their voices louder and the woman's weaker. Moreover, all of the four narrators appear in the report bring up "money" as the key of the story, with three of them relating the case directly to financial difficulties whilst the woman might have more than "money" to tell about the marriage yet muted. This constructed link between money and a *foreign bride*'s marriage has reinforced various stereotypes towards *foreign brides* and transnational marriages: lack of affection in the marriage, marrying for money, *foreign brides* as commodities, etc.. True or not on this individual case, these narratives represented in newspapers, which still possesses the strongest mass communication power in Singapore society, will be repeated by other narrators and consumed by the audience and further assumed onto other *foreign brides* even if they may not follow the same life course. Thereby, muted and deprived of self-agency is not this one woman in the story but the *foreign brides* categorized as a collective.

Besides these stereotypical narratives, three deviant narratives are found in the eighteen sample news articles where different versions of *foreign bride* stories are presented. In Deviant 1, the Singaporean groom-to-be was dumped by the Vietnamese bride-to-be who possibly ran away with the money for an ex-lover. In Deviant 2, the 53-year-old Singaporean husband foresees a happy marriage with his 19-year-old Vietnamese wife and is applying for the wife permanent residency. It is important to mention that both stories are narrated by the men. In Deviant 2, the woman only appears in the pictures as "smiling and happy wife". The woman in Deviant 3 is the only one whose voice is dominant in the narration, and who came to Singapore initially for work rather than for marriage, who has a husband from the local dominant class, at her same age and a lasting ten-year marriage, and who was finally granted Singaporean citizenship. In a sense, Deviant 3 is a rare "dreamy" case of *foreign bride* story where a bright future and past can both be seen and delivered. Calling it "deviant" is not just another construction, but because of the extreme rareness of such divergent narrative in the media.

In short, a typical narrative in most media representations of a *foreign bride*'s marriage is constructed with "reportable" events such as "abnormal" couples, a U-turn in marriage, etc.. It has also a lot to do with the *bride*'s background and assumptions about her motivations to marry a Singaporean man. All these elements are arranged to satisfy sense-making that serves the media and/or the audience's interest and ideology. For the same purpose, events that did not happen but could have are usually implied to strengthen the value of a narrative (Prince, 2008). The following chapter will continue to decipher discourses that underline stereotypical media narratives where *foreign brides* are involved.

8.2 The "Othering" Discourses

After an explanation of how media narratives concerning *foreign brides* are constructed and reconfigured by various narrators in their own social contexts, the following chapters will continue to unearth discourses and underlying ideologies[40] that "other" female marriage immigrants, and further on, gendered and ethnicized their citizenship.

8.2.1. Women from A "Third-world" Asia to Singapore

"*We are decent Vietnam village girls sincerely looking for our Life Partner.[41]*" The "Vietnamese brides" say.

— a line scripted by Life Partner Matchmaking on its website.

"*We are traditional Singaporean men sincerely looking for a wife to take care of me and my family.*" The Singaporean men utter.

— a line delivered in all media coverage, scripted by the author.

Concerning the terminology of female marriage migrants, Japanese researcher Tomoko Nakamatsu (2003:197) has pointed out that the term "Asian brides", which is used in Japan to label wives of other Asian origins, is racialized. In other receiving countries of Asian marriage migrants, similar labels are attached to this body of foreign-born women, as

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[40] The term *ideology* refers to a "systematic and all-inclusive" explanation of any social phenomenon (Berger, 2000).

[41] See hyperlink: http://70.85.180.226/~evacom/photo/index.php?cat=2. Accessed on 08 May 2010.

"mainland brides" in Taiwan, and "Vietnamese brides", "Hainanese[42] brides" in Singapore exemplify. Whilst the term "bride", applying to foreign-born wives regardless how long they have been married, *per se* bears certain implication on the woman's position, adding an origin before "bride" carries more ideologies in relation to various boundaries.

Specifically in Singapore, the term "foreign bride" is employed to encompass foreign-born women who marry to Singaporean men. The term, nevertheless, has more specific denotation than it seems. Despite of the fact that there are also a number of western women who live in Singapore as dependents of their husbands, either Singaporeans or westerners[43], little attention has been given, by either the media or the society in general, to this group of foreign women. In contrast, it is women from certain "third-world" Asian nations, be them Vietnam, China, the Philippines, etc., that are denoted to by "foreign" in the term. Due to the decline of women from China and the Philippines marrying to Singapore, which can be ascribed to either socioeconomic or political factors[44] in those countries, "Vietnamese brides" tends to become a substitute to the term "foreign brides" in Singapore. Eight out of ten stories where *foreign brides* are involved reported by the local media are depicting the image of a "Vietnamese bride", or explicitly employ the term "Vietnamese brides".

A generalized image of an unnamed "Vietnamese bride" has been set up by the media, by the men who tell their stories, or by the matchmaking agencies, in front of Singaporean men. *She* is "young" (usually between 18 to 25 years old), "poor and seeking for a way out of poverty", "pretty", "simple", "gentle", "homely", "pure", "innocent", etc., or "abused", "silent", victim of the marriage. On the other hand, an entirely contrary picture of Singaporean women is simultaneously constructed – "demanding", "materialistic", "haughty" etc. – to stress the reason why "Vietnamese brides" are more desirable. Otherwise, "in some

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[42] Hainan is a southern island of China. Hainanese women used to consist of an important proportion of foreign women marrying to Singapore, due to their familiarity with Hokkien language, spoken by most population of Chinese origin in Singapore. The number of Hainanese "brides" has however declined in recent years.

[43] Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), a leading local women's NGO, is conducting an on-going research project of this group of foreign women in Singapore.

[44] In the Philippines, for instance, matchmaking business that makes profit from marrying Filipino women to foreign countries has been banned since 1990, as part of the Philippines' effort in anti-trafficking in human. In the case of China, no specific backgrounds have been indicated by any research but sometimes referred to economic reasons by the media.

rare cases", *she* could run away, with the allowance given by the Singaporean man, for her ex-lover or unknown reason[45].

In none of these stories, the woman is involved in the story-telling. Most of the time, she is represented by the man: "*she wants a child but we will go slow.*", "*I heard that in Vietnam, most women marry young. If you are not married after you are 22, you are considered overaged.*" (*34-yer Gap is No Barrier for Newly Weds*. Jamie Ee Wen Wei, The Straits Times, 21 June 2009), "*I thought she was homesick and I thought she'd be happy if she could spend more time with her family*" (*DUMPED by Pregnant Foreign Bride via Phone*. Crystal Chan, The New Paper, 27 July 2009), or by the matchmaker: "*what they want is security. If their husbands are loving and financially stable, age is not an issue*" (*The Groom with White Hair*. Jamie Ee Wen Wei, The Straits Times, 21 June 2009). When she does speak up, she says: "*He's good to me and I know he's sincere about settling down.*", "*Since this Italian man likes me and I'm comfortable with him, how long we know each other isn't a problem.*" (*American flies to S'pore to find a Vietnam bride*. Crystal Chan, The New Paper, 14 September 2009) – all in a sense proving the stereotypes given to her. Even when in reports of legal cases such as divorce or maintenance claims, the woman is spoken for by the lawyer and social workers, instead of by herself. With much more messages omitted, what her words deliver is *per se* a lack of self-agency through which the man's feeling and demands are placed before her own.

By reproducing these stereotypical images in the media, a boundary between Singaporean women and foreign-born women, in particular, those of Vietnamese origin, has been drawn. On one side of this boundary are Singaporean women whose being "demanding, materialistic and haughty" can be otherwise interpreted as liberal, enlightened, emancipated, independent, etc. – qualities that are supposedly cultivated by a liberal, modern culture promoted by the nation. On the contrary, Vietnamese women who are brought up in a "third-world" country of economic backward, dictatorship and extreme patriarchy are introduced as substitutes to Singaporean men who are too patriarchal and "traditional" to be accepted by "modern" Singaporean women.

Interestingly, the boundary between Singapore and the "third-world" part of Asia becomes blurred when it comes to men as a universally dominant category. Matchmaking agency "Life

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[45] See *DUMPED by pregnant foreign bride via phone*. By Crystal Chan, The New Paper, 27 July 2009, and *DUMPED, HE FELT DUPED*. The New Paper, 25 May 2009.

Partner Matchmaking" introduces itself on its homepage[46] as *the 1st professional matchmaker firm in Singapore to specialize in matchmaking virgin[47] brides to Singapore men, Malaysian men and Hong Kong men, Brunei men, Taiwan men and other Asian men*[48] (underscore is added by the author to stress). Although men in this statement are divided into those from namely affluent countries/regions such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and those from "other" Asian countries, they seem to form an alliance, that is, "traditional"(usually interpreted as "patriarchal") men seeking for "traditional" "Vietnamese brides".

The lack of the Vietnamese woman's agency is possibly constructed by the matchmaking agencies with intention to promote their business between Vietnam and Singapore. Life Partner Matchmaking is one of those most repeated names in news reports referring to agencies that *specialize* in "Vietnamese brides" – another popular agency clarifies this point in its name "Vietnamese Brides International". The agency explicitly constructs what a "Vietnamese bride" is trained to do in the household: *personal grooming, personal hygiene, housework, cook Chinese dishes, to respect elderly, learn culture of Singapore, interact in Mandarin, new shoes, new clothes, hair styling, and pre-marriage counseling*[49]. This statement, alongside with its earlier introductory statement of "virgin" brides, not only reproduces the patriarchal ideology that subordinates women historically and worldwide to the private, but also implies a cultural boundary, much more than language disparity, between Singapore and Vietnam. How to treat the elderly, personal grooming, housework, cooking, hair styling, and even personal hygiene – these routine activities of mundane life are considered to be part of a nation' lifestyle and carry values and even essence of the national culture. The statement that "Vietnamese brides" have to be trained on these routines implies a superiority of Singaporean culture over the Vietnamese culture, starting from the everyday life.

The construction of a "third-world" Asia that distinguishes from, or to be more specific, is both economically and culturally disadvantaged to, Singapore is ethnicized, and can be

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[46] See hyperlink: http://www.lifepartnermatchmaker.com/index.html. Accessed on 08 May 2010.

[47] The homepage even sets up a video to explain their Vietnamese girls are "certificated virgins" and why virgin brides are needed. See hyperlink: http://www.lifepartnermatchmaker.com/news.html#virginbride. Accessed on 08 May 2010.

[48] See hyperlink: http://www.lifepartnermatchmaker.com/eaboutus.html. Accessed on 08 May 2010.
[49] See hyperlink: http://www.lifepartnermatchmaker.com/eaboutus.html. Accessed on 08 May 2010.

understood as a colonial legacy. And colonial customs stemmed from a world view that assumed the superiority of the masculine over the feminine (Oyewumi, 2006). The massive attention and stereotypes given to specifically marriage between Singaporean men and Vietnamese women, as well as other "third-world" women, and to the women particularly, *per se* analogizes the relationship between Singaporean and Vietnam, and the like, to that between the masculine and the feminine. Whilst Singapore is *per se* a multi-ethnic society, it has constructed new boundaries of ethnics across Asia, much in line with economic divisions within the region. The newly established ethnic boundary usually intersects, or associates, with economic, sociopolitical and cultural boundaries, while downplaying geographical closeness, to altogether configure a line between citizens and non-citizens. *Foreign brides* are a population living in the peripheral border zones.

Such construction is nonetheless usually self-contradictory. By constructing an exotic and passive image of "Vietnamese brides" and the contrasting image of Singaporean women, the media has put forward a symbolic figure of an enlightened Singapore where women are liberated from patriarchal oppression. Yet, on the other hand, a "traditional" and less "enlightened" male figure that usually associates in stories of transnational marriage has somehow reduced the value of a liberal, modern culture. Similar dilemma can be seen in the nation's wandering between globalization/regionalization and "Asian values". Discourses have been very pragmatic on using different groups of women to satisfy their needs. Whilst independent and "modern" Singaporean women are put forward to guard the nation's identity and qualities in the "advanced" club of the world order, "third-world" Asian women are put up to promote "distinctive Asian values", be them traditional family values and gender relations, to serve its need in increasing population, maintaining distinctive cultural characters against westernization, solving internal social problems such as declining marriage rate, etc..

The media's role in this construction is enormous not only through their reproduction of individual *foreign brides*' stories but through their repeating reports on the cross-border matchmaking business. Even though some reports aim to point out essential issues such as the women's status and difficulties, the lack of social supports, etc., their over writing about the women's life history and detailed description of the matchmaking or "bride-hunt" processes might have brought reverse impact on local knowledge reproduction on the women and marriage migration.

8.2.2. Who Give Birth to QUALIFIED Citizens?

Reproduction remains central to constructing citizenship rights of diverse groups of women. Collins (1999) raises in her study of the US case the concept of suitability to be "mothers of the nation". The hierarchy of motherhood has been set intersecting with race and class, with middle-class white women as ideal "mothers of the nation", working-class white women as becoming "fit" mothers, working-class African-American women as "undeserving mothers", and undocumented Latinas as "mothers for hire" (ibid.). The ideology of "suitability" to be "mothers of the nation" in Singapore is no less than that in the US.

In order to understand how this ideology has affected citizenship of *foreign brides'*, it is necessary to first look into the background of Singapore's gender-neutral citizenship law. Only in recent years, the Singapore state had its citizenship law adjusted, which nowadays allows female citizens to pass on her Singaporean citizenship to her foreign-born children. Consideration involved in this change lies in that more and more oversea female Singaporeans are well-educated professionals, and that the state of Singapore believes that "better educated parents beget brighter children" (Tan, 2008). The "prospect of 'losing' Singaporean mothers and their foreign-born children is a potential human resource loss that should be avoided" (Tan, 2008:11).

It is following the same "quality reproduction" ideology that *foreign brides*' reproduction, and further on, their citizenship related to reproduction, comes into general discourse. In particular, given the fact that in 2008, 78 per cent of marriages between a citizen and a non-citizen involve Singaporean men marrying foreign women, and that 9,870 babies, which makes 30 per cent of newly born citizens in the same year had a foreign parent, *foreign brides* have apparently made contribution to the national effort of making more Singaporean babies – a figure too appealing for the state to ignore. Taking into account the nation's constantly low, and declining, marriage and fertility rates, *foreign brides* become an importance substitute force of reproduction in Singapore.

There, however, never lacks worries towards these new mothers of the nation. By constructing "mothers of the nation", reproduction of women from "other" categories, be them foreigners, less educated, non-professionals and the like, becomes less desirable. Since most *foreign brides* in Singapore come from developing countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines and China, they are assumed to be less intelligent and consequently less able to raise potential offspring. The media also now and then point to the educational level of

foreign brides, by indicating, for instance, that *half of the Singaporean men with foreign brides had secondary education or lower, a figure that was similar for their brides* (*More Older Men Seeking Foreign Brides*. Zakir Hussain, The Straits Times, 18 June 2009) – a calculation that easily reminds the readers of a 1980s' population planning policy, according to which better-educated women were encouraged to have more children whilst the less-educated discouraged from having too many, and of another immigration regulation which restricts foreign female domestic workers from getting pregnant and delivering babies in Singapore. Such concern is a very typical result of nationalist discrimination towards certain women's biological reproduction (Lister, 2003). Giving birth to a citizen does not naturally make a *foreign bride* one. Her lack of shared cultural identity in this new nation, along with her assumedly lack of good education, disqualifies her in training her children into qualified/standard Singaporean citizens (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999).

Some media coverage is however more sensitive on the issue of women's reproductive rights. As an effort to prevent or reduce marginalization of children born by *foreign brides*, an article lays emphasis on that *the children go on to excel in school* (*More Older Men Seeking Foreign Brides*. Zakir Hussain, The Straits Times, 18 June 2009). It does not, yet, seem powerful enough against a majority of reports that fix their eyes on the *brides*' intelligent levels. Furthermore, stressing their children's performance in school could cause an opposite effect among the audience, since no news would ever report that children born by female citizens are going on to excel in school.

Another implication in news reports is that children of *foreign brides* are less "valuable". This can be ascribed to a mass reproduction of stories where children, along with their foreign mothers, are victimized. Whilst the troubled economy is reportedly claiming *foreign brides* as another group of victims, children of these *brides* are also involved. Two cases will be presented here as illustrations:

> …Chinese national Chen Yanfei, 31, came face-to-face with her missing husband-in front of a court judge last Monday. The Shenzhen resident asked him to cough up some money for their four-year-old son. Singaporean Tan Jiak Hee, 59, is alleged to have abandoned both Ms Chen and their son last year. [*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. Yen Feng, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A5.]

> In one extraordinary case reported to the Hainan Hwee Kuan last December, a young Hainanese woman alleged that her husband forced her to sign divorce papers before packing her off to the airport the next day. They had been married for less than a year and she was six months' pregnant. In the divorce papers, the man is said to have stated that he was not financially responsible for his wife, nor their child once they were back in China. (ibid.)

Only in one of the reports alike, the Singaporean father claims that he will fight for his child's custody if the wife files for divorce[50]. According to *ACMI 2008 Annual Report*[51], it is a fact that 26 per cent of *foreign brides* seeking help through ACMI[52] have difficulties in claiming maintenance for their children. It is also a fact that, according to the same report, *foreign brides* are also in face of other difficulties such as seeking work, accommodation, health issues, homesick etc., which are however seldom covered by the media. The selected focus in reports may be responsible for an image that these children are not wanted by their fathers, nor effectively protected by the Singaporean laws.

On the next page to where *Imported Wives Left in the Lurch* is published, another report titled *Help for single mums in downturn* (By Zakir Hussain, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A4) reports that the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports "was studying ways" and helped to develop a guidebook "*to get errant ex-husbands to keep up maintenance payments to their former spouses and children*". However this effort would not benefit abandoned *foreign brides* and their children as few of them can afford to hire lawyers while free or subsidized legal advice are designed to serve citizens and permanent residents only.

In a sense, the denial for these children's actual possibility in claiming for maintenance, as a natural result of their *foreign bride* mothers in most cases being denied for legal assistance, has to some extent denied these children as qualified full citizens, even if born as Singaporeans. And the media is possibly reinforcing this false image in their effort to present the flaws in legal affairs concerning transnational marriage. In some other reports, child is an absent issue in the stories, assumedly due to the husband's age, as well explained by a 53-year old Singaporean man who married a 19-year old Vietnamese girl: "*She wants a child but we will go slow. At my age, it will be quite difficult to raise a child. They can be quite a headache.*" (*34-yer Gap is No Barrier for Newly Weds*. Jamie Ee Wen Wei, The Straits Times, 21 June 2009). This is a man who has two adult sons from his first marriage. Since most men marring *foreign brides* had at least one previous marriage which usually brought them children, birth-giving as a right can be easily denied for the *brides*.

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[50] See *Mum Has to Leave Son Behind*. By Shree Ann Mathavan, The New Paper, 31 July 2009.

[51] Accessed via hyperlink: http://www.acmi.sg/aboutus_annualreports.php.

[52] Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants & Itinerant People (ACMI) is a local charity organization which constantly provides help to *foreign brides* and other migrant populations in Singapore.

The possible lack of enthusiasm towards children of *foreign brides* is surprisingly similar to what happened in colonial Southeast Asia, where on the one hand interracial sexual contact was tolerated as necessity for male sexuality; on the other hand, interracial marriage was seen as dangerous for the progeny of such unions were not considered eligible to have access to property and privilege of the European colonial community (Stoler, 1989). Although children born by *foreign brides* are entitled Singaporean citizenship by birth, in both cases, the women are denied as "mothers of the nation" who are in defense of perceived nation-state/community interests, which is a high-quality population. Another factor that might have contributed to the lack of attention to *foreign brides*' reproduction as a form of contribution to the state might be the change in priority during economic crisis. Although the Singapore state has been employing long-term policies to increase its population and fight against the increasingly aging society, reproduction would have to give way to apparently more urgent economic production.

The lack of media representation of *foreign brides* in other social spheres, such as workplace, community engagement, rather than the household, will later on elaborated in relation to the current economic downturn in next chapter. Due to the fact that most *foreign brides* reside in Singapore as dependants of their husbands, their primary contribution to the nation has to be related to reproduction. Despite of the problematics that tie women to reproductive duties, reproduction is undoubtedly a primary reason that qualifies them as potential citizens. This hope of many *brides* is nevertheless diminished in that they are not considered as most desirable "mothers of the nation" who give birth to and bring up standard citizens. When more essential challenge, than population decline, such as economic recession occurs, reproduction or these women's citizenship issue has given way to nation-wide economic construction in media representations. Even where their stories are told, they are not much more than victims or products of the grand backdrop.

8.2.3. *Brides* in Retrenchments

Whilst work obligations and productivity are conventionally related to welfare benefits that presume one's citizenship, *foreign brides*' road to citizenship is at stake due to their lack of representation in economic life. Throughout 2009, 32 out of 37 *foreign brides* who sought help at ACMI[53] were holding Social Visit Pass, Long Term Social Visit Pass, or Dependant's

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[53] Refer to *ACMI 2009 Annual Report*. Accessed via hyperlink: http://www.acmi.sg/aboutus_annualreports.php.

Pass – a figure that suggest that most *brides* do not have the right to work legally in Singapore. Besides, in none of the reports or the matchmaking agency website, *foreign brides* are represented as roles other than mothers, housewives, domestic workers, and the like.

The media are nonetheless passionate in their effort of representing transnational marriage as an industry and thereby marrying Singaporeans as an occupation. Nine out of ten stories reported involve description of the matchmaking business, with agencies' names such as Vietnamese Brides International, and Life Partner Matchmaking, frequently mentioned. Moreover, many reports contain detailed description of the full-scale matchmaking process[54] or "bride-hunt" in Vietnam[55].

Depicting transnational marriage as an industry carries the implication that *foreign brides* are taking up an occupation of marrying Singaporeans. While reporting the impact that economic recession has on the matchmaking business, the report quotes a Vietnamese bride responded to the increasing cases of marriage break-down by analogizing marrying to a Singaporean man to a "job".

> "Many people have lost their jobs," said one abandoned bride, who asked not to be named. "We're not so different." (*Imported Wives Left in the Lurch*. By Yen Feng, The Straits Times, March 9, 2009.Page A5.)

As one of those few voices from the *brides* heard in the media, she utters a notion - "marriage as an occupation" – which was invented by one of the most influential figure in Vietnamese literature in the twentieth century. Vu Trong Phung (1912-1939), a writer and journalist who wrote about Vietnamese women "marrying" European Legionnaire soldiers in French Indochina, depicted a woman in court who told the judges "my occupation is marrying the Europeans". Vu Trong Phung reported, or created[56], this episode, and later on employed the concept "industry", to satirize the monetary value involved in the "mechanical and businesslike" marriage relationship (Thuy Tranviet, 2006). Although the form of "marriage" in the1930s' Vietnam Vu describes is probably more kin to "concubinage" and apparently

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[54] See *Pay $167 a month for CREDIT CARD BRIDES*. By Crystal Chan, The New Paper, 1 June 2009; *American flies to S'pore to find a Vietnam bride*. By Crystal Chan, The New Paper, 14 September 2009; *Dumped, he felt duped*. By Crystal Chan, The New Paper, 25 May 2009; and so on.

[55] See *Bride-hunt in Vietnam*, by John Lui, The Straits Times, 29 August 2009.

[56] According to Thuy Tranviet, who introduces and translates the reportage, Vu Trong Phung has been shifting between roles of a writer and a reporter in his writing. Authenticity of his stories should thereby be questioned.

subjects to no marital rights and obligations as in the contemporary context, it is notions of *production* and *remuneration* involved in the concept of *occupation* that worth discussion.

Economic bonds between husband and wife is probably as old as marriage itself. Money is the key issue that leads to a narrative of employer-employee relationship in *foreign brides'* marriages. According to various reports on *foreign brides'* stories, a *foreign bride* usually plays roles of a domestic worker, a mother, a caregiver, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a logistics operations manager, all at minimum remuneration.

> "Some men feel that since they 'bought' their wives, they can do anything they want with them." (Ms Susie Wong, chairman of the Star Shelter which takes in abused women. *Silent cries of foreign brides*. By Theresa Tan, The Straits Times, 16 September 2009, Page A2.)

If *wifing* is an occupation for these foreign women and their service can be bought by money, its value in domestic production should have been taken into account during the formation of *foreign brides'* citizenship. On the contrary, citizenship of *foreign brides'* has been shattered in these narratives. The domestic *service* provided by *foreign brides* has been again and again narrated as dispensable especially in face of economic difficulties.

An article *Scholars as Foreign Brides* (by Tay Shi'an, The New Paper, 20 April 2009) has given an interesting illustration on how *foreign brides* are constructed as analogy to employees, in this report, scholars employed by companies.

> Signing up for a scholarship is like entering a marriage. Some scholars go into it like foreign brides – they need the money, never mind doubts about the man. They are so eager (or desperate) for the better life that they marry him anyway. […] some companies treat their scholars like foreign brides. They feel they 'own' the scholar. Because they paid for *her* education and living expenses, they feel entitled to ask *her* to do whatever they want, without considering what *she* wants. […] (*italics* is marked by the author to stress key words.)

This awkward analogy between employed scholars and *foreign brides* once again illustrates how the women and their marriages are stereotyped, and feminine forms *she* and *her* are used on the powerless that is subordinated by the assumedly masculine and powerful. Ironically, this is an article written after the case of Dr. Allan Ooi happened, where the medical doctor killed himself out of stress at work.

While most layoffs will entitle the employees compensation, or otherwise, legal rights to appeal, a "laid-off" *foreign bride* would however have no approach or legal assistance to appeal or claim for maintenance for she is usually neither a citizen not Permanent Resident. A lawyer explains in report *Mum has to leave son behind* (by Shree Ann Mathavan, The New Paper, 31 July 2009) that a *foreign bride* has to live in Singapore for three continuous years

before she can file for divorce, and she has to be physically present in Singapore to file for maintenance, which makes it nearly impossible as the husband will refuse to renew her pass, and moreover, legal aid is only entitled to citizens or permanent residents which makes legal costs unaffordable for the woman in most cases. In a word, the denial of her domestic productivity results in the pending of her citizenship, which, in the difficult time, further leads to the deprivation of their legal rights. A *foreign bride*, if following the analogy, is more an "underground" laborer, rather than an employee. As reported in many cases, the husbands deported their foreign wives by simply refusing to renew their long-term social visit passes which have to be renewed by the husbands every 90 days. While the authorities take measures by policy adjust and making claims via media to defend female employees (assumedly citizens)' benefits in retrenchments of manufacturing industry[57], no such concern has been given to *foreign brides* involved in the "industry" of marrying Singaporeans – another "industry" largely affected by the trend of "retrenchments" – which serves as another evidence for how difference of women from within affects life.

Viewing being a *foreign bride* as an occupation can easily lead to materialization of the woman's value in the family and the nation. As the labor they contribute is considered less skillful, *foreign brides* become undesired imported labor and hence are overlooked by the state's labor protection during financial hard times. Also, their labor is seen as dispensable when economic downturn reduces the men's ability of consumption. They altogether contribute to *foreign brides'* dilemma in getting citizenship in a state like Singapore where welfare is strictly controlled and distributed by the state to its citizens[58].

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[57] Refer to NTUC (National Trades Union Congress) deputy secretary in *Retrenchments: More women may be hit*, by Zakir Hussain, The Straits Times, 9 March 2009, Page A4.

[58] It is important to mention that Singapore has a welfare system which is distinct from that of most tax-funded European welfare states, though it embraces a similar cradle-to-grave central public policy goal. The European welfare model born in the nineteenth century has stirred increasing anxiety that free Medicare has produced lengthening waiting lists for service, and that the life-long welfare entitlements have bred generations of dependency. Singapore, nevertheless, has set up a welfare system that relies primarily on its citizens' private savings, to be contributed by both citizen-the employees and their employers, instead of on tax incomes, since 1955. The city-state set up a publicly managed and mandatory program of private savings, called Central Provident Fund (CPF), which requires all citizens to make provisions for their own income security. All savings are tax exempt. It is suggested that the disincentive to work can be minimized among citizens as they regard their CPF contributions as personal savings rather than as taxes. Besides, tax-funded pensions only take after citizens who can not work. Such a welfare regime, nonetheless, does not necessarily reduce the imbalance in labor division and the engendered discrimination to certain labor sectors, i.e. caring and unpaid work. According to the CPF policies, members can withdraw all but 40,000 SGD from their accounts at age 55. Only two-thirds of CPF members reaching that age have in their accounts exceeding that amount, which means one-third of CPF members will not be able to withdraw any part of their savings. There were over 3.2 million CPF members out of over 3.6 million residents by the end of 2008. Low-waged worker members have to rely on certain contribution

9 Concluding Remarks

As classic statements (Mannheim, 1936; in Berger, 2000) about the social origin of knowledge claim, prior to performing his or her pattern of "independent" thinking (if independent thinking is ever possible), a thinking subject is exposed to ready-made knowledge in the society which inherits from past thinkings. Media communication as a site of knowledge mass-production and –reproduction, thereby, have enormous impact on individuals' mindsets, which could lead to shared ideologies towards what goes on in a society.

This study of media representation on *foreign brides* in Singapore, in particular, in relation to the issue of citizenship, has well illustrated the power of media in knowledge (re)production and biases it could bring about. Three questions have been raised at the beginning of this study: How are narratives of female marriage migrants' life trajectories (re)narrated by local media? How have female marriage migrants been represented in relation to reproduction, labor and nation-building? How is citizenship centralized in these representations? Correspondingly, narrative and discourse analyses made from various empirical materials have led to the following observations: 1) Through construction and reconfiguration of *foreign brides*' experiences, media narratives make sense out of "reportable" events in a way that follow normative values and ideologies about transnational marriage, and tend to leave out the women's initial telling and alternative narratives around the same events. 2) A new ethnic boundary has been constructed in the media discourses, according to which a "third-world" Asia, denoting developing countries in the region, namely Vietnam, the Philippines, China, etc., is defined as opposed to the "first-world" Singapore. It functions in association with economic and political boundaries to control citizenship entitlement. 3) Reproduction is stratified on the grounds that define who are desirable "mothers of the nation" – an ideology that not only subordinates women's citizenship rights to

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from the CPF Board, apart from their own savings, in order to be able to afford their medical cares. Critiques on the CPF regime also rise recently due to the economic difficulties when more and more are faced with loss of jobs yet prevented from touching their savings in CPF accounts. In other words, the Singapore welfare regime that works to reduce overall dependency on the state welfare, will neither avoid devaluation of certain paid work, nor reduce gendered labor division as women who provide unpaid labor within the households are considered unemployed and have to rely on tax-funded welfare.

their bodies but creates stratification of women from within, because of which *foreign brides* are further subordinated on their road to citizenship. 4) Analogies have been made between 'matchmaking business and' an '*industry*', and 'marrying Singaporeans' and an '*occupation*'. The two analogies lead to unjust narratives on *foreign brides*' disadvantaged encounters in marriage and familial affairs, especially, in the contemporary context of economic recession. The *brides*, though frequently compared to *employees*, are not entitled corresponding labor protection provided by the authorities. To conclude, the values and ideologies carried in these discourses are as patriarchal as ethnicized. Accounts given to rights and obligations, and the nation-building, have thus inevitably gendered and ethnicized citizenship pursued by *foreign brides* marrying to, and living in, the country.

Due to the limitation in resource, this study is unable to give full examination on media representation in a larger time-span and a wider range of media, which would have led to more diverse discoveries. Yet it could serve as a starting research of a more in-depth research project. As a suggestion to continuous research, the audience's response to such media exposure on the issue could be examined in order to reveal another stage of knowledge reproduction in the society. Such studies would definitely bring about more understandings on how local ideologies affect perception of this group of migrant women and their mundane life.

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Appendix

List of news articles collected (date descending):

Web fuels surge in Filipinas marrying foreigners
By: ALASTAIR MCINDOE,   The Straits Times (World - Regional) 24/10/2009

Silent cries of foreign brides
By: THERESA TAN,   The Straits Times (Prime - Commentary) 16/09/2009

American flies to S'pore to find a Vietnam bride
By: CRYSTAL CHAN,   The New Paper (News) 13/09/2009

Bride-hunt in Vietnam

By: JOHN LUI, The Straits Times, 29/08/2009.

Taiwan's bride brokers under scrutiny
By: HO AI LI,   The Straits Times (Prime - News) 11/08/2009

Mum has to leave son behind

By: SHREE ANN MATHAVAN, The New Paper (News) 31/07/09.

DUMPED by pregnant foreign bride via phone
By: CRYSTAL CHAN,   The New Paper (News) 26/07/2009

34-year gap is no barrier for newly weds
By: JAMIE EE WEN WEI,   The Straits Times (Home) 21/06/2009

The groom with white hair
By: JAMIE EE WEN WEI,   The Straits Times (Home) 21/06/2009

More older men seeking foreign brides
By: ZAKIR HUSSAIN,   The Straits Times (Home) 18/06/2009

Pay $167 a month for CREDIT CARD BRIDES
By: CRYSTAL CHAN,   The New Paper (News) 31/05/2009

DUMPED, HE FELT DUPED
By: CRYSTAL CHAN,   The New Paper (News) 24/05/2009

Scholars as foreign brides
By: TAY SHI'AN,   The New Paper (News) 19/04/2009

More foreign brides suffering in SILENCE
By: GENEVIEVE JIANG,   The New Paper (News) 11/03/2009

Imported wives left in the lurch
By: YEN FENG,   The Straits Times (Prime - Special Report) 09/03/2009

Help for single mums in downturn

By: ZAKIR HUSSAIN, The Straits Times (Prime- special report) 09/03/2009

Retrenchments: More women may be hit

By ZAKIR HUSSAIN, The Straits Times (Prime – special report) 09/03/2009

She came to work, but found lasting love

By: author unknown, The Straits Times (STIMES) 15/02/2009