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“Like Machines” in Thailand’s Seafood Industry

An Analysis of Burmese Female Migrants’ Experiences through
Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to answer the research question: *How can we understand the experiences of Burmese female migrants working in Thailand's seafood-industry through the lens of interdependent reproductive, productive and virtual economies?* The purpose is to increase understanding of Burmese female migrants' experiences, illustrating how these are influenced by complex social relations and power-dynamics. In doing so, this thesis aims to contribute to understanding of globalisation by revealing its uneven and oppressive material-symbolic effects. Using feminist, critical realist case-study design, primary fieldwork was performed in Samutsakhon, Thailand. Semi-structured individual- and group-interviews with Burmese female seafood-processing workers were carried out through a combined, qualitative data-creation approach. Research participants' stories are analysed in an iterative process using Peterson's (2002) inter-disciplinary "RPV-framing" for integrating *Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies* (understood as systemic sites of power). This analysis shows that Burmese female migrant workers' experiences are strongly shaped by systemic determinations of value that are reproduced at micro-, meso- and macro-levels. Their experiences construct, reproduce and are subjected to under-valuation of women's work, values which influence their lives in complex ways. I conclude that their choice to migrate is a reproductive strategy that results in multiple burdens and requires complex, flexible strategies.

Keywords: feminism; gender; globalisation; productive and reproductive work; social reproduction

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“The framing introduced here attempts to acknowledge complexity while politicizing it. In one sense, I seek to demystify the operating codes of capitalism – the pursuit of profit as a social logic – and to expose profit seeking’s domination dynamics. This is a project of particular difficulty yet urgency in today’s world. In another sense, I want to expose how gender/heterosexist coding permeates symbols, selves and systems and ‘naturalizes’ denigration of identities and activities deemed ‘feminine.’ And in a Foucauldian sense, I want to analyze the specificity of mechanisms of power – especially those most taken for granted – to build strategic knowledge” (Peterson, 2002:6).



Women working with fish-selection at a seafood-processing working-site in Samutsakhon, Thailand. (March 2017). Source: Author’s own.



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The MFS Scholarship Programme gives Swedish university students the opportunity to carry out fieldwork in low- and middle-income countries, or more specifically in the countries included on the *DAC List of ODA Recipients*, in relation to their Bachelor's or Master's thesis.

Sida's main purpose with this Scholarship is to stimulate the students' interest in, as well as increasing their knowledge and understanding of, development issues. The Minor Field Studies provide the students with practical experience of fieldwork in developing settings. A further aim of Sida is to strengthen the cooperation between Swedish university departments and institutes and organisations in these countries.

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အထူးကျေးဇူးတင်ရှိခြင်း

ဤစာတမ်းပြုစုမှုသည် အမျိုးသမီးများနှင့် လူအများသို့၏ ကြိုးစားအားထုတ်မှုနှင့် ဝိုင်းဝန်းပါဝင်ကူညီမှုများ၏ရလဒ်ဖြစ်သည်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏စာကိုရေးသားခဲ့သော ကျေးဇူးတင်စကားများ၏စကားလုံးများသည် လုံလောက်လိမ့်မည်မဟုတ်ပါ။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့စာတမ်းပြုစုချိန်ကာလတွင် ကြုံတွေ့ခဲ့ရသည့် အခက်အခဲ များအား ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အကူညီ ပေးသောသူများအတွက် အထူးကျေးဇူးတင်လိုပါသည်။

ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အရင်ဆုံး ကျေးဇူးတင်စကားများ ပြောကြားလိုသူများမှာ လတ်ထိုင်း ဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း (Raks Thai Foundation) က ‘ခါလိုလျင်’ (Carolynn) နှင့် ‘ခင်’ (Khin); လူ့အခွင့်အရေးနှင့်ဖွံ့ဖြိုးတိုးတက်ရေးဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း (Human Rights and Development Foundation) က ‘နန်းစံမွမ်း’(Nang San Mon) နှင့် State Enterprises Workers’ Relations Confederation က ‘ခွန်လင်း’ (Khun Rin) သို့ကို ကျွန်ုပ်တို့စာတမ်းပြုစုရန် အတွက် အရေးပါသည့် အချက်အလက်နှင့် နယ်မြေဆင်းအလည်ပတ်သွားခြင်း ဘာသာပြန်ပေးမှုများအား အရမ်းကျေးဇူးတင်ရှိပါသည်။ အကယ်၍သူတို့၏ကူညီမှုများမရခဲ့လျှင် ဤစာတမ်းပြုစုမှုသည် ပြီးပြည့်စုံလိမ့်မည်မဟုတ်ပါ။

နောက်ဆုံးအထူးကျေးဇူးတင်လိုသူများမှာ ဆာမွတ်ဇာခွန်းခရိုင်မှ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ဆုံမေးမြန်းခဲ့ရသော မြန်မာအမျိုးသမီး ရွှေပြောင်းအလုပ်သမားများတာဖြစ်သည်။ ဤစာတမ်းပြုစုမှုများသည် သင့်ရွှေပြောင်းအလုပ်သမားများဘဝ နှင့် သင့်အတွက်တာဖြစ်သည်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် သင့်အတွက် ယုံကြည် စိတ်ချ ကျေနပ်မှုများရတဲ့ ကျေးဇူးတင်စကားများသည့်ထက်မက ပြောပေးချင်ပါသည်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့နှင့်အတူ သင့်သို့၏ ရွှေပြောင်းအလုပ်သမားများအကြောင်းကို မိမိနှင့်အတူသည်ဆောင်ရင်းနှင့် နောက်ဆောင်ခွန်အားများဖြစ်စေဖို့ နှင့် အကြံဉာဏ်ကောင်းများဖြစ် ပေါ်ရန်အတွက် ခွန်အားများစွာပေးနိုင်သည့်အတွက်ကြောင့် ကျေးဇူးတင်ရှိကြောင်းပြောကြားလိုပါသည်။

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ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
FAR	Foundation for AIDS Rights
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPE	Global Political Economy
GSC	Global Supply Chain
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HRDF	Human Rights and Development Foundation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-DWT	ILO's Decent Work Technical Support Team
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual
LUMID	Lund University Master of Science in International Development and Management
MWG	Migrant Working Group
MWRN	Migrant Worker Rights Network
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUW	National Union of Workers
PE	Productive Economies
RE	Reproductive Economies
RPV	Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies
SERC	State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation
UN	United Nations
VE	Virtual Economies

ABBREVIATIONS

e.g.	example given
et al.	<i>et alii</i> (and others)
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> (and so on)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> (in the same place)
i.e.	<i>id est</i> (that is/means)
n.d.	no date

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1. INTRODUCTION

“A migrant worker is not an ATM-machine” was written on a trade union’s campaign-shirt to illustrate migrants’ exploitative experiences in Samutsakhon, Bangkok’s metropolitan area. Seafood-processing dominates in this province, mainly employing Burmese women. Precarious working-conditions and human-rights abuses in Thailand’s seafood-industry have received much international attention, pressuring Thailand to act. Worldwide access to information does however not grasp that this exploitation goes far beyond the workplaces, but exists within a scenery of structural hierarchies and social relations in which we all partake. In this thesis, I try to show how the racialized, gender-based oppression facing Burmese female migrants reflects patterns of systematic under-valuation of their paid and unpaid work. Throughout the following pages, I attempt to illustrate how Burmese women’s experiences are intimately linked to their exploitative conditions at work and in their communities. I claim that this understanding can help us grasp globalisation and counteract its uneven, oppressive effects.

1.1 Research Theme

The world is amid large and multifaceted processes of change. Many people are gaining access to work, health-care, education and technology, lifting themselves out of poverty (Green, 2016). The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies two momentous labour-market trends; unpaid work and labour migration,¹ accompanied by feminisation, regionalisation and globalisation (ILO, 2014). The forms under which people work – paid and unpaid – are complex and changing, with higher mobility, informalisation and irregularisation, alongside large demographic shifts (ILO, 2016a). This affects the world of work and subsequently, transnational dynamics and power-relations. Yet massive inequalities persist and grow – in terms of power, resources, treatment, opportunities – within and between countries and, not least, between women and men. Burmese women working in Thailand’s seafood-industry encompass various global trends, i.e.: more women pursuing paid work, while remaining underpaid and responsible for reproductive

¹ Almost half of the world’s 244 million international migrants (living outside their native country) are from Asia (UN, 2016). Estimates suggest that 66.6 million, or 44.3%, of migrant workers are women (ILO, 2016d).

work; increased intra-regional migration; informal, non-standard, precarious work within global supply-chains (GSC); and production-patterns whereby labour rights-abuses enable cheap, high-quality products and large profit-margins.

Critical voices are raised against predominant academic discourses' narrow-mindedness and failed sense-making of these processes. Peterson (2002) carries one of those voices. She introduces a cross-disciplinary framework for analysing globalisation through interacting *Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies* (RPV); the "RPV-framing". Feminist, post-modernist criticisms are to some degree gaining ground. As current multi-dimensional imbalances and challenges are expected to continue and grow, the world's leaders have agreed upon an agenda to address and defy those. The *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* calls for inclusive development, realisation of human rights, and achievement of gender equality. It involves *all* actors, at all levels and in every corner of the globe (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2016). This thesis responds to these academic- and policy-debates and builds upon the RPV-framing.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

My thesis aims to increase understanding of Burmese female migrants' experiences, currently or previously employed in Thailand's seafood-industry. Their stories constitute the main data-source, constructed through collaborative primary fieldwork in Samutsakhon. In an iterative process, I analyse their experiences through the RPV-framing's critical, feminist lens, distinguishing their reproductive, productive and virtual economies. I demonstrate how their RPV are interlinked in complex ways, influenced by systemic, multi-level under-valuation of their paid and unpaid work. In this way, I hope to show the value of feminist, post-colonial and critical interpretations of lived experiences by integrating voices of persons who are usually excluded from such discussions. I claim that Burmese female migrant workers' experiences are essential to understand the massive, material-symbolic effects of globalisation as they, on a daily and longer-term basis, develop complex, adaptive strategies to mitigate its oppressive effects on their and their families' lives. I therefore seek to answer this research question:

How can we understand the experiences of Burmese female migrants working in Thailand's seafood industry through the lens of interdependent reproductive, productive and virtual economies?

1.3 Contribution and Delimitations

Studies show how transnational migrants, and especially “low-skilled” women from low-income countries, face discrimination within and beyond their workplaces. The above analogy of migrant workers as “ATM-machines” tries to illustrate this situation. However, while academia insufficiently covers South-South-migration, studies on Thailand’s seafood-industry rarely present multi-dimensional analyses. Further, research-gaps exist on female migrants’ reproductive work outside care- and domestic-work sectors, including in GSC (Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012). Therefore, this thesis addresses the lacking understanding of complex interplay between, and racialized gender-dimensions of, precarious, underpaid *productive* work; unpaid *reproductive* work; and symbolic (*virtual*) meanings underpinning Burmese seafood-workers’ vulnerability, poverty and marginalisation. This thesis will however not discuss how to ensure marginalised groups benefit from economic development. Noteworthy, I do not focus on environmental/ecological pillars of sustainability. My empirical material does not incorporate male workers, even though they also suffer from many obstacles that mark these women’s realities. My case-study is small-scale and does neither account for various stakeholders, nor for detailed information about Burma.²

1.4 Thesis Outline

This introductory section has presented the thesis’ theme, purpose and research question, to be answered throughout remaining sections. In what follows, I give a brief contextual overview of Thailand’s dependency on, and legal/policy framework for, labour migration and its fishing/seafood-industries. Section three sets the theoretical and empirical scene of women migrants’ lives and work in Thailand. Section four outlines the thesis’ theoretical underpinnings; the RPV-framing. Thereafter, methodological choices are motivated and discussed. The empirical and analytical fieldwork-findings are presented and discussed in the sixth section. Finally, the concluding section summarises the findings vis-à-vis the research question, and implications for policy and research.

² Throughout this thesis, I write Burma instead of the country’s official name – Myanmar. The major reason is that Burma was used almost exclusively by the research-participants and field-assistants.

2. CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW: THAILAND'S ECONOMY

This sub-section serves to give a brief overview of Thailand's economic context, focusing on labour migration's role and legal/policy frameworks. I then describe Thailand's seafood-industry. This contextual understanding is key to enable the multi-dimensional, multi-layered analysis sought in the research question.

The Kingdom of Thailand's progressive socio-economic development is often recognised as a success story. In past decades, Thailand has progressed from low-income to upper-middle income status. Economic growth has coincided with rising incomes and job-creation, translating into rapid poverty-reduction. In 1986, 67% of Thailand's population lived in poverty; in 2014, only 11% – improving well-being, education and social protection. Nevertheless, Thailand's income-distribution remains unequal, with growing disparities within and between regions (World Bank, 2016). Low-cost, labour-intensive exports have marked Thailand's industrialisation-strategy (Kaur, 2004), and migration contributes significantly to its economic growth (UN, 2016).

2.1 Labour Law and Migration Policies

Thailand's leading economic position in the sub-region and high demand for "cheap" labour have resulted in millions migrating from less prosperous neighbouring countries, seeking jobs and better opportunities. Burma's socio-political-economic obstacles are the equation's other side (Traitungyoo, 2008:152). Thailand has around 2.3 million Burmese migrants (IOM/ARCM, 2015:5), primarily employed in fishing/seafood-industries, agriculture, construction, manufacturing and domestic work (ILO, 2016c; Roujanavong, 2013). Around 45% of registered Burmese migrants are women (MAP Foundation, n.d.). Thailand's constitution recognises that everyone is equal before the law, that women and men shall enjoy equal rights, and prohibits "unjust discrimination" (IDEA/ICJ/UNRCO, 2016:Section 27). However, only five of eight Fundamental Labour Standards Conventions are ratified (*see Appendix I*), restricting workers' rights to organise and protection from discrimination. Migrants are denied the right to form or join trade unions.

Thailand's migration-policies and strategies have varied over past decades, but intend to "regulate the irregular" (Arnold, 2004:2-5). In 2003, a bi-lateral Thai/Burmese

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was endorsed, permitting legally registered migrants two-year stays and possibly two additional years. After securing nationality-verification, migrants receive temporary passports and work-permits, qualifying for Thailand's social security-scheme. Complicated Thai-Burmese relationships postponed institutionalisation to 2009 and met criticism as many lacked required documentation or were unwilling/afraid to notify Burmese authorities. The MOU-process is lengthy, expensive and increasingly restrictive, why most Burmese migrate illegally. Almost half get temporary legal status as "irregular workers" but few access non-wage entitlements, and remain vulnerable to harassment (ILO, 2016c).

2.2 Thailand's Seafood-Industry

As a tropical "biodiversity hotspot" (Jones et al.,2016:30) with long coastlines, Thailand's geographical features are advantageous for fish- and seafood-production (FAO, 2009:2). This contributes to growth, trade, food-security and employment (FAO, 2016:54; Errighi et al.,2016:ix) and its vision as the "Kitchen of the World" (Kingdom of Thailand, 2006). Thailand's commercial fishing/seafood-industry is a multi-billion-dollar business. Despite drops it remains top-ranked, as the world's fourth largest fish/fishery-products exporter and biggest shrimp/squid/cuttlefish-exporter.³ The United States, the European Union (EU) and Japan consume half; the other half domestically (AF/ILO, 2015:16).

Thailand's seafood-industry has grown through participation in GSC, absorbing foreign labour, capital and technology to realise high food-safety standards. It comprises various actors of different size and degrees of formality (*see Appendix II*), obstructing Thai government authorities' regulations. This helps explaining its exploitative character; social upgrading of Thailand's seafood GSC has not accompanied the economic upgrading. Especially in pre-processing activities and on fishing-vessels, serious labour-practices and human-rights abuses are recorded, including forced- and child-labour and human trafficking. Lately, this has gained intense international media-attention (Errighi et al.,2016:ix-3;16-18; ILO, 2013:v). In 2016, the EU threatened Thailand with export-bans unless it "clean[s] up its poorly regulated seafood industry" (*The Guardian*, 2016).⁴

³ Thailand's seafood export-value ranked third until 2014 (US\$ 6,565 million; 4.9% of its global exports), following China and Norway, but was surpassed by Viet Nam (FAO, 2016:53-54;70).

⁴ One investigation is considered a starting-point of the international attention Thailand's seafood GSC has been subjected to lately, "uncovering" that it uses slave-labour and human trafficking (*The Guardian*, 2014).

These industries are highly gender-segregated; men work on fishing-vessels and women dominate land-based processing, where child-, women- and migrant-workers are most vulnerable (ILO, 2015b:6-14). This thesis covers seafood-processing: preparation, preservation and manufacturing, usually occurring in peeling-sheds, processing-plants, factories and intermediate markets (ILO-IPEC, 2011:14-15). Remaining sections will show how gender-dimensions go far beyond occupational segregation.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: GENDER, SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND MIGRATION

This section presents empirical and conceptual dimensions of this thesis' problem-area and reiterates research-gaps which it attempts to address. I define central concepts and present feminist research which provides understanding of social reproduction and gender-dimensions of migration.

3.1 Gender

Gender is understood as socially constructed features of people, enhancing roles, responsibilities, norms and values. These learned ideas vary over time and space and are changeable. This non-binary concept is often simplified to ideas about femininity and masculinity.⁵ I see gender as a social identity-marker across a spectrum, intersecting with e.g. race/ethnicity, nationality/citizenship, age, health/ability-status and sexual orientation. Gender-relations are hierarchical and construct power-imbalances at micro (family/household), meso (institutional), and macro (national/international) levels, reinforcing "vulnerabilities and differences due to bias and discrimination[...], leading to a vicious circle of cumulative disadvantage" (ILO, 2016b:13-14).

Gender equality is the goal: equal opportunity, treatment, outcomes and enjoyment of rights – for every person, irrespective of gender-identity – in all domains of life and work. This signifies that "all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes and prejudices" (ILO, 2016b:15). The Agenda 2030 identifies gender equality as a pre-condition for inclusive development.⁶

3.2 Development and Agency

A myriad of definitions and interpretations concern *development*. I proceed from Sen's (1999:xii) definition of development as expansion of freedom in a process whereby different forms of unfreedoms – hindering marginalised persons from exercising agency

⁵ While acknowledging that gender-identity includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA) persons, this thesis focuses on persons who identify themselves as women.

⁶ *Inclusive* refers to developmental processes that leave no one behind.

– are removed. Interlinkages and complementarities exist between individual freedom of agency and social arrangements. This idea of development, “the progressive expansion of the freedoms to be and to do” (Green, 2016:3), links to gender and identity; the freedom to not being defined or judged by your gender.

I use Kabeer’s (2005:14) conceptualisation of *power* as the “ability to make choices” and *agency* as persons’ *power to*; “ability to make and act on their own life choices, even in the face of others’ opposition” (positive) or the *power over*; “capacity of some actors to override the agency of others through, for example, the exercise of authority or the use of violence and other forms of coercion” (negative). Agency intersects *empowerment*; a complex concept that, in this study, is perceived as a process of change wherein a person who has been deprived the ability to make choices obtains this ability. If such active choices are made in a manner that challenges power-relations, by a person with previously no/limited opportunities to do so, the process is empowering (ibid.:13-15).⁷

In short, I see development as processes of (intended and unintended) change whereby persons achieve agency and power-relations are defied. Gender equality is the goal of such processes and thus inseparable from development. These interpretations are *feminist*, which I understand as “a project not simply to empower ‘women’ but to transform all structural hierarchies that are linked by denigration of the feminine” (Peterson, 2002:22).

3.3 Social Reproduction

Relationships between production and reproduction have long been key-concerns of feminist economists.⁸ Social reproduction is vital to understand the economy from a gendered perspective. Physical/biological- and socialization-processes, activities and choices (pregnancy, childbirth, infant/dependent-care, education/upbringing, cleaning, consumption, food-preparation etc.) contribute to daily and generational reproduction within households and other locations. These are contextual and experienced, valued and rewarded differently (Colen, 1995:78; Kofman 2012:144; Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012:149-154). Social reproduction tends to be “women’s domain” who arrange life to manage “double-edged” responsibilities. Globally, and especially in lower-income

⁷ Kabeer (2005:14) points out that someone who has never been disempowered cannot be empowered.

⁸ The 1970s’ domestic-labour debate was a starting-point, opposing productionist, dualist interpretations. Mackintosh’s (1981:10) expansions of social reproduction emphasise its different meanings, beyond biological and generational aspects of producing and maintaining the labour force.

countries, more women than men are involuntarily underemployed. Women's fewer paid work-hours translates into lower pay and gender-pay gaps, narrowing women into fewer, female-dominated jobs. This contributes to gender-segregation at work while reinforcing women's duties as the main care-givers (Fagan, et al., 2012:1; ILO, 2016d:17-19).

Social and economic policy can provide measures to meet workers with family-responsibilities' needs through planning/providing child-care, elder-care and other community-services (ILO, 2007:80). This can promote gender equality and non-discrimination and is often conceptualised as *work-life balance*; here defined as the "distribution of time and effort between work and other aspects of life" (ILO, 2011:1); women and men's paid and unpaid work⁹ and responsibilities at work and in their personal lives (Fagan et al., 2012:1). When work-life balance measures exist, these are often provided on a citizenship-basis, excluding migrants. Social reproduction is central facet of gendered global migration (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015:40).

3.4 Migration

In the research-field of migration, the gender factor was long overlooked. This changed in the 1970s-1980s by "adding" women's experiences to the previously male-dominated, gender-blind field. In the 1990s, feminists criticised macro-economic concepts and favoured micro-scale studies on gender-norms and intra-household relations, recognising women as an unfixed category, affected by intersections of e.g. ethnicity, nationality, age, class and sexuality. Such studies¹⁰ highlighted feminisation, irregularisation and commercialisation of Asian migration, following economic growth, rising inequalities, changing global production/reproduction-patterns, and growing occupational gender-segmentation (Yeoh, 2014:139-140).

Migrant workers are often high-skilled or willing to do low-paid/low-status jobs (UN, 2016:76). Migration-disciplines and policy-debates alike focus on South-North-migration,

⁹ *Unpaid work* is often vaguely defined. In 2013, an international statistical standard was introduced, acknowledging various unpaid forms of work with multiple functions for workers and society, e.g. "own-use provision of services", i.e. unpaid household/care-work (ILO, 2016a:4). UN-resolutions try to make women's unpaid work more visible. Many countries carry out nationally valid time-use surveys, shaping market-value estimations and inform policies. Based on the countries that try to measure its value, unpaid work constitutes between 20%-60% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (UNDP, 2015:117).

¹⁰ Yeoh (2014) refers to studies including: Bjerén, 1997; Buijs, 1993; Chant, 1992; Lim and Oishi, 1996; Mahler and Pessar, 2006. I have not used those in this thesis.

i.e. migrants' integration in Northern welfare-states. Development-scholars highlight remittances and skilled-labour migration's socio-economic significance. Scholars have identified knowledge-gaps on South-South-migration's implications for social welfare, institutions and relations in sending- and receiving-countries. Conceptual approaches suitable for policy-responses and governance-arrangements are needed, and research that recognises intersections of migration and social development (Hujo and Piper, 2010:vii-2;34; Kofman, 2012).

Feminist academics have expanded migration-theorisation, accentuating the importance of women migrating not only as workers and family-members, but the significance of both productive and reproductive work (Kusakabe and Pearson, 2013:961). Previously centring care, gendered migration-disciplines have recently recognised that *global social reproduction* is key for understanding care, placing care-work within global, inter-connected phenomena. Feminist-scholars influence globalisation-theory and policy, drawing attention to gender-dimensions of contemporary transnational migration (Kofman, 2012:142-145; Kofman and Raghuram, 2015:1).

3.4.1 Low-Cost Labour Migrants...

The paper *Who Cares?* (Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012:149-158) intersects my case, stressing the that Burmese migrants' trans-border care-strategies are very complex. From life-history interviews and surveys, it analyses Burmese women working in Thailand's garment-factories looking to safeguard their own labour-power's daily reproduction and their children's generational reproduction. Notwithstanding bad working/social-conditions, many are dedicated to stay in Thailand. Their care-strategies vary depending on individual conditions and show how both sending- and destination-countries obviate costs of labour-power reproduction; as does Thailand's industrial capital hiring them. This showcases that Burmese factory-workers face "gendered constraints on their mobility, agency, and ability to raise the value of their labor" (ibid.:159).

Despite covering a different sector, these arguments are central for my case, and have not yet been applied to seafood-processing. I proceed from Pearson and Kusakabe's (2012) identified research-gap concerning care-burdens of women migrating within the Global South to work in non-care-industries.

3.4.2 ...in Thailand's Seafood-Industry

As raised above, Thailand's seafood-industries are associated with grave human/labour-rights abuses and appalling working-conditions (ILO, 2015b:4). Manifold studies and non-academic documents highlight the exploitation on fishing-vessels.¹¹ Others apply ecological/environmental approaches,¹² as unsustainable exploitation of marine/coastal resources and overfishing cause substantial biodiversity-loss (World Bank, 2006:ii). While various studies acknowledge that pervasive child-labour associates with poverty and deficient opportunities to study, there is insufficient understanding of female seafood-workers' reproductive burdens and inadequate/non-existing child-care opportunities. Thus, I see a need to go beyond occupational segregation when analysing gender-dimensions of Thailand's seafood-industry.

Before presenting my theoretical framework, I raise one point which has not sufficiently come through in this section: the relevance of social identity-formation processes in relation to gender. Resurreccion and Sajos' (2010) study *Not a Real Worker* addresses how Thai employers and migrant couple-workers in shrimp-farms in Surat Thani construct gender- and migrant-subjects (a sense of "place") through work-practices and migration-processes. They view gender-identities as dynamic and diverse, and affected by farm-owners' productivity-seeking and migrants' need for shelter and income. The title refers to reproduction of the female worker-subject which distinguishes migrant subjects.

This section accentuated the importance of gender to understand transnational migration and female migrants' conditions in low-cost industries such as seafood-processing. Moreover, it recognised productive/reproductive interlinkages as central features of global migration. I try to contribute to this field through addressing several research-gaps identified through a theoretical grounding that takes understanding of these phenomena further.

¹¹ See, for example: Chantavanich et al., 2016; EJF, 2013; ILO, 2013; and Marschke and Vandergeest, 2016.

¹² See, for example: Bennett and Dearden, 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Lebel et al., 2015; and Magurran et al., 2011.

4. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: THE RPV-FRAMING

This section outlines my thesis' theoretical underpinnings. Peterson (2002; 2003; 2004) develops an inter-disciplinary framing used to grasp globalisation and rethink the global political economy (GPE). Emphasising interrelationships between *Reproductive, Productive, and Virtual Economies* (RPV), she creates the "RPV-framing", which shapes my understanding of my empirical material. The RPV-framing is described as a conceptual innovation to encourage cross-disciplinary, relational, multi-dimensional analysis and critical practice in respect to globalisation's¹³ uneven effects. It is founded on critique of predominant disciplinary paradigms' inadequate sense-making and politicising of contemporary neo-liberal globalisation. It further opposes disciplinary and epistemological separations of symbolic from material, seen as both analytically and politically problematic. Peterson addresses this double-edged critique with a framework that enhances identity, culture, economy and power when analysing the GPE, employing interpretive, feminist, post-colonial and Marxist perspectives (ibid.).

In rewriting the GPE, Peterson incorporates reproductive (RE), productive (PE) and virtual economies (VE) as "mutually constituted (therefore coexisting and interactive) systemic sites through and across which power operates" (Peterson, 2002:4), building on Foucauldian ideas of culture and economy as inseparable. This allows us to analyse interconnected conceptual and material dimensions of social reproduction/non-wage labour (RE); productive/waged labour (PE); and processes of meaning-systems, symbols, subjectivities and cultural codes (VE). This analytical exercise addresses masculinist, modernist and materialist fixations without forsaking their insights (ibid.:5). Thereby, we can grasp globalisation's complexities and how power and social hierarchies generate vast material effects, while entrenched in subjective symbolic/cultural systems (Peterson, 2004:62). This rethinking endeavour to irradiate "the intersection of race, gender and

¹³ Globalisation is defined as: "large-scale transnational processes occurring today at an accelerated pace (due to electronic technologies in service to economic neoliberalism) and with *extremely* uneven effects" (Peterson, 2002:4, emphasis in original). The processes Peterson refers to correspond to the labour-market trends in this thesis' introduction, i.e. migration, informal and flexible work arrangements, capital flows and global production-patterns.

economic inequalities as structural features of global processes” (ibid.:51), while inspiring “more effective resistance to asymmetries of power” (ibid.:63). Although interdependent and constantly dynamic, RPV are analytically separated and categorise this section, described through concepts and formulations drawing mainly from Peterson (2002).

4.1 The Productive Economy

The PE is the most familiar, conventional economy and is therefore presented first. It centres primary (natural resources), secondary (manufactures), and tertiary (services) production. It assumes market-exchange of goods and services, produced through specialised (gendered and racialized) labour-division. PE-sites include workplaces, markets, firms and transportation-networks, with the state outlining the rules. The PE’s agents/identities occupy themselves with waged labour, tying products (services, commodities) to factors of production (labour, symbolic/material resources) through production/consumption-processes (Peterson, 2002).

The RPV-framing moves beyond this, stressing that PE-conditions, varying intensely over time and space, are reshaped by globalisation’s economic restructuring – affecting work, identities, resources and power. Gender figures through occupational segregation, pay-gaps and poverty, influencing differentiations/perceptions of skilled/un-skilled; jobs’ “sex-typing”; full-time/part-time; authority/supervision; women’s/men’s work-experiences; and capacity to participate in trade unions. Exploitation-patterns composite other intersecting features (e.g. race, class, age), affecting identities, desires/tastes, job-expectations, work-relations, information and entitlements. PE-sites are interlinked with RE and VE, as public–private dichotomies – and conventional economic theory – recognise paid/productive work as economic but unpaid/reproductive work as non-economic/private. Flexibilisation and feminisation are key in global mass-production “insofar as women are preferred for the low-wage positions associated with export-led industrialization, downgraded manufacturing, and low-skilled service jobs” (ibid.:9). Thus, the PE has many well-known features but is rewritten to capture complexities that are oftentimes neglected, building on Marxists’ critique of development’s unevenness and inexorable exploitation (Peterson, 2004:63).

4.2 The Reproductive Economy

“The basis of all reproduction of any socio-economic formation is after all the maintenance of human life[...]this means that the satisfaction of basic needs to reproduce human life should also be the basic consideration in the construction of any social or economic theory” (Evers et al., 1984:23-24).

The RE is marginalised by conventional economic theory despite its essential role, addressing feminist emphasis on social reproduction and non-waged labour as fundamentals of the global economy (Peterson, 2004:63). Simply expressed, and as previously mentioned, the RE comprises families and private spheres, wherein human life is created, everyday-life sustained and socialisation reconstructed. Biological and social reproduction involve value-production whereby hetero-sexism is normalised. Sexed labour- and resource-division is assumed and often reproduced through identity/ideology-creation. Peterson’s rewriting encompasses more; that the RE is inseparable from culture, politics and economics, thus fundamental to social theory (Peterson, 2002:9). This is illustrated with five examples/concepts:

- i) *Inter-generational Reproduction* – i.e. negotiations about conditions of social members’ biological reproduction, e.g.: cultural norms; demographic dynamics; meaning/valorisation around sexuality; agency/identities regarding biological reproduction; reproductive health, choices and technologies; and social relations’ spatial/temporal composition (families, support-groups, communities) that enable parenting/inter-generational reproduction.
- ii) *Social/Cultural/Institutional Reproduction* – wider social relations encompassing biological reproduction, beside parenting-practices, including: meaning-systems/ideologies around gender, race/ethnicity, age, class and other “axes of difference”; linguistic, cultural, educational, religious, economic, political, and legal institutions; and socialisation into/reproduction of cultural norms and “ordering” (language, cultural rules – VE-dimensions).
- iii) *Continuity and Change* – the RE’s key-role in order *and* transformation; that processes of change are heterogeneous and dynamic, connected with social systems’ preservation. E.g., parenting is always entrenched in and reinscribe power-relations as new-borns/children are very receptive to ordering, why children’s identity-commitments are resilient to transformation.

- iv) *Consumption* – (conventionally feminised and marginalised, benefitting production) composing traditional consumption-sites, i.e. *families/households* (RPV-linkages) and structural linkages of high-income countries' consumption-patterns and lower/middle-income countries production-options “as producers conform to first world desires increasingly shaped by marketing forces rather than (sustainable) subsistence needs” (Peterson, 2002:11). Politicised, e.g. through identity-creation; citizenship-matters; consumer-rights movements and “gender-differentiated contributions to and control over household resources/income and decision making” (ibid.).
- v) *Non-waged Labour/Informal-Sector Activities* – informalisation – central to the RPV-framing – illustrates interactions and overlap amongst the economies; the RE's vital role; the inappropriateness of solidly separating economic from non-economic; and economic activities that most people in the world perform. It is gendered, racialized and linked to formal and informal work-sectors. Unregulated, informal economic activities (e.g. money-exchange/VE) are on exponential rise (regarding value, volume, socio-cultural importance) in contemporary global restructuring, even more so when including reproductive labour.

Flexibilisation – essentially about restructuring organisation of production through increasing the share happening outside the regulated, formal economy – depicts RE-PE-linkages. For example, strong growth in “homework”/home-based production (usually women being sub-contracted by men) blurs boundaries between unpaid/reproductive labour and paid/formal labour, merging flexibilisation and informalisation. Migration-flows' race/ethnic- and gender-features of “who works for whom” are exemplified by female migrants' work, e.g. domestic work. Such work is perceived as un-skilled and formed by history and modern global economic dynamics (Peterson, 2002:11, referring to Cohen, 1994), although it undoubtedly is significant; “sought-after but devalorized” in receiving-countries and central to sending-countries through remittances (ibid.:14, referring to Yadav, 1993–4; Chang and Ling, 2000).

4.3 The Virtual Economy

“Economics is only a system of values” (Steinem, 1997:84).

The VE is “less familiar but increasingly consequential – though dematerialized” and encompasses “financial markets, cyberspace, and the exchange less of goods than of signs” (Peterson, 2002:5). Specifying the VE permits us to disentangle two of globalisations’ most “mysterious” features:

- i) The vast growth in financial transactions, showing different linkages to (and de-linkages from) the PE. Grasping the “meaning and value of abstractions in the sense of being dematerialized (intangibles, services; virtual money, symbols of pecuniary magnitude)” and linking these to “expectations, identities, and practices” of RE and PE (ibid.:15) requires new models.
- ii) The “increasing salience of an economy of signs” (ibid.) involves exchange of abstractions (Internet, information and communications technologies (ICTs), the informational society), through symbolic codes and sign-values. Capital constructs consumer-subjectivities and “market cultures”. Positivist models cannot make sense of this, nor of linkages between the real and the virtual (ibid.:15-16).

Peterson (2002) notes that RE-VE-linkages (between e.g. symbolic ordering and subjectivity) are harder to spot as often less direct than RE-PE/PE-VE-linkages, and understood through comparatively unfamiliar literatures. Gendered subject-formation of the infant is the clearest RE-VE-link. RE are key in socialization/socio-cultural phenomena, i.e. identity-formation of “competition, risk, trust, short-term versus long-term expectations of reward, and investment orientations” (ibid.:11-12). Other RE-VE-linkages, enhanced by mainstream economists, are interlinkages between the family/household (site of accumulation, production, consumption) and macro-level phenomena. Implications for women’s structural vulnerability are political but heterogeneous, often intensifying feminisation of poverty, while “politicize[ing] gendered and racialized linkages among households, states, and global dynamics in ways that may promote social change” (ibid.:14-15). In sum, the VE is enhanced by the rewriting of the PE and RE above. In a similar manner, I will not use the VE at detail, but focus on dimensions of identity, agency, expectations and value in relation to RE and PE.

4.4 Triad Analytics

“We need a revamped materialism that will allow us to see the virtual realities of the globe” (Eisenstein, 1998:11).

To simplify rethinking and analytical change-overs, Peterson (2002:20-21) has developed triad analytics. It “posits identities (subjectivity, self-formation), meaning systems (symbols, discourse, ideologies), and social practices/institutions (actions, social structures) as co-constituting dimensions, or processes, of social reality” with “two-way interaction (co-constitution) among all three dimensions”. This can be visualised as a triangle (*see Figure 1*), with arrows representing that two-way connection, enabling:

- i) Relational understanding of social reality’s *material-symbolic* characteristics – recognising that these are interactive, interdependent and indissoluble;
- ii) Understanding of social practices and conceptual structures as indissoluble from identification-processes and politics as all three dimensions are co-constitutive.

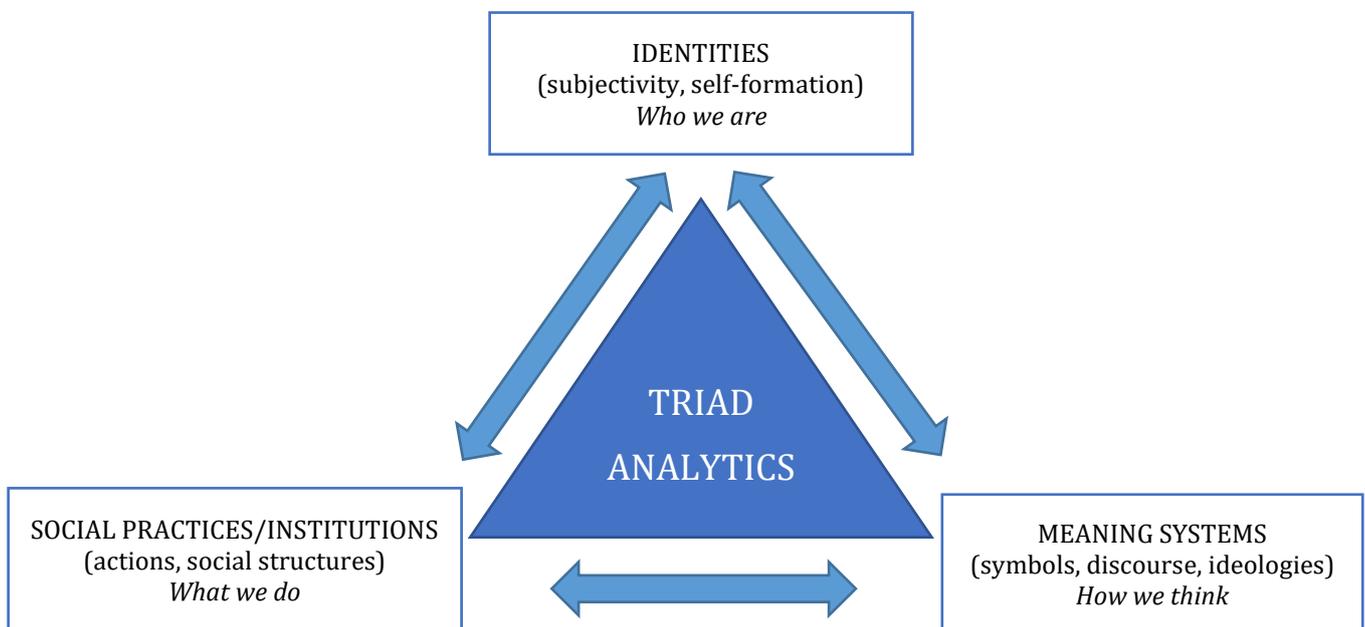


Figure 1: Triad Analytics. Source: Author’s own, adapted from Peterson, 2002:21.

4.5 Applying the RPV-Framing to Burmese Female Migrants

Applying the comprehensive RPV-framing to my case may appear over-ambitious; I argue it is appropriate. The framing's applicability goes beyond the GPE. Its point is not "making more ambitious theoretical claims", but "opening up" what is usually analysed (Peterson, 2002:21), encapsulating methodological/analytical/theoretical dimensions. It is "less a theoretical elaboration than a mapping technique" (ibid.:5) to highlight more features, interlinkages and relationships, aligning with my thesis' aim. The RPV-framing's fluidity and flexibility is at expense of its specificity (ibid.:5-6). Peterson has applied it to "rethink war", investigating "linkages between, and the gendering of, licit and illicit informal activities in relation to transnational financing of new wars" (Peterson, 2008:7-8). Other researchers applied it to globalisation's creation of Western/Euro-centric beauty-ideals and beauty-trade's impact on gendered beautification-processes of Mexican adolescence, embedded in power, privilege and racial hierarchies (McCracken, 2014:76-77).

The step to analysing Thailand's seafood GSC is not large; though my unit of analysis is the female workers upholding it. Thailand's seafood-industry is usually interpreted from conventional, gender-biased accounts that fail to grasp how its human/labour-rights abuses and economic significance are interlinked and mutually strengthening. I address this by applying the RPV-framing to the interviewees' stories to expand the analysis. This helps grasping how circuits of power operate at multiple levels, across interacting RPV. Concentrating on RE, I do not make justice of the framing's complexity. My take-away is "the economy" as a site of power, inseparable from culture and values, co-constituted of social reproduction, productive labour and intangible dimensions.

This marked and drove the entire research; influencing my interview-questions, civil society organisations (CSOs) I reached out to, and interaction in the field. I was dedicated to learning from the women's experiences across the economies. This process was iterative as I gradually learned more about the framing and interviewees' perceptions. The RPV-framing affected my interpretations of their situations, but as importantly – the research-participants' stories were crucial for my understanding of RPV. Thus, my analysis emphasises *their* economies' interdependence, and symbolic-material implications for *them*. Next, I discuss how my methodological choices and data-construction were made flexibly and compatibility with these theoretical underpinnings as well as the interviewees' realities.

5. METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The underpinnings sketched above fall into methodological choices, which are discussed below, including: research design and strategy; selected methods for data-creation and analysis; ethical considerations, and limitations. Altogether, these sub-sections enhance *how* the research question is answered, thus impacting the entire research-process.

5.1 Research Design

5.1.1 *Feminism and Critical Realism*

My choice to centre female labour migrants' experiences builds upon a will to integrate voices that are rarely heard, to "challenge and rethink what is claimed to be 'knowledge,' from the perspective of women's lives" (Reinharz, 1992:241). I adopt feminist, critical realist epistemological, ontological and methodological perspectives. I see research as a dialectical process wherein marginalised people's, including women's, subjective meanings and experiences are decisive. These oftentimes contrast society's internalised meanings (Tickner, 2006:21). To answer the research question, understanding is "coproduced" in a collaborative process of "interactions between the researcher and participants" (Hammett et al., 2014:21). This design resonates in every research-aspect, including the topic's conceptualisation (ibid.:5-6; Creswell, 2012:15-16), originating in critique of epistemological dichotomies' flawed understanding of social relations, and of conventional paradigms' exclusive, ignorant, gender-blind fashions.¹⁴

This position echoes in the research question, geared towards social *and* structural elements, and RPV-grounding's material/symbolic inter-dependency (Peterson, 2002:2). I incorporate constructivist/interpretivist ontological understanding of the social world as subjective and built over time through interactions with others (Creswell, 2012:20-21). Societal and gender-norms' implications are central themes and are, as all social phenomena, contextual and changeable. Seeing structure and agency as mutual, material dimensions (e.g. work, wages, health-care, housing) matter too (Hammett et al., 2014:21).

¹⁴ The iterative process of forming the topic, performing the research and interpreting the stories through the RPV-framing is inevitably encapsulated by my worldview, i.e. my values, ideology and interests.

5.1.2 Case Study

I chose a case-study design for two reasons. First; it concentrates upon complexities and particular nature (Bryman, 2016:60) of contextual phenomena within a “bounded system” (Creswell, 2012:73). Female seafood-workers’ realities constitute a single instrumental case, researched through detailed, in-depth data-construction through several tools and information-sources. Second; a case-study can deepen understanding of larger phenomena by making them more concrete (ibid.). I provide an empirical illustration of the RPV-framing’s approach to understand “informal activities, flexibilization, global production, migration flows, capital movements and virtual activities as interacting dimensions of plural global processes” (Peterson, 2004:51), trying to make these processes “more real”.

Female migrants in Thailand’s seafood GSC are the case, study-population and unit of analysis. Burmese women are among Thailand’s biggest migrant-groups.¹⁵ The location, Samutsakhon, is one of the largest seafood-processing units, with active CSOs, i.e. trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Poverty and marginalisation are heavier in rural areas, why this case is relatively “better”. The fieldwork-setting’s complexity and sensitive, inter-related topics, made it suitable to apply different methodologies, founded on their complementarities. I attempted to integrate those into a cohesive research-process (Mayoux, 2006:116-118) reflecting a holistic understanding of development and development-research.

5.2 Methods

My research-strategy has a qualitative data-construction approach, allowing me to “use different tools to approach the same question or concern from multiple directions” (Hammett et al., 2014:253). Subjective understanding is created in interaction with the interviewees which, combined with other methods, integrate generalisable understanding to identify structural/policy dimensions (Gorski, 2013:669). This enables the “cross-disciplinary, multi-institutional, multi-level, and ‘multi-causal’” (Peterson, 2002:5) analysis sought in the research question through the RPV-framing. It aligns with

¹⁵ Burma is a multi-ethnic nation and people of various ethnicities are represented in its out-migration, as labour migrants and refugees. The study’s scope is labour migrants, and all women interviewed speak Burmese. The ethnicity aspect goes beyond the study’s scope.

my critical realist-approach as it, rather than separating *micro* from *macro*, “appeals to the real ontological distinctions between the various layers or *strata* in the natural and social worlds” (Gorski, 2013:659, emphasis in original). Thus, to achieve my aim and produce valid, credible findings, this combined case-study design is justified.

5.2.1 *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Qualitative, semi-structured in-depth interviews with migrant women are the primary means of data-creation, aiming to obtain “understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2012:20) and “detailed, subjective understandings drawing on people’s knowledge, memories and perceptions” (Hammett et al., 2014:139-140). Having prepared an interview-guide with a mind-map format, divided into themes (*see Appendix III*) I could focus on listening while taking notes and maintaining flexibility. I followed the interviewee’s direction with follow-up questions, letting them impact the process. Despite not using technical/academic terms, they discussed various topics fluidly which spoke directly to the research question (ibid.:7;140-141). The order and sets of questions varied. Clear themes emerged and towards the end, data-saturation was achieved.

In total thirty-five female Burmese migrant seafood-processing workers were interviewed individually and in group-settings. Eleven took place in NGO-offices, and twenty-four in workers’ homes; in Mahachai’s large buildings where migrants reside, and in rural communities outside the city. Thirty-three women participated in January 2017, and two in March, when follow-up interviews with nine women were carried out. Time-frames varied but most were around sixty minutes each, with longer group-interviews.¹⁶

The interviewees were currently (N=23, *see Table 1*) or previously (N=12, *see Table 2*)¹⁷ working in seafood-enterprises. These included both larger, export-oriented factories and smaller-scale, unregulated peeling-sheds and markets, presumably in informal, primary-production stages, for which outreach and knowledge is lesser. Every interviewee shared the same gender, nationality,¹⁸ and (to some degree) class (belonging to the poorer

¹⁶ Some individual interviews were longer than one hour and others shorter (around thirty minutes). Three were only about five minutes each, as we reached them later than expected and they had little time available.

¹⁷ The women workers interviewed are referred to as W01, W2...W35 (meaning both ‘woman’ and ‘worker’) in chronological order based on time of the interview. While aware of that such “codes” negatively affect the narration (in comparison with using actual names other than their own), I prioritise the reader’s understanding through a possibility to link cases and quotes to information provided in the tables.

¹⁸ I did not ask about ethnicity as key informants told me prior to the worker-interviews that this did not impact their treatment. In Thailand, migrants as a group face discrimination, irrespective of their ethnicity.

sections of Thai society, although with clear differences between their economic status). Their ages varied (stretching from seventeen to fifty-three), as did their time in Thailand (from a few months up to twenty years) and legal/migrant status.

Three women were vital for this fieldwork in different ways: an NGO staff-member of the Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF) and two of the health-oriented Raks Thai Foundation. First, as gate-keepers, they provided access to the workers (Banks and Scheyvens, 2014:172). Through purposive- and snowball-sampling, utilising their networks, they approached relevant, potential research-participants.¹⁹ They informed workers beforehand about the study so they could choose whether to participate,²⁰ ensuring my interaction would not be disrupting or cause harm.²¹ These are significant ethical aspects.

Second, as field-assistants, they accompanied the fieldwork²² making Burmese-to-English-translations. Their expertise was useful both for me and the interviewees, involving health/rights-related information whenever participants asked for it. Oftentimes, friends and family-members interacted too. I will never know if responses had been different with interviews on a strict one-to-one basis, but adapted to what appeared most convenient; sitting together on the floor. Ultimately, the foremost priority was the participants' well-being (Mack et al., 2005:8).

Third, as key-informants.

¹⁹ My "criteria" were essentially; Burmese adult women (above fifteen years of age according to the ethical criteria of Lund University Master of Science in International Development and Management (LUMID)) currently working – or with experience from working – in the seafood-processing sector in Samutsakhon. I shared this, and the interview-guide, during discussions with the field-assistants (per phone and email) prior to the interviews, covering my intentions with and focus of the research.

²⁰ In this process, and in the field, Raks Thai incorporated several volunteers, whom were very helpful. The trade union Migrant Worker Rights Network (MWRN) was involved too in the preparatory process, and they often cooperate with the HRDF.

²¹ Interviews were made on a Sunday (often a day off), on an (unpaid) holiday (the Chinese New Year, as many companies are Chinese), during day-time of night-shift workers or mothers currently unemployed.

²² K07 facilitated interviews with W01-W12 (W01-W07 group interview; additional individual, taking place either at HRDF's office or in interviewees' homes). K08 facilitated interviews with W13-W15 and W30-W33, all individually conducted in interviewees' households). K09 facilitated interviews with W17-W29 and W34-W35, as well as follow-up interviewees with W17-W25, eleven of those in group-settings, all in interviewees' households/communities. W16 was interviewed without translator.

Table 1: Interviewees: Burmese Female Migrants Currently Working in the Thai Seafood-Processing Industry.

Code	Age	Arrival ²³ Thailand	No. of ²⁴ children	Household-members ²⁵	Family- members ²⁶	Current Work ²⁷
W01	18	2013	0	S/o, Sh & Shs	M, F, S&B/y x7, SSo	Ff L
W02	29	2016	1	H & B/y	M, F, So/13	Sf L
W03	23	2013	0	M & S/y		Ff L
W04	22	2012	0	S & 4 more ppl		Ff L
W05	25	2012	0	Cf/W12		Sf L
W06	22	2011	0	M, F & S		Ff L
W07	23	2013	0	B & S		Sf L
W08	22	2013	0	H, F/W9, F/W10, Fm	M, F, B/y x2, S/y	Sf L
W09	23	2015	0	Ff/W8, Cf/W10, Fm x2	F, 4 more ppl	Sf L
W10	24	2015	0	Ff/W8, Cf/W09 & Fm x2	F, 4 more ppl	Sf L
W11	29	2006	0	S	M, F, Sx2, Bx2	Sf L
W12	27	2016	0	Cf/W05	M	Sf L
W21	41	2009	3 (2)	H & Do/W34	So (So passed away)	Sf L
W22	35	2007	0 /inf	H, M, S, Sb	Sg(or b?).	Ff S
W24	30	2010	1 (2)	H & So (pre/7, Do born)	M, F, S	Ff
W25	22	2012	1	H (Follow-up: lost job)	G/1,5, M & F	Ff L
W26	24	2015	2	H & Do x2		Sf
W29	28	1997	1(2)/pre	H, So (pre/3)	F (M passed away)	Sb S
W30	38	2001	1	H	Do, M, S/o	Sm S
W31	36	2013	0 (1) /inf	(Da, post-natal death)	H	Sm S
W32	24	2016	1 (2)	H (pre/7)	G/7, M & F	Sm S
W34	17	2012	0	M/W21 & F	B/o (B/o passed away)	Sf L
W35	17	2012	0	H, Sh, Shs	M (Samutsakhon)	Sf L

²³ If they have migrated several times to Thailand, this year refers to their first entry in Thailand.

²⁴ When a second number is put in parenthesis, it refers either to current pregnancy or to the loss of a child (explained under "Family-members"). Sometimes the number is followed by these codes: inf=infertile, pre=pregnant, "/xx" refers to which month of pregnancy.

²⁵ Refers to everyone living in the same household (i.e. room) as the interviewee. The codes used are: H=husband, Da=daughter, So=son, M=mother, F=father, S= sister, B=brother, C=cousin and F=Friend. Sometimes a capital letter is followed by: f=female, m=male (e.g. Cf refers to a female cousin), w=wife, h=husband, s=sister, b=brother of someone else (e.g. Bw=brother's wife (sister-in-law), Sh=sister's husband (brother-in-law), and Shs=sister's husband's sister). When age has been shared, "/xx" follows the code (representing age), or "/y"=younger, "/o"=older. "B x2" means two brothers. If another interviewee is mentioned, their code is put afterwards: "/Wxx". Ppl=people.

²⁶ Refers to everyone in their family in addition to those in their household. In all cases but W35, these persons are supported family-members in Burma. (Same codes as for household-members).

²⁷ Sf=Seafood factory, Ff=Fish factory, b=bakery, m=market. L=large enterprise; S=Small enterprise.

Table 2: Interviewees: Burmese Female Migrants Previously Working in the Thai Seafood-Processing Industry.

Code	Age	Arrival Thailand	Child -ren	Household-members	Family-members	Current ²⁸ Occupation	Work prev.
W13	31	1994	3	Da /3y, /11m	H, Da/14/Thai	Salon Cc x2	Sf
W14	35	2007	6	H, baby, So x2	Three children	Cc	Sp
W15	36	2007	3	H, So/baby, So/17	So/6	Cc	Sf
W16	38	2004	2	Alone	So/9, Da/2	CSO	Sp
W17	35	2011	2	H, So/2	Da	Cc	Sp
W18	35	2011	3(4)	H /pre	Da/14, Da/12, So/10	Ccx2(paid)	Sp
W19	53	2012	5	H, So/8+10x2, Da+So/20sx2		Cc	Sp
W20	43	2014	5	H, Da/3, Da So/20s, B	Da/20, So/8, M, F, S/y	Cc	Sp
W23	38	2007	3	H, Da/18, Da/5, Da/1	M&F passed away	Cc	Sp, Ff
W27	42		2	H	Da x2	HP, HC	Sp
W28	46		3	H, grandchild	Da, So x2/20s	HP	Fb
W33	38	1997	1	H, Do		Cc, V	Sp Fp

Table 3: Key Informants.

Code	Name	Work	Title	Origin
K01	Ms. Vanessa Tui (pilot) ²⁹	NUW	President	Fiji
K02	Ms. UssaRin (Rin) Kaewpradap	SERC	International Affairs Officer	Thailand
K03	Mr. Aung Kyaw	MWRN	Vice President	Burma
K04	Ms. Suthasinee (Pick) Kaewleklai	MWRN	Coordinator	Burma
K05	Mr. Kon Soe	MWRN	Officer	Burma
K06	Mr. Some Satien Tanprom	MWG, before FAR	Project Coordinator (FAR), Committee Member (MWG)	Thailand
K07	Ms. Nang San Mon	HRDF	Women's Education Coordinator	Burma
K08	Dr. Khin Thant Zin	Raks Thai	Health Advisor	Burma
K09	Ms. Carrolynn Mwe	Raks Thai	Field Officer among the Migrants	Burma

²⁸ Cc=Child-care, sometimes the number of children taken care of is indicated (all perform household-work). Codes for not working due to: HP=health-problems, HC=Handicraft, V=Volunteering. Note that "current occupation" refers to the reason why they are not currently employed, therefore the term occupation is used. Also, note that everyone represented in Table 1 but W21 is responsible for care- and household-work.

²⁹ The pilot interview is not included in the thesis. It mainly served for inspiration and practicing interview techniques. It was held in December 2016 with the president of the National Union of Workers (NUW) of Fiji, a tuna-workers' trade union, centring lessons learned from her four decades of engagement in Fiji's male-dominated labour movement.

5.2.2 Key Informant Interviews

Primary data was generated through key informant interviews with persons holding substantial experience from working with migrants in the labour-rights movement and NGOs. These interviews served partly to access broader, more general understanding, to enable the multi-institutional/multi-level analysis explained above. Further, their first-hand experiences improved my contextual understanding, why five were held before the worker-interviews.³⁰ Additionally, the gate-keepers/field-assistants were interviewed in the field (*see Table 3*).³¹

5.2.3 Participatory Observations and Desk-Research

Beyond verbal data, this research includes participatory observations to expand my understanding, carried out at an open-air fish/seafood-market and processing-site in Mahachai, and in migrants' communities. For readers to partake in this, Appendix IV provides some photos.³² Desk-research has brought additional knowledge and understanding; both more detailed and broader, externally generalisable. This is integrated in an embedded research-design and complements, crystallises/triangulates findings, generating a "more complete" picture. Further, it can improve key-findings' usefulness and thereby strengthen validity and trustworthiness (Bryman, 2016:384;638-639) while deepening the analysis; linking the workers' voices to global processes.

5.2.4 Data Analysis

The primary verbal data generated field-notes,³³ audio-recordings and transcripts. I utilised the software NVivo for transcription and coding, comprising the main data-source. Transcribing, coding and analysis were performed in an iterative, inductive process. I tried to maintain the data's meaning when, in a transparent, controlled and systematic manner, identifying trends and patterns to increase the understanding sought in the research question. To safeguard reliability, robustness and validity, and reduce

³⁰ On, for example working- and living-conditions, workplace-characteristics and cultural aspects in this particular location. The depth went beyond the pre-understanding I had attained from desk-research.

³¹ Key informant refers to the nine persons in Table 3. Four of them (K02, K07, K08 and K09) were also field-assistants and translators, and three (K07, K08 and K09) were gate-keepers, accompanying my worker-interviews. None of them wanted to be anonymous, confirmed again closer to the thesis' deadline.

³² All information that could potentially lead to identification of participants has been removed. None of the photos are related to the interviewees.

³³ The field-notes included context, the location's micro-geographies, laughs, voices, gestures and body-language, people entering/exiting the room, etc. These were added to the transcripts to improve accuracy.

risks of bias and error, multiple data-construction and analysis-methods and sources were used, complementing one another and creating deeper, wider data (Hammett et al., 2014:253) through crystallisation. Crystallisation pursues to open research to complex, in-depth understandings rather than validating one singular truth (Tracy, 2010:844). To that end, I performed follow-up interviews with nine participants.

To answer the research question – creating understanding of Burmese female migrants' experiences – the fieldwork-data is analysed through the lens of Peterson's RPV-framing. Thus, the analysis is feminist, critical, inter-disciplinary and relational. As discussed, I apply these analytical categories to the interviewees' realities, guided by triad analytics to identify identities, meaning-systems and social practices/institutions.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

In each interview, I initially presented myself and the research, emphasising my intention as a student to *learn from them*, attempting to position myself in relation to the various “trenchant markers of difference” (Sultana, 2007:374-375). After guaranteeing full anonymity³⁴ and asking for permission to audio-record, their oral consents were recorded. These are central aspects to meet quality- and ethical standards. The field-assistants' impact on the fieldwork went beyond their contacts, skills and knowledge. Thanks to their friendly, confidence-inspiring manner, connecting with the interviewees and gaining their trust was easy – despite the language-barrier, multiple layers of power-dynamics (and different perceptions of power?), and highly sensitive topics. They generously shared their stories, experiences and strategies for tackling numerous challenges. I avoided topics that appeared too sensitive.³⁵

I experienced that interview-situations are unpredictable encounters of respect and empathy, many “emotionally and mentally draining” (Hammett et al., 2014:80)³⁶ and requiring ethical choices. I had chances to show what Bryman (2016:387) considers commitment and rigour; a “substantial engagement with the subject matter”. Personally,

³⁴ All information that could possibly lead to identification of a migrant-worker participant has been deleted.

³⁵ For example, one field-assistant told me that an interviewee had experienced sexual abuse by four men on her way to work. This was not brought up in the interview, but afterwards, I was told about her case.

³⁶ Some interviews evolved into discussions on how to provide support, or advice on where/how to seek health-care. A few interviews involved personal experiences and conversations beyond the study's scope.

I see this as practising imagination; “the possibility of being somewhere that is not the Self” (Spivak, 1997:2). The women’s stories were so strong, it was impossible not to.³⁷

5.3.1 Reflexivity, Positionality and Power

To realise the study’s aim, concerns of reflexivity, positionality and power-relations are key. These were constantly regarded throughout the research, especially in the field, as multiple, interacting attributes of difference were at play. The study can only represent the women’s voices through “negotiated spaces and practices of reflexivity” (Sultana, 2007:374-375). Being a white woman from a Northern welfare-state (Sweden) has brought multifaceted privileges, and I share few experiences with the participants. The worker-interviews shunned technical/academic topics which could raise concerns of “theoretical bias” (Kapoor, 2004:633), building field-research upon concepts neither defined nor recognised by participants. In fact, however, this was an active choice, as *their* understandings were at heart. I avoided a language that further distanced us, asking questions of relevance for, and easily understood by, them. This was essential to enable ethical research-practices (Sultana, 2007:374) compatible with the feminist stance; representing their views and realities to a degree as large as possible (Creswell, 2012:20).

This is far from simple. As Kapoor (2004:644-645, applying Spivak’s post-colonial critic to the development-field) stresses; development-research is performed within unequal power-relationships. The participants – women members of unorganised labour – are highly marginalised. The intention is to use my position and privileges (as a graduate-student with experience from, and a contact-network at, the ILO-Bangkok)³⁸ to, rather than speaking *about* or *for* them – speak *with* them (ibid.:628; Sultana, 2007:374-375). I want their voices to be “part of a wider conversation” (Green, 2016:6) on how to make

³⁷ “Giving something back” can be a gesture of (very symbolic) appreciation, but also confirm/strengthen power-imbalances. I discussed this with field-assistants, and gave money (300 baht, equal to the minimum wage for one day) when they suggested so, to compensate those who travelled to the HRDF-office, and to the women whose economic situations were tough even in comparison with other migrants. I brought cookies/snacks to each interview, and gave each participant a post-card with motives from my home-town, on which I had written my thanks and contact-details. In addition, the Raks Thai field-assistants brought tooth paste and shampoos as gifts.

³⁸ My ILO-internship has been more than a privilege-marker; it has facilitated the fieldwork. Partly because colleagues had recommended certain CSOs, but mostly because it gave me recognition by staff of the involved NGOs and trade unions, who enabled my contact with the workers. Sometimes field-assistants mentioned “ILO” along with “Matilda” and “Sweden” when presenting me and my research for the workers, but I do not think this made me perceived very differently by the interviewees. The key-informants have been very encouraging towards my research. It may be that my experience as an ILO-intern was seen as evidence that I am “on their side” and, possibly, that my research will have a larger impact than is the case.

change happen. I acknowledge that this representation cannot entirely escape “othering”, but I tried to be “scrupulous” and establish ethical exchanges (Kapoor, 2004:642-644).

When most fieldwork took place, I had spent seven months in Thailand, but never been to Burma. This study therefore has clear limitations in terms of flawed language- and context-specific knowledge, i.e. customs, manners and beliefs. I ask the reader to be mindful of this. Recognising and reflecting upon one’s positionality is central in all research-phases; as is awareness of the limitations these matters bring.

5.4 Limitations

5.4.1 Language

Self-reflections aside; my absent Burmese-skills distanced me from the interviewees, and rendered direct dialogue impossible. This may be my thesis’ biggest limitation. Having most interviews translated between Burmese and English³⁹ is a large limitation for a feminist researcher. Despite the translators’ skills and focus; nuances and depth were undoubtedly lost in this data-creation process (Hammett et al., 2014:151). Certainly, I did not understand, identify or perceive “everything”. To address this, and avoid impaired validity, I asked field-assistants for clarifications when needed.

None of us directly involved in the research has English as first-language. For readability- and representation-purposes, after completing transcriptions, I corrected grammatical errors and deleted repeats. While limiting the material’s accuracy, it neither impacted the content considerably, nor its meaning-creation. Concerned with minimising appropriation by avoiding misrepresentation (England, 1994:250), I wanted to draw attention to their actual stories in a way that I would have liked to be represented.

5.4.2 Contextuality

During the fieldwork, I took contextual notes on body-language, intonation and laughs, trying to capture group-dynamics (Hammett et al., 2014:139-140). However, linguistic barriers implied considerable limitations as to the contextual, non-verbal data, and consequently, to the power/relationship-analyses I make. Using different methods was a

³⁹ One of the workers (W16) was interviewed without a translator. Five key informants (including the pilot interviewee) spoke English, whereas four required translation between Thai and English.

way to “compensate” for these limitations, addressing “manageability in relation to skills, resources and time available” (Mayoux, 2006:116). I justify the varying interview-settings and durations with the flexible approach in respect to situational features – important quality-criteria for qualitative fieldwork (Bryman, 2016:387), adding to its methodological consistency.

This thesis centres the migrants’ time in Thailand, and so did the interviews. That I provide little historical and Burmese contexts limit understandings. Burma is however understood through the women’s migration-experiences, reasons for migrating, potential journeys back, family-composition and dreams. *Their* stories are, after all, most central for understanding the full picture of their experiences.

5.4.3 *Methods*

Peterson (2002:2) suggests that effective globalisation-theorisation needs interdisciplinary sensibilities, “accommodate[ing] multiple units of analysis, and methodological pluralism that accommodates both empirical and interpretive insights”. I do not meet these criteria, with a single unit of analysis and limited methodological pluralism. However, I do not claim to theorise globalisation, but use the RPV-framing to grasp interlinkages and gender-dimensions within this case, without losing the interviewees’ subjective meanings.

The thesis could have benefitted from more “pluralism”, i.e. quantitative methods and/or more actors’ participation. However, I chose the most relevant ones.⁴⁰ My qualitative data-creation approach, ontological and epistemological stance – and the explicit focus on female workers’ stories – make this limitation rather trivial. I motivate focus solely on women with my feminist stance’s attention to the most vulnerable. I do however recognise that excluding male workers’ views flaws my gender- and power-analyses.

⁴⁰ Via one NGO-volunteer, we tried to arrange participatory observations in a closed seafood-factory in Samutsakhon. For security reasons, this turned out to be infeasible. I could possibly have interviewed an employer, but I decided not to as this would have been in another province. I wanted to maintain the case-study approach and centre the workers. Further, the CSOs included are by many – including some interviewees, key informants and ILO-colleagues – considered the most active and supportive ones.

6. ANALYSING BURMESE FEMALE MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE RPV-FRAMING

Burmese female migrants are here seen as *agents of development*, who participate in, and make significant contribution to, *their* reproductive (families/households); productive (seafood-processing); and virtual (signs/value) economies. In this section, I use the RPV-framing to highlight how power-dynamics and racialized gender-dimensions influence their experiences, seeking to answer the research question and “opening up” what is usually discussed. The women’s stories get most attention, while understanding obtained through key informants and participatory observations have a complementary, crystallising character. Illustrative cases and quotes of *all* thirty-five interviewees are interwoven to highlight their experiences’ complex, subjective nature. As “trade-offs” between their voices and mine prevail, my separation of and linkages between their RPV are somewhat simplified, aiming to leave relatively more space to them.

Analysis of the research-participants’ stories through the RPV-framing has been an iterative, interpretive process, using concepts introduced in section three and four. While concentrating on their RE, I stress their RPV’s interdependence and symbolic-material implications. I acknowledge the RPV-framing’s complexity, and that I only account for a share. Due to my thesis’ limitations, plentiful information from the empirical data is omitted,⁴¹ hampering the contextual understanding of the case. Addressing this, I encourage use of Table 1 and 2, listing research-participants’ features.

The interviewees’ RPV comprise a sub-section each. The final, summative sub-section discusses RPV-linkages while interpreting the thesis’ title; *like machines*, and whether it “suits” their realities. Finally, I discuss the wider meaning of this understanding, arguing that Burmese female seafood-workers’ stories can help us grasp globalisation, which in turn can be used strategically to transform economies.

⁴¹ As the RPV-framing is not explanatory, and my scope is limited, I have limited the analysis. Consequently, phenomena of great importance for the interviewees – e.g. religion/spirituality, natal families in Burma and remittances – are not included in ways that reflect the interviewees’ realities/meaning-systems.

6.1 Parenting and Power – Reproductive Economies

Social reproduction is central in feminist research and the RPV-framing – and in the interviewees' lives. Therefore, the RE gets relatively more space in this analysis. I illustrate this throughout two sub-sections, enhancing RE as determining their migration-experiences, and their RE-choices on a daily and longer-term basis.

6.1.1 Migration – A Reproductive Strategy

The life-changing decision to migrate to Thailand for productive work was embedded in social reproduction. Hence, migration-experiences are mainly discussed within RE, recognising interlinkages with PE and VE. Thirty-four interviewees⁴² referred to RE-dimensions (families/households, inter-generational reproduction, health) as main-reasons for migrating; economic problems, unemployment and poverty – a desire to give their children and other family-members a better future. For several, their parents were getting old, unable to work, and the only available choice to safeguard their survival was to migrate to Thailand for work, where pay is better. The choice to migrate was thus driven by a will and need to ensure social reproduction.

The economic situation wasn't good, so I came to look for a job and a better life. Actually, nobody wants to come. Everybody wants to stay in Burma, but we cannot earn as much money there as here. We all just want a house there (W18).

Nearly all migrated through brokers,⁴³ by car/truck with “other villagers” (often nine-fifteen persons, “packed” at a small surface, whom they usually did not know). It was a difficult journey, with insecurity and fear of the police and immigration-authorities. Most travelled without documentation, had to walk certain distances and hide in the jungle without food, and several were arrested. Broker-fees are high (over 10,000-15,000 baht),⁴⁴ as are arrestment-fees. I share a glimpse of one migratory experience:

⁴² All but W31, who: “wanted to get the experience and knowledge [of migrating] [laughs] My farm-work was okay, my business went okay, but I wanted to know: how's Thailand these days? That's why I came here, not for economic reasons. I got a lot of knowledge about Thai culture and met people with different experiences”.

⁴³ Some interviewees came to Thailand as children, with parents (W13 and W29 as eight-year-olds). W22 came with her mother and sister, and a few others with siblings, but a majority came alone, as adults.

⁴⁴ Roughly around 300-450 US Dollar. 1 Thai Baht is equal to 0.029 US Dollar (Exchange rate 14 May 2017).

I want to bring up my feelings. When I came here, I faced many problems. Can you allow me to tell my story? (W21)

“Yes, please!”

The first time in Thailand, we had nothing – no mattress, no mosquito-net – nothing. There was nothing in our room, nothing at all, we just slept on the floor. We faced a lot of problems, and we had to face them ourselves. No money, no job, no income. We sought jobs with a broker. Some people gave us things. We only ate grass, some plants, just picked it up. We took our problems with us when we came here (W21).

The first time in Thailand was unanimously described as challenging; marked by inability to communicate in Thai, no money, little food, oppression and fear. Migrating illegally is generally worse for women than for men. For several, it took time until getting a job (one of many RPV-interlinkages), depending on support from other migrants in their community for clothes, food and other material/basic needs. This clearly reflects the inseparability of material-symbolic dimensions (thus, RPV-interlinkages). Most migrants have severe financial problems; living in poverty, in-debt and pressured to sustain many people’s subsistence – affecting mental health:

We face difficulties to sleep. That’s one of our biggest difficulties. We hope to go and see Burma, but there, we’re job-less. If you’ve nothing to do, no job, then people are very much suffering. With nothing to eat, you just go around, picking leaves... On a rainy day, we pick rice and sell to get some money. One day at the time. That’s why we’re all rushing here – because it’s better here (W21).

The interviewees’ migration-experiences and processes of getting a job vary, but women’s challenges exceed men’s. Thirty-four entered “irregularly” (as non-MOU-migrants), most registering in Thailand. Limited access to information was oftentimes mitigated by helpful relatives/friends.

If women workers don’t have work-permits or aren’t registered, we wait for five months. During this time, we hide from the police, because they arrest migrant workers without documents. We hide in our rooms, we cannot go anywhere. Especially women workers (W06).

For men workers, if they have many tattoos, or if they are 'gender men',⁴⁵ like this, employers don't allow them to work. They must wear certain clothes to look a little bit smart. Then they can get a job.[...] For women and men it's very difficult to find a job, but for women it's more difficult (W04). You have to look clean and smart (W05).

It's easier to get that job for the younger ones (W18).

W02, the only interviewee who never migrated illegally, faced problems nonetheless. The broker restrained her from working for the company on her work-permit, hiding her and fourteen others without providing food, before selling them to another broker.

I worked no more than three hours/day, sometimes just one hour. I had to leave – the employer had me pay 2,000 baht/month for rent, and I didn't have enough. He kept my documents. Finally, I ran away and asked HRDF and MWRN for help. We went to the Burmese embassy in Bangkok, who contacted the agent-company in Burma. Eventually – after passing several agents and brokers – I got my passport back for 10,000 baht, plus another fee of 10,000 baht, plus 1,000 baht/month cut off my salary for the original broker-fee. I was sent to another province, for fourteen days I had no job. I had to stay in my room, just waiting for a job (W02).

This illustrates more than employers' maltreatment of workers and that entering regularly does not guarantee smooth migration-processes; that Thailand's migratory system fails to control. It also showcases the power that a worker, whose rights have been violated, can gain through support from, in this case, trade unions/NGOs, thanks partly to her path being formally registered. But, importantly: information about supportive institutions helped W02 to act, turning a disadvantageous work-situation into a better one. W02 now works for a large seafood-enterprise with better conditions and will be compensated for these expenses. This reflects virtual dimensions of productive work and social practices/institutions in an individual case. Hierarchical structures make this a

⁴⁵ Referring to LGBTQIA-persons, and persons with an "androgynous style". Such discrimination throws light on oppression of everything deemed feminine.

success-story. Most workers are ununionized,⁴⁶ with limited information about human/labour rights and social practices with potential to enable their realisation.

If you've been violated so badly inside the factory and then strike, the company cannot function. We try to teach them how to build union-power. How that power can create a change and impact working-conditions, fix the violations. They can see that power very easily (K04).

This depicts the importance of *seeing* things differently, and the ease of doing so, once you get an opportunity to listen and be heard (which does not require high education). That this is true for only one interviewee visualises the impact of power-dynamics on their lives. Low agency associates with multiple identity-markers (VE) i.e. gender, race, legal status, age. Younger women were often first in their families to migrate; “*because we're teenagers, we came first*” (W03). Most felt unwelcomed to Thai society, experiencing discrimination at work and beyond; fearing violence, abuse, harassment and theft on the streets by local “gangs” and by local/provincial police/authorities. Nonetheless, they had no choice but creating an every-day life in Samutsakhon. Two quotes exemplify how power-dynamics among different actors and social institutions interact, drawing attention to how racialized gender influenced their journeys:

They didn't want me. I had many problems. No job. We were ten people living together in one room. I couldn't speak Thai (W16).

I came sixteen years ago with my brother. My older sister was already here. We crossed the river. When we reached the border-area, we had to hide – afraid of the police. It was a difficult journey. I was unregistered – I couldn't go anywhere. I was constantly worried about living and eating. Therefore, I only worked three-four days/month, ten hours, earning 100 baht. I was lucky; my older sister cooked. Because of her, I could survive. I stayed only one year, shrimp-peeling. My sister worked less, she couldn't stand the sun. [Points to ceiling, smiles]

⁴⁶ Migrants can go around Thailand's ban on jointing trade unions by joining MWRN, as it is unregistered and therefore not officially recognised as a trade union by the Thai government. Few interviewees are members, but several have joined activities on e.g. May Day.

Remaining persons⁴⁷ worked here, constructing this building. One day, the migration-police arrested me and seven others. For two months, I worked near the border, ripping chili-pepper. It was only enough for eating, so I went back to Burma.[...]Then they had a new registration open.⁴⁸ The broker-fees were around 15,000 baht. Coming back was also very difficult. I slept on a boat for four-five days. I started working at a big factory, paying another 15,000 baht for the registration-card. As a registered migrant, I could go anywhere, earn money, enough for living, eating – everything. So, it's ok[....]I want another baby, but I need to continue working over the next year, then we'll go to Burma and have another child (W30).

W30 strategically worked her way through vulnerability to more stability. Although she wants another child, savings come first. Reproductive choices sometimes involve prioritising PE over RE.

6.1.2 Un-Paid, Informal, Essential

W30 became pregnant while working for the large seafood-company. She lost her job and decided to go back to Burma for three years. After leaving her child with her mother she came back, since then working at a shrimp-market. W30's case illustrates aspects of the interviewees' RE. Although seventeen of the eighteen mothers interviewed are the main-carers, their *choices* associated with reproduction vary. Most mothers stay home for one or a few years, unpaid, taking care of their new-borns. Whether in Burma or Thailand, depends generally on where they gave birth, and potential child-care solutions. Many children are cared for in Burma by female family-members. Women whose children cannot stay there, while unable/unwilling to stop working, let them play at/near their workplace until starting school. This was visible at the seafood-market I observed. Care-taking of others' children happens for shorter times when needed, but for longer periods/regularly, only for payment. W19 stopped working with seafood to take care of two children not her own, for payment. W13 started working at a seafood-factory when

⁴⁷ W30 shared a room with ten persons when new in Thailand; five relatives (her brother, sister, brother in law, a niece and a nephew), and five friends. They shared the expenses, i.e. rent, food, water, electricity.

⁴⁸ This was when the MOU-system was established in 2003.

her child was six months. W15 will wait *“until he’s three years, then I’ll send him home. My mother, his grandmother, will take care of him.”*

Yes, now he’s still too young [two years]. I’ll go back with him so that he can start school in Burma [at age five], just as his sister who now attends school there. My biggest problem right now is that I cannot work [due to child-care]. I pick rice and beans and sell to get some income. Only my husband works, earning 300 baht/day. We must pay the rent, other fees, and food – we must feed our children – so we can only send 1,000 baht/month (W17).

Some mothers deliver at home; others in hospitals. This choice is embedded in knowledge, information and migratory-status (VE), affecting the child’s opportunities. Key informants tell me that registered migrants giving birth at Thai hospitals can get multiple benefits; birth-certificates and one-year health-insurances for one baht/day. At the follow-up, W24 (pregnant during the first interview) had just delivered a daughter at a private hospital and got these benefits. She looked peaceful and proud: *“It went well, it was an easy delivery”* (W24). However, many hospitals do not provide entitlements to migrants, and treat migrants badly: screaming rather than talking; throwing medicines on them, prioritising Thai. Migrant children born at home do not get these documents/benefits. Thus, vulnerability is passed on to the next generation: *“For children it’s the same, but worse”* (K02).

All interviewees make reproductive choices based on multiple, complex factors, but with limited options and access to information (VE). Some face physical barriers in addition to social ones: W22 has never been pregnant; W31’s child died upon delivery and she never became pregnant again. Being married and involuntarily child-less is difficult in societies that strongly associate femininity with motherhood. Yet all thirty-five interviewees internalise society’s under-valuation of non-waged, informal, home-based labour. Reproductive work is not perceived as work, which W20 tells when responding to what she works with:

I don’t do anything (W20).

“Okay, what does a normal day look like for you?”

*At five AM, I cook for the workers to bring to work, because buying food's very expensive. Then I clean the house, **I do everything**; taking care of my youngest daughter, bathing her, things like that. I just do household-things because all the others are working – someone must cook. When my daughter is old enough, she will cook, even if she also works. Then she will wake up early to prepare the food (W20).*

This illustrates how home-based work is perceived; not as *real work*. Care/household-work is *nothing* and *everything*. Despite appearing contradictory, it showcases how society normalises under-valuation of women and “feminine work”, *as well as* its fundamental roles for societies and economies to function. Child-care and other reproductive responsibilities (for households in Samutsakhon and families⁴⁹ in Burma) encompass challenges pertaining to their situations. In their RE, families/households are sites wherein power operates, involving reproductive negotiation between different actors. All interviewees live in small rooms, usually shared by many. It further shows how both *change* (migration as a reproductive strategy) and *ordering* (raising a daughter to reproduce her role in the household) interact in complex, adaptive ways.

I spend five-six hours/day cooking, washing, cleaning and things like that. The rest of the time I work [often 13-14 hours/day – in total up to 18-19 hours/day] (W04).

I cook twice in the morning, five-eight, and later, three-five (W15).

After my husband finishes work, he just takes a shower and waits for dinner. That's it [laughs](W02).

Partners negotiate about if/when to have children (biological/inter-generational reproduction – *longer-term*); consumption (control over resources – *shorter-term*); roles/division of labour/responsibilities (paid/unpaid household-contributions, influenced by power/gender-norms/stereotypes – *continuous*), etc. There are two-way interactions between reproductive negotiations/decision-making and reproductive

⁴⁹ Although often used interchangeably, in this study, *household* relates to the interviewees' current, physical home/residence (in Thailand). *Family* relates to their natal family and includes everyone who they consider a family-member, whether in Thailand or in Burma, usually including children, parents and siblings, sometimes extended family-members. Households usually include family-members but often other migrants as well (friends or other relatives), typically referred to as “sisters” and “brothers”. That parts of their families are in Burma and Thailand adds to the complexity of their RE.

health/identity/technologies (RE-VE-linkages) and breadwinning/parenting-roles (RPV-linkages). As addressed, agency can be positive (power to) or negative (power over). The interviewees' stories cover both; exemplified with two quotes:

Me and my husband have different duties, we cannot control each other. We discuss and decide together. He gives his money to me, and when he needs money, he asks me. Our two oldest sons⁵⁰ also give their money to me (W14).

They lie...say 'beautiful!' [dissembled voice]But that doesn't last, that's not love. Love's living together for a long time. Now I'm alone – happy. I don't give up. There are no lies[...]He likes other women. He likes alcohol, smoking. He's not good for me, not good for the family. I'm always thinking about my son and daughter – my family (W16).⁵¹

Flexibility of RE usually reproduce women's roles as main care-givers and men's as principal breadwinners – but not always. Above quotes are gender-conforming, and possibly reflect that women's empowerment is "accepted" inasmuch within the private sphere. The next case is "gender-transforming"/non-stereotypical, showing that gender-norms are social constructions and subsequently changeable. W21 is the breadwinner:

My husband takes care of the home; only he takes care of the children, cooks, makes those decisions. He's sick, diabetes. So, I'm the one working, night-time, six PM-six AM (W21). [During the follow-up]:

Yes! He knows how to do it! [laughs]My husband is a sick person, he can do all the 'lady-things', and I do the 'man-things'. We've been married for many years. When we were young, he didn't have diabetes, so he worked hard to support me and our children. When he became sick, it was my turn to work hard for him, as he'd done for us for many years already. So, this is what I want (W21).

"Do you think society could become more like your family?"

⁵⁰ They are fourteen and seventeen years old, and quit school after grade four. Unwilling to continue, they came to Thailand to work. Three of W14's six children attend school, with the youngest taken care of by her.

⁵¹ This is the only worker-interview that was held in English. When W16 was home with their son for three months in Burma, she had no money. Her (then) husband did not send her anything. She recently went back to Burma for a week, leaving their daughter there. Her ex-husband still does not support.

There'll be less equality than in our relationship. Most guys don't want to cook. They say: 'This is the ladies' work, not ours! We come back from work – then we don't want to work more!' Some ladies want to be supported; if their husbands don't work, they complain (W21).

Remaining thirty-four interviewees perform nearly all care/household-work; various laugh at the question whether male family/household-members do any such work. Men's contributions are limited to sometimes "helping".⁵² After W29's mother passed away, she followed her older sister to Thailand, as "*I had no one to take care of me*" (she was eight), although her father was alive. A father to taking care of his children was unimaginable (and likely practically unfeasible). Gender *and* age determine intra-household decision-making/roles. In teenagers' households, the oldest has most power.⁵³ Interviewees' older children give salaries to parents/mothers in all cases but one. The exception, seventeen-year-old W35, stopped studying Thai and computer-science to work with seafood and got married. She was disowned by her family as they were unhappy with her choices.

This sub-section has focused on their RE, while incorporating RE-VE-linkages, and shows that their RE are inseparable from culture, politics and economics. Their migration-stories differ but are all influenced by structural hierarchies wherein racialized gender, age and other *axes of oppression* compound migration-experiences' exploitation-patterns. Trans-national migration influences research-participants' identities/self-formation and meaning-systems/ideology-creation, encompassing both continuity and change. All interviewees changed a lot in their lives to enable social reproduction, through processes which are empowering only to some, varying, "degree".⁵⁴ Nobody has been empowered in the sense of having control of their lives (ability to choose) as intersections of gender, race, age and other identity-markers reproduce patterns of powerlessness (few options available). I argue that such patterns are present at *all* levels (micro/meso/macro), with massive implications for their social/cultural/institutional, inter-generational reproduction. I interpret this as culture, politics and social relations interacting in their RPV, reproducing multi-level power-dynamics. This is a point of departure for their PE.

⁵² For example: "*Sometimes the others [her two teenager-sons and husband] look after the baby, but all other things I do*" (W14); "*Yes, they also help*" (W18); "*Only when he's free from work*" (W07's brother-in-law).

⁵³ Referring to the younger interviewees, often living with siblings or persons seen as "brothers/sisters".

⁵⁴ Recognising the inappropriateness to describe such complex processes as empowerment as "degrees", I use this adjective to pinpoint the subjectivity and complexity featuring each interviewees' sense of agency.

6.2 Flexible and Cheap – Productive Economies

Productive work has large meanings in each interviewee's life. I discuss their conditions, tasks and experiences at work, interpreting these – their PE – mainly as means to achieve social reproduction (RE).

A conventional stance would describe workers in Thailand's seafood-industry as *agents of production* of primary/secondary goods/material resources.⁵⁵ Their workplaces cover large- and small-scale factories, peeling-sheds and markets in Samutsakhon. Through the RPV-framing, these are seen differently; as sites of power, wherein gender, race, age and other identity-markers interact in multiple ways. Most visibly as bases for division of labour/tasks.⁵⁶ “Most are Burmese women. One or two are Cambodian. No Thai. Thai is only the supervisor, a man” (W22). Women perform monotonous, sedentary tasks deemed *feminine* – peeling, selecting, sorting/separating, cutting, boning – performed neatly. Men do the *masculine* work – lifting/carrying, packing and transporting.

For women, it's only the light job – the heavy job is for men. We just select shrimp and separate sizes at the shrimp-market. Then they send it to factories for peeling (W14).

I correct fish, separate the bones. Right now, the employer has asked me to do domestic work all day, clean the working-site (W01).

I check others' work when they've finished, if they removed the pulse. If they didn't work well, I take that fish and clean it again. There are over 200 workers, maybe 90% are women. Men carry the bones that women removed. They clean it and carry it to another place (W09).

⁵⁵ Such approach would also enhance prices, export-patterns, global/national demand/supply, etc. This information is relevant and important as it impacts power and resources. Therefore, it was brought up in section 2.3 as contextual information. But I do not seek to *explain* but to *understand*, why it goes beyond the research-scope. A lot of descriptive information about the interviewees' PE has been omitted.

⁵⁶ All say most – or all – workers are Burmese women. Most employers and supervisors are Thai men, but some hire Burmese male or female – or no – supervisors. Other enterprises are run by Thai couples.

During participatory observations at a seafood-market, I saw plentiful activity and movement, although most women sitting/standing. This is a “classic example” of gender-stereotypes, but there are exceptions:⁵⁷

I lift very heavy weight, they don't separate men and women. They ask us to work the same, they don't allow my colleagues to help. If I tell the head: 'I can't lift this', they say back: 'If you can't, you can quit' (W04).

Working-conditions also include use of chemicals and strong products, few/short breaks, sometimes indoors without air-conditioning. This naturally affects their health-status, i.e., various women report dizziness, pain, feeling cold/chronically paralysed. Mental health often involves stress, fatigue and worry, especially when unregistered, due to constant risk of arrestment and high fees.

Before I faced the problem that they didn't allow workers to use gloves. I had to cut, correct and separate the fish – the small ones from the big ones – both frozen and fresh – and my fingers...very fast the skin was removed, it got dry and it was painful (W01).

I have gastric problems. When I work in the factory, peeling shrimp, I don't have time to eat. Many of us face this (W21).

Now it's better, but we don't have much time for lunch, we must finish super quickly and go back to work. There's a toilet near the working-area, but only Thai-people can go there. They don't allow migrants to use that toilet. If you really must you can run to your or someone's room. Usually we just go once-twice/day, it's very difficult (W30).

This illustrates their work as inseparable from their health (PE-RE-linkages), which in turn affects their productivity/ability to work – forcing some to stop working:

⁵⁷ Interviewees said that some men do peeling/processing too, although a comparably small number. I saw this during observations, and likewise, key informants confirmed these trends. Occupational segregation is even clearer if viewing the whole supply-chain, with no women working on fishing-vessels. Key informants told me that apart from legal restrictions on women to work on boats, having women on board is believed to bring bad luck. In addition, women's household-responsibilities make such work impossible (K06).

I'm paralysed...I cannot stand air-conditioning, I'm cold all day. That's why I cannot work, I must stay home. With my age [forty-two], employers won't employ me (W27).

Interviews reveal bad working-conditions in many regards, despite Thai government's efforts to control and improve these practices. The state's ability to outline the rules is hampered by the sector's complexity and multiple actors, an explanation which does not reach very far. This thesis provides another understanding; through workers' situations, it shows how mutually strengthening power-structures interact at various levels, while reproducing vulnerable women's powerlessness, poverty and marginalisation. W27's difficult situation (physically/mentally/economically/materially) is understood through deterring agency due to gender/race/age/"place".

Interviewees working for bigger/formal enterprises have better working-conditions, access to health-care (often workplace-clinics), salaries and sometimes social protection (although several resist seeking employers' allowance for health-care). Large enterprises buy products from small ones, thus directly linking interdependent formal and informal economies. Overall, smaller/informal business register worse working-conditions and some have been withdrawn. These have not been subject to recent improvements recognised among larger/formal ones (by interviewees and key informants). Social institutions/structures are transformative; power can be redistributed through understanding/information and social practices, but rarely reach the most vulnerable. I have not interviewed current child-labourers, but many started as children, and some mothers' under-age children work.⁵⁸ I heard about labour rights-abuses which must be – but are often not – acknowledged as such. Yet Samutsakhon is comparatively good (confirmed by key informants), benefiting from its central location – with NGOs and MWRN implementing activities, providing support.⁵⁹ Key informants “*get alarms daily*” (K09) from volunteers in communities about i.e. abuse, slave-labour and child-labour in seafood-processing (workers use fake ID-cards to get work-permits). Accidents happen, often without employers taking responsibility.

⁵⁸ Under-age in fishing/seafood is below age sixteen according to the Thai law.

⁵⁹ The support and focus among CSOs shed light on more challenges of importance for migrant workers in this area. Beside human/labour rights, there are aspects which I, despite having a lot of information about, are not centred in this analysis (i.e. language, skills-trainings, education-programmes for migrant children). Their work further enhances matters that I, due to its sensitive character, did not ask workers about (HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria, sexual abuse), which are serious physical/mental health-problems (RE).

I'd like to change job. I'm so tired of my current job (W07).

Changing job is too expensive/difficult, as a broker must change the work-permit accordingly. Home-to-work transportation exacerbates prevailing exploitation-patterns in their PE. Transportation-networks are involved as some go by car/truck/boat, often financed by cuts in salaries: *"I pay 250 baht/week for the truck to pick me up"* (W10) (equalling to around 20% of her weekly salary). Most interviewees walk and are afraid of abuse and harassment on the way. One interviewee had nearly arrived at work when a Thai-gang took her hand-bag. Others saw this but were afraid of interacting. When she fell, they put her on a motorbike and drove to an old house. Four men raped her, one by one, then left her on the street.⁶⁰ They are now jailed, but she received insignificant compensation. Key informants share other horrific cases – including one Burmese seafood-worker being raped by the workplace-head, becoming pregnant, and delivering the child. They say risks are perceived as low as Burmese women are often unable to speak Thai and fear the police. Female migrants are trapped by oppressive structures.

Flexibility applies to all interviewee's PE. Their work is temporary, precarious and seasonal.⁶¹ Most currently employed work six-seven days/week, largely representing both sides of the spectrum: either working excessive hours (twelve-sixteen/day; obliged to work "until it's done"), or are involuntarily under-employed (one-four hours/day). Some chose to work few hours to reconcile with reproductive duties. Eleven interviewees find themselves "not working", for health-reasons or full-time reproductive work.

I enjoyed it but sometimes there's no shrimp. Then we just sit, talking with friends (W14).

I work hard and try my best but my working-hours are so few [nine/day] so I depend on my husband (W22).

I don't like my current job. Three supervisors follow-up on our job, scoring and pushing us, putting pressure to work well and quickly. Another thing's that my work-permit has another employer, so if I hear something about the police, I flee from work. My employer won't take

⁶⁰ To protect her identity, I do not reveal who. This information was provided solely by one field-assistant. No such questions were asked during the interview. The interviewed victim has not told family and friends.

⁶¹ Key informants explain that there is less work in the Thai summer, and more in the winter.

any responsibility for police-arrestment. The reason why I work here is that my husband works night-shifts, and it's near so I'm home around two-three PM, so I can cook for him (W30).

The earliest I finish is five-six PM [nine-ten hours], if there isn't much seafood. Sometimes if there's a big holiday, like Songkran [New Year], we must work all night, until the morning (W35).

This mirrors the flexible work-force that migrant women constitute. Dedicated to supporting their families, they make whatever arrangements possible based on available options. One can conclude that work-life balance does not correspond to their realities, neither as an outcome, nor as a social phenomenon. As much as every interviewee would like to work (paid/PE) either more, or less, while balancing trade-offs between income and reproductive duties, which requires energy and time. W32 came to Thailand with her husband, unaware of her pregnancy. Her sister-in-law knew this would prevent her employment, and offered her urine for the medical exam. Despite expected to deliver within two months, her work-load was heavy: selecting shrimp and squid, far from home, at least between six-thirty AM-six PM, seven days/week – then cooking.

Because I'm pregnant, I'm allowed to sit sometimes, and go to the toilet for a longer time. My work-permit will expire, so next month I'll renew it. Then I'll stop working. Four-five months after delivery, I'll ask someone to look after my baby, and start working.[...] We haven't sent any money [to parents and seven-year-old daughter]. I borrowed 7,500 baht from my sister-in-law, but had to pay 10,000 back. It's only 1,000 baht left – but she comes every day, asking for it (W32).

The interview was held in W33's room, who entered and gave her view of W32's situation:

She has so much trouble! First, she stayed here. We gave her food, clothes – I gave her this dress. Until now, she cannot send money to Burma. All wages have been paid for the term – money finished already! Neighbours help with food, I'm praying for this. She only gets 240 baht/day. Hiring someone to care for the baby is 100 baht/day, plus milk-powder and other things.[...] Sometimes she comes back very

late, eleven PM, working overtime. I'm worried. She doesn't know exactly where to deliver, she hasn't been to the hospital yet (W33).

Actually, I wanted to go to the hospital, but my sister-in-law sent me to the clinic. I paid over 1,000 baht (W32).

Everyone looked concerned while discussing how best to help W32. K08 shared important information, hopefully lowering her vulnerability. The difference between W32 and W24's situations – both seven-months pregnant – depicts the importance of information-access in their RE and PE (RPV-linkages).

Although often not identified as such, discrimination is common. With limited information about labour-rights (VE), and that all/most workers are Burmese women, may make it difficult to identify. Many are happy with their jobs, do not complain, yet may earn below the minimum-wage;⁶² would get fired if working too slowly/unproductively, or fear getting fired due to age/pregnancy. Companies neither hire pregnant nor older women, and finding a job after devoting time to child-care is often difficult (and expensive). Gender and its assumed responsibilities clearly cause serious problems.

*This job is very harsh for me, I've never worked like this before. It's very difficult. Everything's the same. I don't like the work or the manager. The head of the working-site comes and checks the fish, and when seeing a bone, they don't pass me – it's not the standard. Then my daily wage is cut by 50 baht so I only get 300 baht. We get a bonus from using the knife. I try to find all bones [illustrates]. I also cut muscles and get very tired by that. Each migrant worker must finish twelve kilos, it's very difficult. I can only finish nine. The woman-head complains, saying I must finish at least ten[...] **I feel like I work here like a slave for the Thai community-people (W12).***

Outsourcing of primary-processing to home-based work exists and is among the worst examples of vulnerability and abuse. No interviewee's seafood-PE is home-based (but several have "made some cushions" for sale when unemployed – their handicraft is not perceived as work either). During participatory observation, however, I saw women separating fish outside their homes. Many interviewees are pressured/treated badly by

⁶² Which is 300 baht/day, around 8.7 US Dollar (Exchange rate 14 May 2017).

supervisors. Others say that the “supervisor is like a mother” (W34). Key informants confirm that owners of the smallest peeling-sheds, almost exclusively employing women:

...they consider those workers as family-members, because as a family-member, you work for free. 'I give you food – you work for me.' Slavery, basically (K04).

This shows how VE-dimensions interact in their RE and PE – how their self-formation/esteem forms through interaction with others, directly causing vulnerability. Further, a migrant’s relatively “good” situation can quickly deteriorate, showing instability. When first interviewing W25, things were okay: “I want to be rich. If I had a big bunch of money, I’d give it to my parents and stay with them. My daughter is there”. When revisiting in March, her life had entirely changed. She showed her leg; a big scar:

A dog-bite. It happened on my way home from my sister – it bit me on this street, three weeks ago, at eight-thirty PM. I had to go to the hospital and get an injection. It all went okay but only my husband is working, there isn’t even enough to pay the rent. I was just knocked-off, they didn’t give time [to recover]. So, I must find a new job and pay at least 7,000-8,000 baht for a new work-permit.⁶³ The dog owner just gave me 1,000 baht. It doesn’t even cover...nothing (W25).

In this case, the dog-bite not only caused pain/health-problems (RE) and made W25 lose her job (PE); it affected her social relations and finances (VE):

After the dog-bite, I cannot get along with my husband. Our financial situation also broke because of the dog-bite. I’m so unlucky!⁶⁴

Without intending to take away W25’s feeling (but the opposite), I claim that her situation is not (only) due to bad luck, but resulting from multiple, multi-level power-dynamics’ reproduction. Through VE, interviewees’ feelings, identities and dreams get my attention.

⁶³ This is to update the work-permit for the new employer. As it happened after working hours, the employer does not support, even though it was a formal, well-recognised enterprise.

⁶⁴ K09 adds: “She is superstitious – being bitten by a dog is bad luck.”

6.3 Aspirations, Agency and Action – Virtual Economies

They all dream of going back home, to Burma (K07).

The VE is perhaps trickier to interpret. I find these intangible, subjective dimensions key for understanding the interviewees' experiences, and a central contribution of the RPV-framing. Conditions at home and at work are intimately linked to self-formation, feelings, expectations, norms, dreams – briefly analysed here, based on interviewees' stories.

W18's words shared initially in this section are true for all interviewees: *everyone* dreams of a house, where family-members can live together – embodying great material-symbolic value. The house represents the inseparable nature of material and symbolic/cultural dimensions: a prerequisite for the family living together, wherein social reproduction is guaranteed, in the way they want. As this section has shown, paths to reach that dream are difficult. Younger workers dream of becoming fashion-designers, teachers, farmers, work at the stock-market, in garment-factories or with district-trade. Some younger interviewees and most over thirty want to run their own businesses in Burma: *"I want to learn something that I can bring back to Burma, a skills-training, to grow something."*⁶⁵ *Then I can open a shop and have an income"* (W11).

If I'd become a boss or manager, I'd like to work in Burma. I don't want to work in Thailand. We feel safer there than here (W05)[others agree]. We are polite, we have friendships, and a beautiful culture! A lovely culture (W06)[all laugh].

*I'd like to get a better job, earn loads of money to support my child to continue studies in Burma.[...][laughs] I expect this kind of job where I currently work, but I'd like to be the boss. If I try, everything is possible (W02).*⁶⁶

I don't think about the future, just about today and tomorrow. Sometimes I'm afraid things won't be like I expect[...]. If I had enough money, I'd stay with my children, without relying on my husband. I don't think about him, just my children. This is my second marriage;

⁶⁵ She has heard about that the MWRN provides occupational trainings on growing mushrooms.

⁶⁶ Note that W02 is the MOU-migrant who will be compensated for the costs involved after having her labour-rights abused. I think this illustrates a process of empowerment.

my first child is from another one and these two are with my [current] husband. I worry about my older daughter, I want her to stay with me [instead of the ex-husband], but she can't because of financial problems. I'd like to be near Burma but stay in Thailand because my children can get a good education here (W13).

They find education important. W14 shows a photo and smiles: *"This daughter got a prize in her school in Burma – we expect her to continue studying"* (W14).

Yes, she enjoys school, and sometimes she cries when she cannot go to school [laughs](W30).

I want to live with my family. I want my son and daughter to become doctors or engineers. My son told me he wants that, I say: 'good, study!' I want a change. I want to change my life. I hope someday, I have enough money to live with my children. I dream [laughs](W16).

When talking about their dreams, research-participants almost unanimously separate those from their expectations/current situations.

It's impossible [becoming a boss]. If you look at my background, experience and economy (W08).

I don't have any expectations about my life, I just work. Today is better than before and that's enough for me (W01).

"But if you could choose anything, what would you like to do?"

I'd like to be a teacher. If I had a chance to study, I'd like to become an English teacher in a Burmese school (W01).

Yes, I wanted to study. But I had no choice. I only went to school until sixth grade (W34).

W34 is W21's only daughter. She peels shrimp at a small open-air factory since age thirteen, supporting the family (and father's diabetes-treatment) with her mother. One older brother studies at a Burmese university; the other died in a car-accident in Thailand. Her parents (appearing less "gender-transformative" in the follow-up interview) never considered letting her study instead, due to lack of finances and control:

We had to concentrate on work[...] Because she's younger, and a girl.[...] A girl faces more dangers than a boy. There were more dangers in her life. That's why we decided to bring her here (W21).

Experiences from working in Thailand depend on their expectations. Many do not complain; they earn enough money to support their families and that is all they asked for.

My aim was just to peel shrimp. And this is all I do. I want to do this because now I know how to do it. In the beginning I was so slow, so I had to find vegetables because we couldn't afford to buy it (W21).

Some had higher ambitions, which the final case shows, mirroring a large mismatch between expectations and reality. W12's story enhances complex RPV-linkages. A life-incident – parents' divorce – forced her to prioritise differently. After selling the house, she stayed with her mum.

I graduated in Burma. My whole income, I gave to my mum. She plays with lotteries, and sold all her belongings. Right now, she has nothing, and I'm very angry and disappointed. I came to Thailand...(W12).

Despite a college-degree and working professionally as designer while giving design/sewing-classes, she migrated to work in seafood-processing to support her mother. Travelling without documents, she got arrested already at the border, spending a month in prison.⁶⁷ *"I cried a lot in prison. I also didn't want to go back home."* When released, at the Thai-Burmese border, she passed the check-point, despite there being the same, old police-man who arrested her. *"I think the broker had given him money"*. The police keep the broker's car in which her luggage is, containing all material and self-made clothes. *"Until now I didn't get my clothes. When I called the police to get back my luggage, they said: 'You! Give the phone to the driver and ask him to come and pick up his car!' but he doesn't want to."* The police refuse to give her belongings back until the driver has paid the fee; higher than the cost of the car itself. She called the driver who refuses to pay. W12 came to Mahachai and her cousin/W05, referred to as "sister" (explained as a woman with whom social relations are featured by mutual respect), helped with the registration-process and a job in a seafood-factory. She does not cease to support her mother, as the

⁶⁷ Another woman was arrested but she had a baby and the police decided to release her.

only one covering her living-costs. Her younger brother (twenty-four) – employed, married, without children – does not. She does not talk about her father.

*No, he doesn't send anything. I take full responsibility for her. I'd like to get my luggage back. **I feel like I work here like a slave for the Thai community-people.** And when I lived in Burma, I was one of the teachers, teaching people how to make clothes. I'm a designer (W12).*

Her words are strong and speak for themselves. By paraphrasing those a second time, after providing more personal (virtual/contextual/subjective) information, we can better understand her situation. When previously quoted, the information only enhanced her PE – her experiences as an agent of secondary production. This case interweaves the three dimensions, and their interlinkages. Also, it highlights gender-dimensions of roles and responsibilities, as her brother did not take any responsibility whatsoever. Thanks to her “sister”/W05, opportunities were available, but her responsibilities (and others’ expectations of her) as a daughter made her leave her dream behind and “accept” seafood-processing. The loss of her material and inability to get it back further exemplifies racialized gender-biases and oppression, as her bag with uniquely designed, hand-made clothes and material were literally perceived less valuable than the car. I claim the value of that bag is very high; materially (a potential means to take her out of poverty – PE) and symbolically (through an empowering process of change whereby her unfreedoms are removed, agency acted out, while she contributes to, and benefits from, development).

Female migrant workers are perceived as “low-skilled”; while working excessively, efficiently, neatly. Classified as “temporary” and “short-term” migrants; while creating an entire life in Thailand, through longer-term, complex, flexible/adaptable strategies. These terms say little about their work and their lives. A point I try to make is that the structures and hierarchies are the same, they just come across differently at different levels, and for different persons. Through “zooming in” on Samutsakhon’s seafood-industries, we can *see* – and hopefully understand – how globalisation’s uneven effects are manifested in the lives of Burmese women working in this GSC while also being responsible for their families/households’ reproduction, like W12. I argue that the meaning of this understanding goes far beyond her individual case – and the case of Burmese women working in Thailand’s seafood-industry. To conclude, I discuss the stories in relation to the thesis’ title, illustrating their experiences.

6.4 “Like Machines” – Low-Skilled or Under-Valued?

We feel like we are machines for them to use. The Thai employer, the gangs and other Thai people – for them, Burmese migrant workers are like machines – for them to use (W11).

My thesis’ title refers to this quote. It does not represent all interviewees, but I analyse the metaphor in relation to Burmese female migrants as a group. *Like machines* can be interpreted differently; W11 refers to oppression in Thai community and at work. Their stories, constructed through fieldwork in Samutsakhon, contain cases of human/labour-rights violations (beyond what has been shared). This section has showed how experiencing oppression within PE and communities have large, complex and *different* impacts on their lives. *Like machines*, they are expected to work; mechanically and neatly; low-paid; with few/no breaks; until “everything’s done”, irrespective of how long that takes; without complaining (PE). *Like machines*, Thai men (mainly) – the police, other authorities, “gangs” – misuse their power in direct (violence, sexual abuse, theft) and indirect/virtual ways; creating fear; forcing them to adapt their social practices; to be flexible in life, not only at work; lowering their agency – “for them to use” (VE). The thesis’ introductory quote enhances this:

‘A migrant worker is not an ATM-machine’. We had a campaign-shirt saying that. Wherever they go, when the police see them: ‘Just give me the money, or else you will not walk pass me’ (K04).

W11, who migrated ten years ago, uses *machine* in two more settings; first, when I ask whether she has seen accidents at work:

[silent]Workers can get inside the machine[...]Before, they used humans to work hard for them, now they use machines instead, to carry the fish-cans. It has developed (W11).

It has developed; in an economic/technological sense. The interviewees have been central for that process. But cheap labour is still demanded; manual labour still needed; ununionized, unregulated labour remains a competitive resource. The work and the workers, however, remain under-valued. This is reflected in low wages; precarious working-conditions; low agency/opportunity to impact e.g. working-hours, etc. It has *not* developed according to my interpretation of the concept. Their unfreedoms persist;

actors structurally and directly block them from exercising agency; they remain disempowered. Therefore, I see a need to challenge these power-imbalances.

Hitherto, *machines* have mainly covered PE-VE-linkages. With their RE, the metaphor appears contradictory. The interviewees are in no way “mechanic”, as persons and in life (outside work). *Like machines* is inapplicable to their personalities, their roles as mothers/daughters/sisters/wives/friends – their transnational RE. Their “value”, as conventionally understood, is so tied to their productivity (PE-contributions), that their personalities/skills/ideas/health/aspirations remain unrecognised and unheard. Thus, this contradiction highlights their under-valuation. Society fails to recognise that migrant women “accept” these conditions *because* they aspire something else. If not for themselves, for their children. To reach that, options are very limited. “*Nobody wants to come*” (W18); but they come. Migration to Thailand is the best option available; therefore, I interpret this active, life-changing choice as a reproductive strategy.

6.4.1 *Understanding Globalisation through Female Migrants’ Experiences*

Through focusing on their experiences – as the research question implies – I have attempted to show how ignoring their RE excludes an essential dimension of their lives. A condition for human existence. Such ignorance is not only inappropriate and narrow. It is directly harmful, in multiple and complex ways, materially and symbolically. “Double” (or rather, multiple) responsibilities practically limit their ability to make/act on their own choices, i.e. through joining a union, studying Thai, attending occupational trainings; activities that potentially remove some unfreedoms. This is not sufficiently acknowledged; reproduction is *assumed* to happen.

This thesis, and the machine-metaphor, throw light on the interviewees’ racialized, gendered oppression, as migrants and as women, in community, at work and at home. This illustrates their sub-ordination (“not real workers”). Multi-level under-valuation of women and *the feminine* reflects structural power-hierarchies with direct – material/symbolic – implications for their lives. As shown, this is institutionalised at household/work-place/community/regional/national/global level. The latter, as wealthy consumers demand cheap, high-quality seafood-products. A demand which Thailand is keen on meeting, as the “Kitchen of the World”.

Because our products are sent to foreign countries, we must clean all the dirt, everything. It must be perfect. That's why we put masks on (W23).

Further, the under-valuation is internalised; affecting the interviewees' self-esteem/identities. While not literally feeling *like machines*, they do not highly value their significant, complex contributions in *their* RPV and social relations. I therefore claim this gender-biased, racialized, conventional way to measure value is present and reproduced at *all* levels. Interactions of these multi-level power-dynamics ultimately affect Burmese female migrants in Thailand's seafood-industry in many ways. This hinders them from acting upon their own life-choices, and they remain disempowered. They are left behind.

Burmese women working with seafood-processing are agents of development, significantly contributing to Thailand's economic growth while fulfilling privileged consumers' demands. This is unrecognised. Thus, I conclude that recognising the under-valuation of *the feminine* in productive, reproductive and virtual economies, is key for understanding how marginalised persons cannot benefit from development. How experiences of hard-working women in a country other than their own are unheard. How consumer-goods are valued over producer-subjectivities.

I also claim that this understanding is important for grasping globalisation. What I do not discuss, is how to take action. However, I argue that including and listening to marginalised persons is prerequisite for understanding their experiences, as well as globalisation. I finally claim that this understanding can inform our actions and policy-making to transform economies, and hopefully realise sustainable, inclusive development and gender equality.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have sought to answer the research question: *How can we understand the experiences of Burmese female migrants working in Thailand's seafood-industry through the lens of interdependent reproductive, productive and virtual economies?*

The purpose was to illustrate how Burmese women's experiences are influenced by complex social relations and power-dynamics. Further, I wanted to contribute to understanding of globalisation through their experiences, which I claim embody globalisation's uneven, oppressive, material-symbolic effects. With a feminist, critical realist case-study design, I performed primary fieldwork in Samutsakhon. Semi-structured, in-depth individual- and group-interviews with thirty-five Burmese female seafood-processing workers were carried out through a combined, qualitative data-creation approach (complemented with key informant interviews, participatory observations and desk-research for crystallisation).

I used aspects of Peterson's (2002) rewriting of the GPE when analysing Burmese female migrants' experiences. These were analysed in an iterative process, using the interdisciplinary "RPV-framing" for integrating interacting *Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies*, understood as systemic sites of power. In doing so, I attempted to highlight *more features* of their economies than conventional accounts. The focus was on their RE, because early in the fieldwork, it was found to be central to female seafood-workers' lives. I aimed to illustrate two-way interactions between RE-PE and RE-VE in the thirty-five interviewee's stories (only marginally PE-VE-linkages).

Through this critical, feminist, post-colonial lens, I find that female seafood-workers' experiences are strongly shaped by systemic/structural determinations of value which are reproduced at micro-, meso- and macro-levels. Their experiences construct, reproduce and are subjected to under-valuation of women's work (paid/PE and unpaid/RE); values which influence their lives in complex – yet different – ways. Through the metaphor *like machines*, I discuss experiences of gendered, racialized oppression:

- i) ...at work (mechanic tasks, done neatly; low-paid; few/no breaks; excessive working-hours or involuntary un(der)-employment; required flexibility; irregularity/vulnerability; maltreatment/discrimination – their PE); and
- ii) ...in their communities (violence, sexual abuse, theft by authorities, “gangs” – their VE). I suggest this demonstrates material (poverty, unfulfilled basic needs) and symbolic (low agency, disempowerment) consequences.
- iii) I discuss the metaphor *like machines*’ inapplicability to these women’s RE, personalities and lives, as an illustration of multi-level ignorance of their RE; a key-facet of under-valuation of *the feminine*. I argue this ignorance impoverishes our understanding of their experiences.

With this analysis, I further find that Burmese women’s experiences provide significant and relevant insights for understanding not only their situations, but also facets of globalisation. I conclude that their choice to migrate is a reproductive strategy, the best available option. This results in not only double but multiple burdens, as their families/households (RE) cross national borders, and maintaining these relationships requires complex, constantly flexible strategies. That these workers “accept” multi-dimensional oppression to enable social reproduction demonstrates that social reproduction is fundamental for them. I also find that predominant neo-classical, masculinist paradigms’ valorisation of work and workers is reflected in the inequitable distributions of resources, responsibilities and power (RPV-linkages) that the interviewees are subjected to, with analytical and political implications. This further indicates that social reproduction is inseparable from culture, politics and economics, and that – when the RE is acknowledged as fundamental – agents of primary/secondary production can instead be recognised as agents of development.

7.1 Implications for Future Research...

In this thesis, I have tried to demonstrate the importance of understanding processes in the GPE and their oppressive, heterogeneous consequences through listening to persons usually excluded from such discussions. Through interpreting multi-dimensional, multi-level, politicised and inter-dependent RPV (through triad analytics) we can easier grasp racialized gender-dimensions and processes that reproduce such inequalities within and between countries, regions and groups. Transnational production- and accumulation-processes – normalised through neo-liberalism – profoundly affect people’s everyday-lives. Therefore, I applied a framing for analysing the GPE to a micro-case, which is a central contribution of my thesis, as this theoretical/analytical framework has not been applied to this context before.

I suggest future research expands and applies the RPV-framing (or other critical, feminist, post-colonial frameworks with cross-disciplinary, relational, interpretive approaches) to diverse contexts. Because we can then easier understand how:

- i) material-symbolic dimensions are interactive and inter-dependent;
- ii) social practices and conceptual structures are just as entangled with identity-creation processes and politics as RPV;
- iii) subjectivity/identity/self-formation are complex and inter-linked with multi-level social hierarchies that structure them, while shaping people’s meaning-systems/ideological preferences; and
- iv) that social reproduction is fundamental to social theory.

For future research to enable a more complete picture and deeper understanding than this thesis has, more pluralism is needed, in terms of:

- i) levels – more actors, agents, institutions;
- ii) methodology – e.g. quantitative methods;
- iii) scale – e.g. sending- and receiving-countries, or perhaps applying the RPV-framing to the entire seafood GSC (from sea to ship to shore to markets/supermarkets to consumers’ households);
- iv) more intersecting identity-markers, e.g. ability, indigenous identity, religion and other gender-identities – LGBTQIA and men.

7.2 ...and Policy

Finally, beyond *recognising* that Burmese female migrants working in Thailand's seafood-industry are agents of development, this should be translated into action. To create transformative changes, it is important to understand *what* we want to change. When *seeing* oppressive power-dynamics, I believe it is easier to plan and coordinate actions and measures accordingly – and strategically. Ongoing transformations like ICTs facilitate many persons' communication across physical borders. Virtual dimensions of globalisation could be used for innovative forms of organising. The Agenda 2030 is another momentum, calling for transformative changes for inclusive, sustainable development.

The task for policy-makers and CSOs is nothing less than to try to make the rethinking of globalisation worthwhile. To shape measures and actions based on new (and old) understandings, evidence and questions. To find creative ways to incorporate the skills, ideas and aspirations of marginalised persons and groups. To practise what one preaches and leave no one behind. That is what is needed to create an enabling environment for transformative changes and inclusive, sustainable development and gender equality.

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APPENDIX I: RATIFICATION OF RELEVANT ILO LABOUR STANDARDS CONVENTIONS

Table I-A. Ratification of ILO Core Labour Standards Conventions; Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Conventions; and relevant Technical Conventions and Recommendations

Convention Category	No.	Convention	Burma	Thailand
Fundamental	C087	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948	1955	...
	C098	Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949	...	...
	C029	Forced Labour Convention, 1930	1955	1969
	C105	Abolition of Forced Labour, 1957	...	1969
	C138	Minimum Age Convention, 1973	...	2004 ⁶⁸
	C182	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999	2013	2001
Fundamental and Non-Discrimination	C100	Equal Remuneration	...	1999
	C111	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)	...	...
Gender Equality	C156	Workers with Family Responsibilities	...	...
	C183	Maternity Protection	...	...
	C189	Domestic Workers	...	...
Technical	C188	Work in Fishing, 2007	...	...
Recommendation	R204	Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy, 2015	... ⁶⁹	...

Source: Compiled by the author, based on ILO NORMLEX – Information System on International Labour Standards.

⁶⁸ “Minimum age specified: 15 years. Pursuant to Article 5, the provisions of the Convention shall be applicable to the following branches of economic activity: mining and quarrying; manufacturing; construction; electricity; gas and water; sanitary services; transport; storage service and communication; and plantations and other agricultural undertakings mainly producing for commercial purposes, with the exception of family and small-scale holdings producing for local consumption and not regularly employing hired workers” (ILO NORMLEX, n.d.).

⁶⁹ Recommendations are not ratified. Neither Burma nor Thailand has provided submission of R204.

APPENDIX II: THAILAND'S FISHING AND SEAFOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

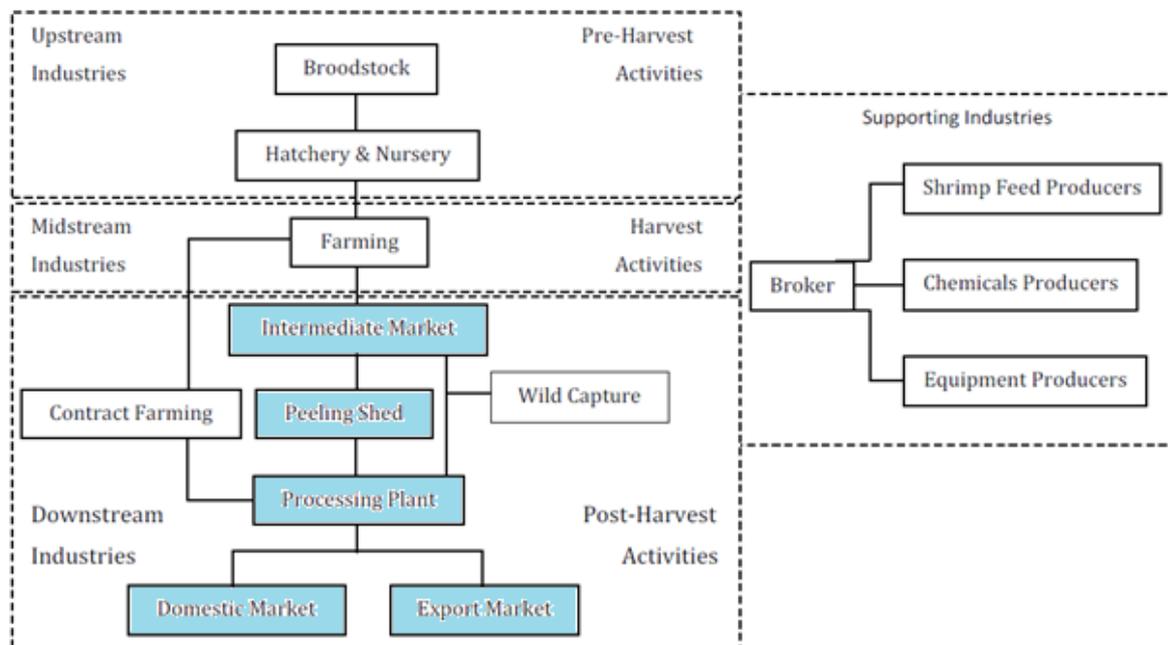


Figure II-A. Thailand's Fishing and Seafood Supply Chain. Source: Adapted from ILO-IPEC, 2011:16⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Figure II-A was compiled for the ILO-IPEC, 2011 (unpublished, internal). Access was provided during my internship with the ILO DWT-Bangkok. Most shrimp-production used in the interviewees' work derives from coastal aquaculture, fed with "trash fish" (AF/ILO, 2015:16). Coloured areas in the figure represent the GSC-phases within the thesis' scope, as previously explained (although export-markets do not employ the interviewees, but illustrates that their workplaces operate in both national and international markets). The ILO has fifteen years of experience of working with the Thai fishing/seafood industries. Currently, the ILO implements the project *Combating Unacceptable Forms of Work in the Thai Fishing and Seafood Industry (Ship to Shore Rights)*, funded by the EU, aiming to "reduce forced labour, child labour and other unacceptable forms of work, and progressively eliminate the exploitation of workers, particularly migrant workers, in these sectors, and thereby improve compliance with fundamental rights at work" (ibid.). To take more targeted action, the ILO calls for research on the nature of work, and will publish a baseline-study (forthcoming, 2017). I have continuously discussed my research topic with several ILO-colleagues who currently work or previously worked with projects targeting this supply chain.

APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE

(See next page, Figure III-A)

This interview-guide contains four sub-categories, which were created based on my initial idea to explore the concept of work-life balance – a point of departure for this research. These four categories constituted a tentative, rough structure for the interviews, with interlinked questions to facilitate a flexible, semi-structured approach. These are compatible with the RPV-framing but adapted to my initial desk-research on the seafood-industry. As mentioned, I avoided technical/theoretical terms, trying to formulate the questions in a way that made sense for the interviewees (which meant they were usually more openly formulated than the guide indicates). Thus, the interviews focused on:

- i) their current family/household situation and reproductive responsibilities/roles, including periods of particular vulnerability and/or stress, i.e. pregnancy, post-delivery and the time after migrating (RE);
- ii) working conditions, including working-hours, wages, workplace- and workforce-characteristics and treatment (PE);
- iii) health and well-being aspects, including social protection and health-care access; and
- iv) agency, self-development and virtual aspects, including access to information and education, and forward-looking dimensions – dreams and strategies (VE).

After the field-work, I decided to remove health/social protection as a “separate” category, because in the initial coding-process, I realised that the content coded as health/social protection was consistently directly linked to the three other categories as well. Further, health is explicitly enhanced by the RE in the RPV-framing, why it made sense to instead incorporate it in the analysis of the three economies.

Note that this guide mainly served the purpose to facilitate a flexible approach in the field, while making sure that all dimensions were covered.

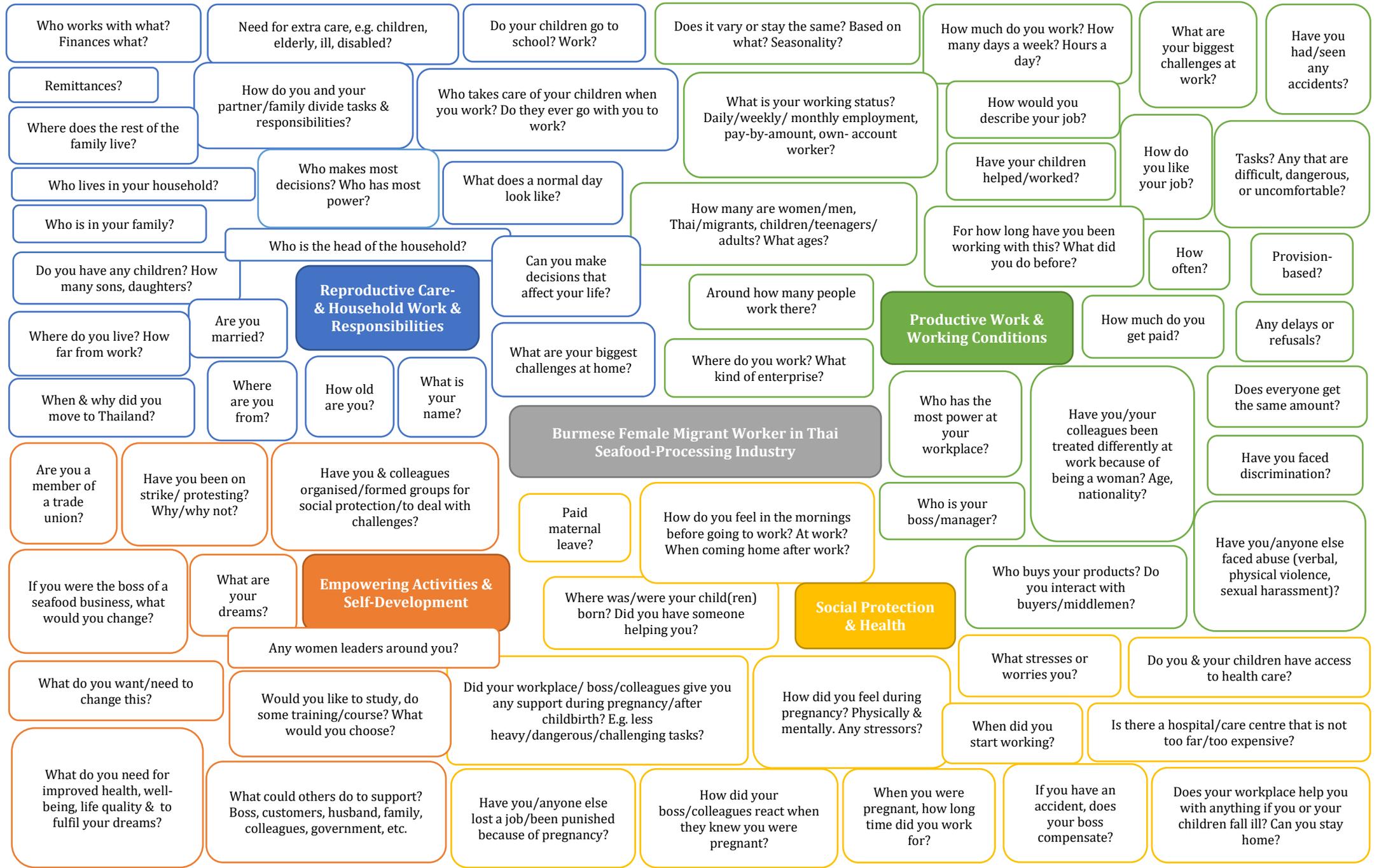


Figure III-A: Guide used during the interviews.

APPENDIX IV: PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph IV- A: Women working with shrimp-selection at a seafood-processing working-site (left), and female migrant seafood-processing worker's child (right) in Samutsakhon, Thailand. (March 2017). Source: Author's own.



Photograph IV- B: Child playing at a working-site (up), workers at a seafood-processing working-site (down) in Samutsakhon, Thailand. (March 2017). Source: Author's own.