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The experiences of racial and gender stereotyping: The case study of Thai women in Sweden.

Lallalit Suphsert

Lund University

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Supervisor: **Milka Ivanovsk Hadjievska**

Abstract

- This research project is a case study of Thai immigrant women in Sweden. It concentrates on women who were originally born in Thailand but currently reside in Sweden. The purpose of the research is to explore the life of Thai immigrant women by present their individual experiences and the reason why they chose to migrate to Sweden such as interracial marriage, employment opportunities, and pursuing a higher education degree. More importantly, this research project aimed to explore how racial and gender stereotyping affect the experiences of integration of Thai immigrant women and their perspective toward Swedish society. Since migration could create significant change toward the immigrant, this research project aims to explore how Thai women integrate and conform into their society. There are 15 participants that participate in this research project. They are Thai immigrant women who have different backgrounds and chose to reside in Sweden for different reasons.

- Keywords: Gender, Racial Stereotype, Intersectionality, Discrimination, Migration,

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Thank you, everyone

Lund, 20/5/2021
Lallalit Suphsert

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1. Introduction

In the last decades, the statistics have discovered the increasing trend of Thai women migrating to Sweden. Migration from Thailand to Sweden is a rapidly growing phenomenon with a threefold increase over the last ten years, with the majority of migrants being female migrants (Webster, & Haandrikman 2014; Yang, 2016). Many factors motivate Thai immigrant women to leave and resettle in Sweden for example, interracial marriage, employment opportunities, and pursue higher education degrees. Even though the migration can bring significant change to the particular individual, there are existing report demonstrates the stereotyping of Thai women in term of unequal power relation, sex tourism and other social problems which often position them “as both materialist rural women and ignorant victims in the Swedish society (Chuenglertsiri, 2012; Fernbrant *et al.*, 2017; Webster & Haandrikman 2014)”. For example, the unequal power relation can be explained in the relation of interracial marriage and employment. In terms of interracial marriage, Asian women especially, Thai women often perceived as submissive, mail order brides, domestic, sexual slaves, or prostitutes (Fernbrant, 2017, Osanami Törngren, 2011; Pongthippat *et al.*, 2018, Tschirhart, 2019). In terms of employment, they are often employed in less professional skill work such as domestic work (Osanami Törngren, 2011; Yang, 2016.). For example, Many Thai immigrants were introduced by their acquaintance to get a local job and mostly start to work in manual labor when they first arrive in Sweden such as housekeeper, a waitress in a restaurant, or masseur in a Thai massage parlor, or picking local fruit in the farm (Kanchanachitra, 2020; Ohtsuki, 2010; Pongthippat *et al.*, 2018; Tschirhart, 2019; Yang, 2016). To explain this phenomenon, the theories that could be applied to this research project are Intersectionality, Orientalism, and Power & Agency. Additionally, the push and pull factors could conceptualize why Thai women come to Sweden. The primary aim of this research project is to explore the gender and racial stereotyping that Thai women experience in Sweden. Moreover, the research project will explore their social and economic background and the complexities in terms of power relations and how that significantly impacted their experience of conforming in Swedish society.

1.1 Research Question:

Referring to the existing literature, Sweden is one of the countries with different immigrant groups that born outside the European Union. The country has been famously known for its high-quality standard of living and a generous social welfare state. Among these immigrant groups, Thai is considered one of the large proportion of immigrant groups in Sweden. As I am a Thai international student and currently lived in Sweden, I have encountered many Thai women who have resided in Sweden for different purposes. They have experienced certain discrimination and common stereotype based on their gender, class, and position. Therefore, The primary aim of this research project is to explore the gender and racial stereotype that Thai women experience in Sweden. Additionally, the motivation that influences them to live in Sweden and different configuration affect their experiences.

What are the experiences of gender and racial stereotyping of Thai Immigrant women in Sweden? And How do gender and racial stereotyping affect the experiences of integration in Swedish society?

1.2. Define Stereotype and the connection to Thai women

A stereotype can be classified as prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors based on race and gender identity. The stereotype is commonly based on gender, foreign nationalities, the irregular status of the individual. According to Webster & Haandrikman (2014), “Thailand is a very popular holiday destination for Swedes with, on average, nearly 500,000 trips of Swedes to Thailand annually (as cited in Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2011) (14).” The country is famous for its unique beauty, historical background, and friendly people which is commonly known as ‘the land of smiles.’ The positive reputation has brought many foreign tourists to visit and explore the attraction of the country. On the other hand, Thailand is also recognized as a destination for sex tourism and prostitution. For example, Thai women are usually portrayed as prostitutes and sex workers through the Western media and Hollywood films. According to Poltecha (2017), “Thailand has been portrayed through western media as a destination of sex tourism, cheap sex, and prostitution with scenes of go-go bars, nightclubs, and prostitutes (81).” It reproduces western perception towards Thai women as prostitutes and sex

workers. They are expected to be passive, submissive, and obedient, under male authority, and that is also involved with prostitution as women are treated as objects in Thai society. This representation of Thailand in the Western media has created the general stereotype of the country and Thai women. A stereotype is perceived as an instrument which people use for making assumptions and judgment of others or cultural groups. According to Yang (2011), “Some western film has turned the land of smiles into a bizarro realm of brute violence, grim depravity, and unfettered libido, populated entirely by broad racial stereotypes: Thuggish gangsters. Wizened monks. Lascivious ladyboys (para 5).”¹ Consequently, people from different cultures or cultural groups perceive Thailand from their certain point of view that then leads to stereotyping or prejudice accordingly (ibid).

Even though prostitution is considered illegal in Thailand, it was not a disguised activity and people still acknowledge the existence. According to Boonchalaksi & Guest (1994), “Thai prostitution ring became an economic activity with high levels of investment and is directly connected to tour companies, hotels, clubs, mail-order brides, etc (as cited in Poltecha 2017: 20).” The country became an essential connection in the international supply of prostitutes around the globe (ibid.) Even though gender equality has been increasingly promoted in Thailand, the country is still considered a patriarchal and male dominant society. Therefore, Thai women are usually placed in inferior positions and men are in superior positions. According to Cho *et al.* (1997), “Thai wives are usually perceived as self-sacrificing, sexually docile, fragile, sexual dolls, submissive, good caring wife, sexual plaything” (as cited in Jones, 2011:6). Even though the sex industry is universal, there are some differences between the sex industry in western society and Thailand. In Thailand, the sex worker or commonly known as “the bar girls” who can offer both performance and sexual experiences such as strip shows, ping pong show, or pole dance to the customer. According to Poltecha (2017), “Customers can invite bar girls to go out and have intimate relationships and sexual intercourse... Moreover, the bar girls could become the customer’s girlfriend for either a short-term or long-term relationship. It is called a girlfriend experience² (17). The stereotype leads to discrimination toward Thai brides who are

¹‘Looking for a Hangover cure’ Access on March 10, 2021 from <https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Looking-for-a-Hangover-cure-2358831.php>

² Girlfriend experience, as known as GFE, the service that commonly offers to foriegn male tourists. The girlfriend experience is not provide only sex but also provide short or long term relationship while the male tourists stay in

normally perceived as a bar girl, a prostitute or a mail-order bride in the western. Although the stereotypes do not reflect all Thai women's lives, they do affect Thai women who want to disassociate themselves from this assumption (Poltecha, 2017:1)

1.3 Delimitation

Delimitation is a factor that restricted the data gathering of this research project. The duration of this research project is roughly 4 months. Therefore, the limited time is one of the interferences that restricts the data analysis. Even though I have collected data since the beginning of January 2021, I felt that I should have done the interview since November or December 2020. The data collection is time-consuming and each interview is approximately 1-2 hours. The participants have been collected through snowball sampling. The technique is appropriate for searching the participants because one participant could recruit future participants from among their acquaintances. Since the research project is about Thai immigrant women in Sweden, I have to find only Thai female participants who are originally from Thailand but registered in Sweden for different reasons. I have chosen participants that I have known personally, some participants that I discovered through social networks, and some participants that I have known through the introduction of my previous participants. Some participants are overlapped in terms of their reason as while they moved to Sweden. For example, Participant F moved to Sweden to do her Master's degree in Innovation and Sustainable Development. After she finished her studies, she got a scholarship for a Ph.D. position. During that moment, she met her husband and decided to reside in Sweden. Initially, I would like to place her in the interracial marriage section. However, I placed under the category of pursuing a higher education degree because of her initial purpose to move to Sweden.

After I have collected participants from snowball sampling, I asked for their available time for the interview. I have realized that some interviewees are concerned about the COVID 19 infection. Therefore, I have found an alternative method to conduct interviews through telephone

Thailand. Both parties benefit from this relationship, the Western has the ability to fulfill their sexual fantasy and the Thai women acquires financial support.

calls. I chose a participant age ranging from 30 to 40. Even though the researchers have not known some of the participants personally, all participants are agreed to participate in the interview. The participants were open-minded, friendly, and eager to answer the interview questions. Moreover, most participants were sympathetic and unprejudiced to engage in the interview. The interview is conducted in the Thai language which is the mother tongue language of both interviewer and interviewees. Since language is one of the key influences for conducting a productive interview, the participant will feel comfortable answering their personal questions. Therefore, the quotes from Thai women were originally in Thai but later translated into English. Unfortunately, I have changed some participants (who moved to Sweden because they found employment in the domestic sector) because I believe that I want to point out how the same occupation impacts the gender and race of Thai women. I have analyzed my data based on existing research and literature in English but the interviews were conducted in Thai. However, some concepts have to be further elaborate because it is uncommon in Swedish society such as the common stereotype that Thai women prefer to marry Western men. The scope of this research project is limited in terms of gender, nationality, and age. The orientalism and intersectional approach will narrow the racial and gender stereotype that Thai women experience in Sweden.

1.4 Outline of the research project

I was inspired by Gender, Global Development, and Postcolonialism (SIMS39). During the course, I have been introduced to many issues of gender and development around the globe. The concept of gender inequality, intersectionality, sexual violence, precariousness, and power relation. One of the assignments is to analyze the documentary which is called Whore's glory (2011). Judging by the name, I assume that the documentary is about my country Thailand, the land of smiles or the destination of sex tourism. I was asked by my classmate about the accuracy of the reality and I inconveniently admitted that it the same as the documentary represented. The documentary is directed by an Austrian film director about the prostitution organization in Thailand. It represents the brothel system in which Thai women were perceived as exotic, submissive, sexually available, sweet, uneducated, and passive. Moreover, the documentary has represented Thailand as the destination of sex tourism for Western men. I was not embarrassed about the ugly truth. The documentary inspires me to explore the impact of the representation of

Thailand as the destination of sex tourism on Thai women, who want to disassociate themselves from this common stereotype and generalization. Since Thai is one of the major immigrant groups in Sweden, I started this qualitative research by exploring the history of the migration movement and when that Thai woman began to settle in different countries as Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I used interviews as the major resource to learn about different dimensions of experiences of Thai women after they migrated to Sweden. Chapter 3 As the research question is centralized on the gender and racial stereotype, I will represent how the Western perspective impacts the class, status, and position of Thai women. Chapter 4 The public sphere will represent the traditional value of Thai women and how does it impact them in the present time. Chapter 5 Since I have chosen participants who migrated to Sweden for Employment opportunities, I want to explore their employment status and condition.

2. Literature Review

Since the concept of Thai women in Sweden is not a new topic, there is some existing literature that already discusses the experience of Thai immigrant women in Sweden. Therefore, The literature review can be categorized into 3 main themes 1). The purpose of migrating to Sweden 2). An experience that migrant women encountered when migrated to Sweden 3). The process of integration to Sweden.

Initially, the previous literature has discussed how immigrant women migrate to Sweden for various reasons, for example, interracial marriage, employment opportunities, education opportunities. The literature has explained how globalization has led to international migration. One of the main reasons is International marriage (Hedman, 2009; Wojtenk, 2012). The term represents the marital relationship between two parties with different nationalities, where only one of the parties resettles (Butratana & Trupp, 2020; Chuenglertsiri, 2012; Dribe & Lundh, 2008; Fernbrant, 2017). According to Rofriguez-Garcia (2015), “The possibilities for individuals to meet and marry across national, cultural, racial, religious, and class borders, leading to the “internationalization of intimacy (9)”. Even though the parties who resettle could be both male or female, the report has demonstrated the spouses are primarily female. According to Fernbrant *et al.* (2017), “ 75% of the Thai population are women, among whom 80% are partnered with Swedish or other Scandinavian men.” Moreover, the Swedish statistics also stated that Swedish citizens who engaged in interracial marriage often marry Thai followed by Iraqi nationality. In terms of employment, Thai women successfully integrated into Swedish society because of their labor participation and entrepreneurship skills as their strategies of improving their personal and family lives (Jungteerapanich, 2014; Ohtsuki,2010; Webster,2016). The employment opportunities are an alternative for immigrant women to migrate to Sweden. However, the demand in the workforce for migrant women is mostly domestic work. According to Yang (2016.), “local women who were educated and middle class were demanded into the workforce and led to a rising demand for low-skilled workers such as domestic work”. For example, Many Thai immigrants were introduced by their acquaintance to get a local job and mostly start to work in manual labor when they first arrive in Sweden such as housekeeper waitress or masseur in Thai massage parlor or picking local fruit on the farm, even though they have a highly educated background (Chen 2016; Kanchanachitra, 2020; Yang, 2016.). Additionally, Sweden

has welcomed many international students with their multiculturalism and cultural diversity. The previous research has demonstrated some factors that motivate students to Sweden such as interesting courses and an international environment³. Even though education is not completely the reason why women have migrated to Sweden, it is a contributing factor that influences a student to extend their stay, for example, employment opportunities or pursue higher education level (Chen, 2016; Webster, 2016)

Secondly, the existing literature has provided some experiences that incoming immigrants encountered when they migrated to Sweden. Since the purpose of migrating to Sweden is connected with international migration, it involves how the incoming immigrant integrates into the new society, community, and environment. The existing literature has demonstrated both internal and external factors that affected the experience of the incoming immigrants. In terms of migration, the discriminatory discourse, and the stereotypical assumption has described immigrant women in a negative perspective (Jungteerapanich, 2014; Rodríguez-García, D. *et al.*, 2015). According to Fernbrant *et al.* (2017), The literature stated that immigrants are most likely to be exposed to prejudice or discrimination especially, in non-Western European or North American countries. The most common prejudice about Asian women involved in international relationships, for example, submissive, mail order bride, domestic, sexual slaves, or prostitutes (Fernbrant, 2017, Osanami Törngren, 2011; Pongthippat *et al.*, 2018, Tschirhart, 2019). The effect of stereotypes has affected the incoming immigrants in terms of insecurity, instability, and precariousness. Moreover, the previous literature has provided evidence of an unequal power relation of interracial marriage the migrant women experience while they are living in Sweden (Pongthippat *et al.*, 2018; Webster, N.A., & Haandrikman, 2014). In some circumstances, there is a high possibility that the migrant will experience stress and insecurity after migrating to a new country (Tschirhart, *et al.* 2009). Consequently, it could impact the incoming immigrant physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychologically. According to Pongthippat *et al.* (2018). “The intimate partner violence by Swedish men reported in the interviews demonstrated that the immigrant women had experienced not only psychological violence in their family life in

³ Educational Responses to Newly Arrived Students in Sweden: Understanding the Structure and Influence of Post-Migration Ecology Accessed on February 15, 2021 from <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F00313831.2015.1024160>

particular but also a combination of physical, economic and sexual violence”. Many endured the violence because they have difficulties learning their rights in Sweden. Even though they have a high educational background, it does not protect the women from intimate partner violence (Jungteerapanich: 2014; Pongthipat *et al*, 2018). According to Butratana, K., & Trupp (2020), “lacking or limited foreign language skills of Thai migrants may restrict them to build meaningful relationships with neighbors and complicate bureaucratic procedures, e.g. for registering businesses or applying for loans (Webster, & Haandrikman:2014)”.

Lastly, the existing literature has discussed the process of integration in Sweden. The study of migrant’s social networks would bring a better understanding of their patterns of settlement, Employment, and their process of integration in Sweden. Personal identity is considered an essential part of migrant integration. Even though migrant women have immigrated to the new country, they usually maintain a connection to their origin countries (Cheunglertsiri, 2012). As previously mentioned, migrant women entered the process of integration such as interracial marriage, employment opportunities, education opportunities. The experience can significantly impact their process of integration in terms of positive and negative. Many immigrant women are challenged by adaptation, acculturation, and adjustment on their daily basis (Dribe 2008; Kanchanachitra, 2020; Pongthipat *et al.*, 2018; Wojtenko, 2012.). Moreover, Women residing abroad are vulnerable to social exclusion because of their language skills, lack of contact with their relatives, and possibly intimate partner violence (Fernbrant *et al.*, 2017; Jungteerapanich, 2014). In some scenarios, migrant women with a high level of education degree are more likely to be employed in a lower skill than native-born with the same level of education (Yang, 2016.). Therefore, labor participation and entrepreneurship skill is another factor of immigrant women successfully integrating into Swedish society. On the other hand, the existing research report that migrant women often have difficulty finding suitable and reliable employment which may lead them to establish their own business and employment opportunity (Tschirhart e al, 2019). Even though the migrant woman is a foreigner to the country, they have the same rights as the local citizens such as the right to vote, social welfare, and insurance (Chuenglertsiri, 2012).

3. Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the racial and gender stereotype that Thai women encountered in Sweden and how that impacts the experience of Thai women in Sweden. Intersectionality Orientalism and will be the main theories to answer the research question. To understand how gender, class, and race impact their position and status in Swedish society. Additionally, the research project will use push and pull theory to conceptualize the motivation that influences Thai women to reside in Sweden.

3.1 Intersectionality

The intersectionality theory is a powerful theoretical approach to understand how class, race, status, and gender intersect to configure the experience of inequalities for individuals. Moreover, the theory is overlapping with the interdependent to the concept of discrimination, disadvantage, unprivileged, and inferiority. It is an analytical tool to understand how discrimination has several dimensions and power structures (Harris, 2013; Samuel 2013). The aspect of gender, race, sexuality, sex, class, ethnicity, age, and disability is contributing to discrimination and oppression (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Referring to the previous research, power structure, hierarchy, status and class is the key component to the intersectionality. It helped explain the grassroots of discrimination and helped understand the overlapping of race, gender and class create oppression, marginalized and subordination. Referring to Claudia Jones's⁴ theory, Triple oppression or discrimination is a notable example of why black women situated in the working class. However, the concept can be applied to Thai women as well in terms of gender, race, and class. The intersectional approach helped explain how Thai women were considered as the inferior group in society. Moreover, the power relations of Thai women immigrants as a homogenous group. An intersectional approach is a feminist theory that related to power as a dynamic relation that restricts women to domination. According to Lutz, Herrera & Rupik (2016), "Intersectional analysis is born out of conflicts within and in between social movements

⁴ Claudia Jones (1915-1964), black feminist, journalist and activist. Her theory of Triple oppression or discrimination has significantly explained how women are more vulnerable in the form of discrimination and devaluation. By analyzing the component of gender, race and class.

struggling for social justice, cultural transformation and a difference and diversity-sensitive, socially, culturally and ecologically sustainable democracy (217).”

The growing multiple forms of inequalities such as gender, class, race, and immigration status fall under the umbrella of intersectionality. Even though gender equality has been increasingly developed, Thai women still experienced disadvantages in the present time regardless of their well educational background, professional career, and class. The portrayal of Thai women, as a prostitute in the media and the significant number of Thai women as domestic workers, create a significant impact toward the status of Thai women in the Swedish society as a whole (Poltecha, 2017). This common perception is connected to the race-based division since the domestic work is not attractive to the local Swedish people. Therefore, the majority of domestic workers are originally from the global south. The colonial legacies still have major the experience of a post-colonial female who came to work in modern colonialism (Yuval-Davis, 2016). Moreover, the intersectional approach is connected to the Marxist concept of hierarchies of power which referred to the imbalance of power between the western and non-western (Bürkner, 2012; Lutz & Herra & Supik, 2016). The concept is the binary opposition of superiority and inferiority, creating an unfair status of Thai Women such as the inequality of financial income and gender-based occupational segregation. Furthermore, the racialized divisions often concentrated on the subordinated people who were perceived as economically and socially disadvantaged especially, racialized women in unprofessional jobs such a domestic and sex workers. Even though women have become more empowered and independent, the role of domestic work is still considered a woman job in the present time (Elden & Anving, 2016). Referring to the previous literature, there are some interesting aspects about the status and class of Thai women in western society. Even though Thai women realize their inferior status, they still involve with further subordination because of the limited opportunities to thrive in the labor market. Moreover, non-western employees are willing to travel across the work because they found that the jobs in western countries are more appealing than their native countries.

3.2 Orientalism

The stereotyping and prejudice of Thai women have connected to the theory ‘Orientalism’ or ‘Othering⁵’ by Edward Said. The term referred to the unequal relationship between the western (European and Americans) and eastern (Non-western groups such as Asia, Africa, and Middle east) such as the hierarchy of gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality. The theory represents the discourse of the Occident misrepresenting the Orient as backward, uncivilized, and eccentric. According to Lapanun (2012), “Said perceives Orientalism as a system of representations framed by a constellation of assumptions that brought the Orient into the Western learning, consciousness, and empire (6).” Orientalism can help explain why Thai women are usually perceived as backward and uneducated compared to Western women. According to Kwan (1998), “The characteristic of the Oriental woman is “meek, shy, passive, childlike and innocent”... their sexualized roles and character as sex objects for western consumption is considered socially acceptable, in contrast with white women (100). Generally, women are distinguished as oppressive and submissive based on a Western standard, which they are powerless and under male authority (Spivak, 1986; Mohanty, 2003; and Sharma, 2006). According to Sharma (2006), “the context of white empowerment believes in their possession of the power to talk and make decisions about the Third World-looking people (22).”

Thai-Western couples residing in Europe have been stereotyped by the Western media and public perception, mainly centralized on the partners’ unequal power relationships, the women’s prior involvement in sex work, and other social issues (Webster & Haandrikman, 2014). While Western men are attracted to Thai women because of the ability to fulfill their sexual fantasy, Thai women are attracted to Western men because of the flexibility of gender relations and better living conditions than in their homeland (Lapanun, 2012: 6). Moreover, the term orientalism can be related to the binary within the sex tourism industry. The consumer and worker directly correlates with the concept of colonizer and colonized and the Western and non-Western. The

⁵ According to Edward Said’s, Europe portrays the “Orient” as inferior, uncivilized and eccentric, but importantly Said argued this was simultaneously about defining Europe as the orient opposite superior, civilized and privilege. Western countries like Europe often relate the beliefs and norms of Muslims stereotyping of the East. Orientalism is a form of “knowledge” that authorizes and justifies the assertion of western power over the east. According to Said (1979), “Orientalism offers a marvelous instance of the interrelations between society, history, and textuality; moreover, the cultural role played by the Orient in the West connects Orientalism with ideology, politics, and the logic of power, matters of relevance (24)”.

colonizer or Western imperial power is usually referred to as the consumer meanwhile, the colonized are usually referred to as the worker in the developing countries in the global south (Poltecha, 2017: 9). Orientalism allows Western discourse to dehumanize Thai women by considering them as “exotic” or “submissive” to white Western superiority. The existing representation and discourse of the East as ‘Oriental’ or different from the West has reinforced Orientalism. According to Pettman (1999), “Dominant group men’s access to the bodies of subordinated, colonized or slave women was part of the privilege of power. These women were frequently constructed as sexually available, promiscuous, or alternatively as passive, or already abused: excusing the using men from responsibility towards the women or their children (54)”. Thai-Swedish couples or generally, Thai with Western men were seen as deviant because of the perception that derives from the Western media and popular culture.

3.3 Power and Agency

Power and Agency theory can explain the status and position of Thai immigrant women in Sweden. The theory was initially invented by Stephen Ross in the 1970s to describe the concept of power, inequality, and competition. As previously mentioned in discriminatory discourse and stereotypical assumptions, Western interpretations of gender oppression in the media and limits interpretations of power and agency create a negative image of Thai women in Sweden. The theory has explained how Thai immigrant women perceived through the westerner by the portrayal of the media. According to Webster & Haandrikman (2014), “Agency and power can be expressed throughout different settings and methods, but in some cases, an agency needs no more than the simple individualism of autonomous actors exercising their power over the world (17).” The theory can be applied to describe the hierarchies of power of each individual based on gender, race, class, and sexuality. Even though Thai immigrant women can exercise their life by free will, there are contexts of limited options such as the inability to make choices and decisions through the concept of power and agency. For example, the existing report has stated that Thai women are inferior in terms of socioeconomic status, they are often positioned in the low skilled labor (Butratana & Trupp, 2014; 222). Power and Agency are correlated with the Push and Pull theory because those concepts are connected as an individual power to exercise their right between their origin countries and a new destination. Moreover, Thai female immigrant; experiences to the new destination is related to global unequal gender and racialized relations

(Kanchanachitra: 2020). For example, Middle-class Thai women worked as domestic workers in Sweden (which will be further elaborated in the section on the employment opportunities for Thai women). The power and agency theory has provided evidence of an unequal power relation of Thai immigrant women in the Swedish society by the influencing of general assumption and stereotype of Thai women in the western perception

3.4 Push and Pull factor

Another theory that could explain how Thai women chose to reside in Sweden is Push and Pull factor. One of the theories that could explain the phenomena is the Push and Pull factor. The theory is first mentioned by an English-German geographer, Ernest Ravenstein (1834-1913). Push factors influence the immigrant to leave, associated with their origin countries. Meanwhile, pull factors motivates them to migrate to another different place that differs from their original destination. Each individual has a different purpose and motivation that associate them with adaptation and adjustment. Therefore, the experience of migrants is different and unique depending on their individual circumstances. Referring to the theory of Ravenstine (1997), the push factor refers to the circumstances that influence the migrant to leave their origin countries and settle in the new area. The circumstance could be intentional or repulsive depending on the circumstances. For instance, political instability, economic factors, natural disaster, and other extraordinary factors (as cited in Yang, 2016:9). A push factor is described in terms of negative position which can cause a minor or major impact on the particular individual such as unemployment, food deprivation, overpopulation, war and conflict, religious or political persecution, and racial discrimination (ibid). Meanwhile, the pull factor referred to as the attractive or positive motivation to the new destination. However, the condition in the resettled area is not necessarily better or worse than their origin countries, but the possibility could be due to more opportunities for subsistence and development such as the significant demand for foreign labor and pursue higher education degree (Jungteerapanich, 2014; Osanami Törngren, 2011; Yang, 2016). In some circumstances, international migration can bring more freedom and liberty to the individual migrant from political or religious persecution. Additionally, Human traffickers or smugglers are also considered as the pull factor. The scheme offers better job or living conditions to attract migrants to migrate to new destinations (Yang, 2016). The theory of push and pull factor can be applied to the research project because it can explore the particular

the reason that motivates Thai immigrants from their original geographic location to Sweden which contributes to the different experiences that they encounter as a foreign citizen. International Moreover, the Push and Pull factor is correlated with the international migration flow that determines the population to resettle in new countries.

4. Method section

The purpose of this research project is to explore the gender and racial stereotype that Thai women experience in Sweden and how these experiences impact and affect their process of conforming to Swedish society. The research project is mainly centralized on Thai immigrant women because Thai is one of the large immigrant groups in Sweden. Referring to the existing report, there is an increasing number of Thai immigrants in Sweden for different reasons such as marriage, employment, and studying. Despite the increasing number of Thai women in Sweden, there is existing literature that demonstrates Thai women as a marginalized group in Swedish society. Even though Thai women become more sophisticated in terms of education and professional career, the majority of Thai women have been considered uneducated immigrants. Initially, this qualitative research aims to explore the background of Thai women and their purpose to reside in Sweden. Moreover, the migration movement can further elaborate on how Thai become the large immigrant groups in Sweden. I have collected 15 participants who resided in Sweden for different reasons. I separate the participants into 3 different categories, the participants who reside in Sweden for interracial marriage, the participants who moved to pursue higher education background, and the participants that moved for employment opportunities. Secondly, the analyze core concept of gender and racial stereotype that Thai women experience by examining their class, status, and profession. Finally, the impact of gender and racial stereotype on Thai women's process of integration in the Swedish society. Since migration can create a significant change for an individual, this could bring both favorable and unfavorable aspects for Thai women.

4.1 Method and Research Design

This research project is a qualitative research design based on multiple case studies and existing research. Moreover, the data is mainly from in-depth interviews with different participants. An interview is appropriate for the data gathering method because the research project is mainly concentrated on the experience of gender and racial stereotype of Thai immigrant women. Therefore, it is important to discover information from different participants because it gives a better perspective and insight from the primary source. I can understand the participant's

opinions, behavior, and experiences. The interview can be appropriately conducted through physical interaction, telephone, or by a video call. Before the interview, it is crucial to design interview questions that are relevant to the research project. The researcher has to make sure that the interview question will be clear and easy to comprehend. Since there are 3 different categories of participants, I have designed 3 different interview question formats that suitable for the participants. Moreover, the equipment to collect data such as voice recorder or note-taking has to be prepared before meeting with the participants. the researcher should inform partial information of the research project to the participant before conducting the interview. In my experience, the participants, who received the information before conducting an interview, are more cooperative and interested to conduct the interview than the participant who did not have prior knowledge. For example, the researcher should introduce and explain the purpose of the research project before conducting the in-depth interview, how the information obtained from the interview from the participants can help develop the research project. In some circumstances, If the research project is related to the participant's personal information, the researcher should find creative techniques to know about the participant information, that are not considered intrusive. Since there are 3 different groups of Thai women in my research project, the interview question has to be devised for the coherence of the interview. Since the research project has explored the experience of a different group of Thai women (such as interracial marriage and education purposes), I have designed both general and specific questions for the different groups of interviewees. More importantly, the participant should be informed about the time limitation.

4.2 Interview and Sampling

Since the research project is mainly about the experience of Thai immigrant women in Sweden, the data collection is collected through in-depth interviews because it allows the researcher and reader to understand the participant's personal experience, activities, behavior, and opinion. I have asked 15 participants to participate in an interview in which all of them agree to participate. 5 women have migrated to Sweden because of their spouse, 5 women have migrated to Sweden to pursue higher education degrees and the other 5 women have migrated to Sweden because of employment opportunities. The participant profession is varied: Participant (A) is a stayed home mom who recently quit her job as a flight attendant, (B) personal assistance for disabilities

children, (C) own a local grocery store, (D) own a beauty salon and (E) a shopkeeper in the Asian market (F) an employee in the technology company, (G) a consultant (H) an architect (I) Strategic Analyst (J) Ph.D. researcher. Meanwhile, participants (K, L, M, N, &O) are former and present Au pair. The age of participants ranged from 30 - 40 years. I chose this age range because the age difference can contribute to the difference in the experience of integration. Their type of residence permit is different. Some participants have obtained PUT or UT (Uppehållstillstånd) ⁶ which lasted for an undefined time depend on the purpose of living, a Work permit, and Au pair visa. All of the participants have a university degree but only 5 participants have a Master's degree.

I used snowball sampling as a technique to find the participants which is a widely accepted sampling technique. The technique is convenient and suitable because I can discover participants in a limited time. According to Parker *et al.* (2019), the technique is normally initiated with a small number of contacts who suit the criteria and later become participants for the research project. Later on, the agreeable participants are asked to introduce other potential participants to complete the interview (*ibid.*). For selection criteria, I chose participants who have different backgrounds, education, and profession to participate in this research project. The confidentiality of the interviewee will be the top priority and their identity will be kept anonymous. I have informed the participants about the aims of the research project and they have been asked to provide consent to record their voice before conducting the interview. The majority of the participants are agreed to have their voice recorded but a few refused and preferred note-taking of the conversation instead.

Importantly, it is very essential to gain trust and confidence from the participants in order to conduct an in-depth interview effectively. The interviews were mainly conducted through telephone because it is more convenient for the participants and they feel more comfortable than in person because of the COVID 19 pandemic. However, some participants who I have known personally were willing to conduct the interviewee in person. Most participants were really

⁶ Accordig to Migrationsverket, Uppehållstillstånd is a resident permit that allow foreign national to reside in Sweden legally. After the applicants have been granted with residence permit, they have to be photographed and have the fingerprint taken. It is mandatory that you need your residence permit care when you go to government agencies or the health care services.

enthusiastic, intrigued, and open-minded to participating in the interview. However, some participants were very timid and distrustful to participate in the interview because I have not known the participant personally before conducting the interview. Therefore, small talk or finding something in common to discuss is very important to relieve tension between the interviewer and interviewees at the start of the interview. Even though I have not known some participants personally, some suggested meeting up after the interview because they were interested to know more about the research project. Since all the participants are older than me, I referred to them as *Pi* because the interview is conducted in Thai, and in the analysis, I used a code name to refer to them than used their real name to guarantee anonymity. Even though conducting the interview through the telephone is convenient for both the interviewer and interviewees, it has some disadvantages. Face-to-Face interviews have more advantages because the interviewer has the opportunity to observe the nonverbal behavior of the interviewees such as emotional gestures and physical interaction. However, phone interviews are more flexible and adaptable for the interviewees who do not prefer to meet physically. As has been previously mentioned, some participants agreed to meet physically but some were comfortable chatting only through telephone. For example, Participant A, F & H recently have welcomed new babies to their families. They were concerned about the risk of COVID19 infection and try to avoid unnecessary physical gathering. Therefore, we agreed to conduct the interview by telephone.

More importantly, the interview questions are very important because it is a tool to explore participants more systematically and comprehensively. I used a semi-structured interview because I do not have to follow the formalized question but instead an open-ended question. The participants have the opportunity to express their opinion, perspective, and feeling during the interview. In my perspective, the interviews were very insightful and compelling. I have discovered that Thai immigrant women groups are a close-knit community and some participants have known each other for many years. I was able to discover the participants who moved to Sweden for interracial marriage and higher education degrees very quickly. I have known some participants through the association of alumni from Lund University. However, I found it more difficult to collect participants who lived in Sweden because of employment opportunities. Initially, I found some participants who worked as a waitress, massage therapist, and former Au pair. I personally feel the incoherency of the data analysis. Therefore, I have made some changes

in the participant in the employment section and conducted 4 new interviews with participants (who were former and present pair). In a Swedish context, the Au pair⁷ is considered as a domestic worker. There are social network groups called Thai Aupair in Sweden, communities in which former or new Au pair can interact with each other. The community consists of over 6,000 members who still living in Sweden as an Aupair, extended their living because they found their partner and some already left Sweden. The participants that I chose to interview are participants that already finished the Aupair program and extend their residence permit to stay with their partner. The duration of the Au pair program is 1 year or 12 months but the Au pair program can last for 2 years or 48 months in some countries. The different types of participants have demonstrated the difference in terms of profession, education level, and background.

Table 1: 15 participants of Thai immigrant women in Sweden

Participant	Profession	Status	Type of interview and Interview Date
A	Housewife (recently resigned as a flight attendant)	Married	Phone Interview - 4.2.2021
B	Personal assistance for children with disabilities	Single	Phone Interview - 9.2.2021
C	Local grocery store owner	Married	Phone interview - 10.2.2021
D	Beauty Salon owner	Married	Face to Face interview - 11.2.2021
E	Shopkeeper	Engaged	Phone interview - 12.2.2021
F	Researcher at Health science center	Married	Phone interview - 1.2.2021
G	Researcher engineer	Married	Phone and Face to Face interview - 9.2.2201

⁷ The definition of Au pair is different in some context. Generally, an Au pair is a program that young adult (18-30 years old) wants to explore in another culture and learn new languages by living in a foreign country with Host family, In compensation, Au pair will receive a private room or shared room with their host siblings along with pocket money, the Aupair will takes care of task related babysitting, childcare and easy household chores (Au pair.com).

H	Marketing web developer	Married	Phone interview - 12.2.2021
I	Strategy Analyst	Single	Phone interview - 13.2.2021
J	Ph.D. researcher	Single	Face to Face interview - 14.2.2021
K	Au pair, Freelancer	Single	Face to Face interview - 28.1.2021
L	Au pair, Babysitter	Single	Phone interview - 15.4.2021
M	Au pair	Single	Phone interview - 18.4.2021
N	Au pair	Single	Phone interview - 21.4.2021
O	Au pair	Single	Face to Face interview - 25.4.2021

Ethical Consideration

In terms of ethical consideration, the information of the participants will be confidential and anonymous. Participants were chosen voluntarily and they were informed prior to the interview about the purpose of the research project. Moreover, the researcher is aware of the sensitivity of the question and the risk of participation for respondents to withdraw from the interview. Therefore, they will be asked for consent for a voice recording before conducting the interview. Fortunately, most of the participants are comfortable with voice recording. However, some are comfortable with only note-taking. The researcher aims to protect the data of the participants. The researcher is aware of the ethical issues in terms of confidentiality of the information of interviewees and unwilling to share personal information because of the sensitivity of the interview question. Therefore, the researcher has to take precaution in designing interview questions. The data gathered from the interview was solely used as a resource for the master thesis on the gender and racial stereotype that impact the experience of Thai women in Sweden.

5. History of Thai Migration movement

The research project is connected with the concept of migration because they are relevant to the term of movement and residing. Migration is referred to as a movement from one original area to another. Each individual has a different reason to engage in the migration movement. The concept will explain when Thai women started the migration and become one of the large communities in Sweden.

The first wave of Thai outbound migration started in the 1950s and 1960s when the increasing number of Thai people went to work and study abroad in the United States, Australia, and Europe (Butratana & Tripp, 2014 :221). In the late 1960s, a considerable number of the high skilled workers including doctors, engineers, and nurses started to move to the United States where they continue to represent the largest group of Thais living abroad until the present day (Mix and Piper, 2003: 53).

The second wave of Thai outbound migration began in 1980 when there was an increase in overseas contract employment. The Thai government initiated a labor migration scheme by improving the condition of labor recruitment. According to Sciortino & Punpuing (2009), “In 2007, there were 161,917 low-educated and low-skilled Thai contract workers employed abroad (as cited in Butratana & Trupp, 2014: 222).”

According to Hayami (2012), Southeast Asian women are more autonomous in terms of social and economic status compared to women from neighboring regions in South and East Asia (as cited in Butratana & Trupp, 2014: 222). However, the existing report of Thai outbound migration has demonstrated that female migrants mainly work in domestic work in commercial service sectors such as nannies, housekeepers, and service employees (Yamanaka and Piper, 2005). Thai women are usually employed in domestic work because they were traditionally engaged in domestic spheres of housework, child-rearing, and parenting which were segregated from the male-dominated sphere of capitalist production, politics, religious life, and the wider society (King, 2008: 197–198). Even though there is less occupational gender segregation in Thailand, Thai women were traditionally involved in domestic work rather than skilled labor.

The third wave started in the 1980s when there's economic growth in Thailand. Thai outbound migration was demanded highly skilled workers and the offer of scholarships. While professional job positions have opened up for women in developed countries, women from developing countries have been restricted to low-paying jobs, regardless of their educational levels and professional training in foreign countries.

The fourth wave started in the late 1990s with the increasing influx of international tourists, cross border marriage outbound migration in Western Europe and North America. Thailand has become a popular destination for tourism and provides tourists with extraordinary experiences. Besides the national government export labor force, the existing report demonstrates that Thai have migrated independently to find their own employment. The workers have the possibility to find employment through formal or informal brokers or through family relatives or friends. This wave is the beginning when western countries employed domestic workers from the global south (Butratna & Trupp, 2014: 231).

6. Interracial marriage

6.1 Globalization and Marriage

Referring to the existing literature, the most common reason that motivates Thai immigrant women to Sweden is interracial marriage. The term is different from traditional marriage because it is involved with different geographical scales, transnational communities, and international migration patterns (Wojtenko, 2012). It referred to the marital relationship between two parties with different nationalities, where only one of the partners resettles (Butratana & Trupp 2020; Chuenglertsiri, 2012; Dribe & Lundh 2008. Fernbrant, *et al*, 2017). As previously mentioned in the literature review, the “internationalization of intimacy” possibly causes the individual from different national, cultural, racial, religious, and class borders to meet and marry (9).

Referring to the existing literature, interracial marriage has been increasing due to the impact of globalization. The broadened globalization has increased the number of international travel along with communication access (Moses & Woesthoff, 2019: 452). It allows people from different parts of the world to connect together through the internet connection. Moreover, it provides the opportunity for the individual to meet with their potential partners with a particular characteristic that is unavailable locally (Webster, 2016; Yang, 2016). The rise of globalization has allowed people to meet their partners from different parts of the world. To demonstrate, A growing number of dating applications and websites is another platform that allowed people (from the same and different nationalities) to begin their relationship. The uncomplicated way of communication allowed people to have access to the internet. People can connect through their phones. Partners can connect through social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook messenger. This innovation enables couples who met online to maintain their long-distance relationship before they met in real life. Even though the partners who resettle possibly could be both male or female, the report has demonstrated the spouses are primarily female. According to Fernbrant *et al.* (2017), “ 75% of the Thai population are women, among whom 80% are partnered with Swedish or other Scandinavian men (1).” Moreover, the Swedish statistics also stated that Swedish citizens who engaged in interracial marriage often marry Thai followed by Iraqi nationality.

6.2 Migration and marriage

In Thai literature, there is a specific term for Thai women who marry a foreign husband which is referred to as “Mia Farang ” (Westerner’s wife) (Butratana & Trupp. , 2020; Pongthippat et al., 2018). The pattern can be connected to the concept of marriage migration, which the term is associated with the adaptation, acceptance, and adjustment of Thai women in Swedish society. Marriage migration has created a relationship between partners who differ in terms of race and ethnicity. Migration and interracial marriage are connected because it creates a significant change for the immigration status of one partner (Kanchanachitra, 2020; Jungteerapanich, 2014; Webster., & Haandrikman, 2014). For instance, it allows one partner who comes from the economically less advantaged to have a better life condition; more social or economic benefits can be provided by the country that the couple resides in. Additionally, it can also provide an opportunity that one partner can establish a new settlement in a new country without changing their citizenship. Since some women come from less economic disadvantage, this relation has demonstrated that Western men can help Thai women and their families gain upward social and economic mobility in their home country (Chuenglertsiri, 2012; Rodríguez-García *et al.*, 2015; Wojtenko, 2012).

Even though the marriage migration can create a significant change and bring positive aspects for Thai women, the discriminatory discourse and stereotypical assumption have described Thai immigrant women in a negative perspective (Jungteerapanich, 2014; Rodríguez-García, D. *et al.*, 2015). According to Fernbrant *et al.*, (2017), “the immigrants are most likely to be exposed to prejudice or discrimination especially, non-Western European or North American countries.” Asian women especially, Thai women often represent negatively in foreign media For example, the TV program, newspaper, or documentary are often referred Thai women in terms of prostitution, mail order bride or provide sexual service in massage parlor (Chuenglertsiri, 2012; Kanchanachitra, 2020 Jungteerapanich, 2014). Moreover, Thai women often perceive common stereotypes when engaging in interracial marriage as submissive, mail order brides, domestic, sexual slaves, or prostitutes (Fernbrant, 2017; Osanami Törngren, 2011; Pongthippat *et al.* 2018; Tschirhart, 2019). The effect of stereotypes has affected the incoming immigrants in terms of insecurity, instability, and precariousness.

7. Life in Sweden: the experience of Thai women in a different dimension

7.1 Quality of life in Sweden

Based on the interview, the participants have pointed out some positive aspects that they encountered while living in Sweden. They have mentioned similar experiences as immigrant women in Sweden. Participants B, F, G, I & J are totally satisfied with their life and consider Sweden as their home. They are impressed with their quality of living, lifestyle, and environment.

Participant B stated that she was very happy with the immigration policy of Sweden. Since she was married before she met her ex Swedish partner, she was able to apply for residence permit for her children from her previous marriage as well.

.. Before I met my Swedish (ex) partner, I have been married before...I have children from a previous marriage... After I moved to Sweden, I wanted them to come live with me so I applied for a residence permit for children moving to a parent in Sweden...Now they are living with me except my oldest.. ” (Participant B)

Participant F mentioned that she was really impressed with Sweden in terms of the maternity and paternity leave system in Sweden because there is no paternity leave in Thailand. She likes the idea that husband and wife shared the responsibility in the household including housework and child-rearing. As she recently welcomed her first child and is on maternity leave, the system has allowed her to take a break from work.

The majority of the participants have neutral expressions about Sweden. They mentioned both positive and negative aspects. They prefer the lifestyle in Sweden because the country is more calm and relaxed than in Thailand. They later mentioned that they are happier because they experience less pressure and stress in their daily life.

However, participants A, C, D, H & O expressed that they are experienced with homesickness and unhappiness in Sweden. They are not totally satisfied with their living conditions in Sweden because their lifestyle is too boring, the winter is very long and extreme. They stated that people

are very reserved and close-minded. Their life is more stressful because they do not have many people to interact with.

“..My husband was my classmate while I was studying for my master’s degree...It was my first time studying abroad. During that time, I was unhappy and depressed because of the weather... If I have not met my husband, I will move back to Thailand after the graduation...”
(Participant H)

Based on the interview, mood and emotional state significantly have an impact on women’s physical and mental health. There are some existing reports that discussed that women are more likely to experience sleepiness and fatigue during the winter. The symptoms that they mentioned are similar to Seasonal Affective Disorder.⁸

“...The winter is very difficult for me...I was more outgoing and active as a person... I cannot go outside because it is too cold and the sky gets dark very fast... I cannot sleep and sometimes I have to rely on the sleeping pill ”
(Participant K)

According to Pongthipat *et al.*,(2018), “Emigrants often carry distress with them from one nation or culture to the new one. In Effect, migration is a stressful life event that may be associated with subsequent marital instability, which, in turn, influences immigrant women’s health (1).

7.2 Employment difficulties

In terms of employment, some participants have expressed difficulties to find employment in Sweden. Besides education and skill, Language is a key factor that women are unable to access

⁸Accessed on March 15, 2021 from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/hw169553>

Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD is commonly known as Winter depression commonly occurs during the winter. It is a form of depression that people usually experience during a particular season. People are more reserved and inactive during the winter because the sky got dark earlier. Multiple studies have shown that women have a much higher incidence of SAD, with prevalence rates of 80% People diagnosed with Seasonal Affective Disorder in winter show decreased sleep efficiency and lose their appetite. In November and December, people start to decorate special lights in their windows throughout Sweden, a common tradition to make it easier for people to endure the darkest period of the winter season. On the contrary, people are more outgoing and spending time outside in the daylight during the summer. They normally feel more cheerful and energetic because the days are longer. Feeling sad, grumpy, moody, or anxious, Lose interest in normal activities, Eat more carbohydrates, Gain weight, Sleep more but still feel tired are the common symptom that people experienced in the winter.

the Swedish labor market. Even though Sweden is an English-speaking country, occupations with high income require employees who can speak and write English and Swedish fluently. The existing literature demonstrates that Thai immigrants in Sweden (who lack high-level Swedish language skills) have contributed to their unsuccessful in accessing the Swedish labor market. According to the existing report, Thai women usually employed in domestic or care work in Sweden. Even though there is no segregation of gender in the employment sector, the majority of care workers are women because of the perception that the role is a “women’s responsibility”, which therefore poorly valued in social and economic terms. Since the concept of domestic work has been feminized over the centuries, women are solely responsible in this sector. Based on the interview, the participants stated that they are limited job available for foreign workers who unable to communicate fluently in Swedish. Despite the university degrees, they are mostly employed in the domestic sector because of the language improficiency to find work that suitable for them.

“... I moved here because of my ex-partner. During that time, I barely speak English and have no knowledge of Swedish. Since my ex-partner can understand Thai, there’s no problem with communication.... However, I want to be able to earn my own money. I joined Arbetsförmedlingen⁹...They asked me about my educational background and skill.. I worked as a masseur in the beginning... ” (Participant B)

“..I met my husband through a friend..When I was in Thailand, I owned a very successful clothing store.. I sold clothes both in stores and online... I can speak English very well because I learn it through my university... But I do not know what to do when I move to Sweden because my skill is not applicable to finding a job.. I struggled for a while before I found a job in the Thai community” (Participant E)

Although Participant D has a university level and has a background knowledge of the business. She described her struggle to find suitable employment in Sweden.

“ ... I felt very confident because of my previous education and work experience before I moved to Sweden. However, I started to feel hesitant because the company required employees who speak fluently in both English and Swedish...In the first year, I asked my husband to support me

⁹ Arbetsförmedlingen is a Swedish Employment agency company responsible operated by the Ministry of Emoloyment. See more <https://arbetsformedlingen.se/other-languages/english-engelska/do-you-want-to-work-in-sweden>

financially since I cannot find a job and I have little knowledge of Swedish...” (Participant D)

“...Even though English is widely spoken in Sweden, Swedish is mandatory to find a high-paid job.. When I first moved here, I registered for the SFI¹⁰ course immediately...My disadvantage is language so I have to work harder than other people.. I learn Swedish through the SFI course... learn through the internet. and practiced with my customers...” (Participant H)

Even though the participants have mentioned their difficulties to find employment in Sweden, Participants K, L, M, N, & O moved to Sweden because of employment opportunities.

Participant K stated that “ .. I applied to become an Au pair in Sweden because I want to practice English and learn new languages... It was a different experience because I got to live within the new country and practice new languages besides English..”

Participant O stated that “...I never been to European countries before and it is my dream that I want to travel and speak English fluently... I decided to become an Au pair because I want to work and travel ”

7.3 Experience of stereotyping and sexual harassment

Even though the participants have mentioned some positive aspects about their quality of life in Sweden, they have stated that they have been experienced discrimination and victimized by sexual harassment. The representation of Thai Women as prostitutes in the Western media is one significant factor that caused the misrepresentation and assumption in Swedish society. This common stereotype has detrimentally affected Thai women who want to disassociate themselves from this perception. Referring to the interview, the participants have demonstrated their experiences toward gender and racial stereotype in Sweden.

“...I encountered many customers. Some are nice and some are unfriendly. I was once asked by a male Swedish customer that do I offer a ‘happy ending’¹¹.... Therefore I prefer female customers

¹⁰ SFI or *Svenska för Invandrare* is the Swedish free language course offered to the immigrants who are registering in Sweden. If they have been successfully registered, the immigrants are eligible to learn Swedish in the kommun that they live in.

¹¹ Thai masseurs tired of "happy ending" requests Accessed on February 15, 2021 from <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/5611344>

because they are nicer... But sometimes I cannot choose because I want to earn money...” (Participant B)

“.. We are both Thai women in foreign countries, ... it is very common that we have been generalized as prostitutes because we are from Thailand... When I told them that I come from Thailand, some men looked at me in a funny way” (Participant C)

“...Some Swedish men have asked me why there are many prostitutes in Thailand....Later, I was asked if I am a prostitute as well...Of course, I was shocked and angry...I simply replied to him that not all Thai women are prostitutes ...”(Participant E)

Besides the stereotype that the participants experience, some participants have described that they have encountered sexual harassment while they are in public and the workplace.

Participant A stated that she has encountered unwanted sexualized comments or catcalling in the public.

“...I think because I’m Asian so that’s why they thought I do not understand them, especially in public transportation. I normally ignore them and pretend that I do not understand what they were saying...” (Participant A)

Participant F described that she has encountered unwanted attention from her colleagues in the workplace.

“... I’m not sure if this is called sexual harassment or not but some of my male colleagues have asked me to massage for him while we are working together. I think this is because of the massage parlor that is mostly owned by Thai women and the media that often represents Thai women as masseurs... or sometimes my male colleague asked me to have a drink with him after work... Honestly, I don’t know how to react. Since he knew I have a husband... So I just pretend to not hear the question and focus on the work to avoid conflict...”

Based on the interview, the participants have experienced similar stereotypes despite their status, class, and position.

Happy ending has connotation meaning which refer to sexual experiences that the massuer provide to the customer toward the end of the massage.

I was not able to get along with my husband's family when I first met them especially when they knew I am from Thailand...They thought that I was just looking for a western male to marry and get a visa that the same way the media represented... ”(Participant H)

“... I have to change to another family because my employer was not very nice...They did not say it directly but I can tell that they look down on me as a Thai girl... They asked for an Asian girl specifically... so I assume that they must appreciate Asian culture and people... Yes, my expectation and reality are completely different.” (Participant M)

7.4 The perspective toward the education system in Sweden

The education system in Sweden is very attractive to international students. In the last decade, Sweden has welcomed many international students to study in the country. Referring to the existing report, many international students believe that studying in Sweden will lead to a greater probability of employment after finishing their degree. The liberal policy from the Swedish government offered an ‘After studies’¹² permit for those students who wished to find employment after they have finished their degree. Even though non-European students are required to pay tuition fees, many universities generously offered scholarships to international students. The statistics have demonstrated that there were approximately 25,000 foreign students studying in Sweden each year.¹³ Despite the growing pandemic of COVID 19 and traveling restriction, the report has demonstrated that there has been a 13% increased number of international student admission to Swedish universities¹⁴.

“I really admire Sweden in terms of education and child care... When my children moved to Sweden, they have been offered student counseling before going to school which is really rare in Thailand.” (Participant B)

¹² After studies permit or Residence permit for looking for work is offered to student who have completed their higher education in Sweden to extend their permit to look for employment or explore the possibilities of establish their own business in Sweden. Accessed on <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Studying-and-researching-in-Sweden/Looking-for-work-after-studies.html>

¹³ ‘International students in higher education in Sweden by type’ Accessed on February 20, 2021 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1139205/international-students-in-higher-education-in-sweden-by-type/>

¹⁴ Sweden popular as study destination despite the pandemic Accessed on February 20, 2021 from <https://si.se/en/increase-of-international-students-in-sweden-despite-the-pandemic/>

“.. Coincidentally after I graduated I was offered in a Ph.D. position. It lots of hard work but I am happy to receive this opportunity ..” (Participant J)

Additionally, participants mentioned different some general experiences that they are impressed with their quality of life in Sweden.

...I come from Bangkok so it is always busy, traffic and many cars on the street..I normally use a car to commute but when I live in Sweden, I prefer to use public transportation because it is more convenient and punctual ” (Participant E)

8. The representation of Thai women in the Western context

8.1 Western men and Thai women

When women from less developed countries marry a Western man from prosperous countries and reside in more desirable locations, people often assume that they are married to upgrade their social and economic status (Lapanun, 2012:2). Importantly, the obsolete value that Thai women prefer to marry western men in order to have better living conditions is a common assumption that has supports the common stereotype in western society. This concept is related to the term ‘Hypergamy’ which referred to “marrying up” or a practice of marrying someone who has equal or greater wealth and status. Marrying up means a better socioeconomic status, education, financial income, and other aspects associated with economic well-being. Webster and Haandrikan (2014) have pointed out the hypothesis on interracial marriage between foreign immigrants and Swedish men. They have mentioned that men with higher age and lower financial income are more likely to marry a foreign woman, especially when they come from developing countries in the Global South. The representation of Asian women often perceived by westerners as “docile, submissive, inferior and easily to be manipulated” compared to Western women (as cited in Viruega, n.d.: 9). According to Smutkupt & Kitiarsa (2007), “Western men married Thai women with some certain degrees of masculinity orientalizing style of thought and rationalization. These marriages allow men to fulfill their exotic dream of having Oriental wives, whereas Thai women find themselves ‘marrying up’ occidental husbands as a means to escape poverty and enjoy happy endings and successful marriages (3).” In the patriarchal value, Western males preferred to marry Thai women because they can have a sense of their power and self-value which they hardly find in their native country. In the meantime, there are many dating applications and websites that accessible to western men. For example, Asiandating.com, DateinAsia.com, Thaicupid.com, and Thailovelines.com. The website is another platform that illustrates images of Thai women as easily available marriage partners (Angeles & Sunanta, 2007:7). They advertise women as lotus blossoms or oriental butterflies. The delicate and feminine figure by the commercial marriage agencies representing Asian women in an attractive and appealing way (Poltecha, 2017:12).

8.2 The pre assumption and the reality

In the media and western culture, Thai women have been represented as a victimized sex workers. Referring to Cheung (1993), Meanwhile, Western males are represented as the tourists that travel to Asia exclusively to consume the fantasies of the eroticized Orient (as cited in Poltecha, 2017: 9). The representation has caused the status injury toward Thai women who want to disassociate themselves from the common stereotype. In the Swedish context, prostitution is seen as women's oppression and is unacceptable in a progressive, gender-equal society (Ekberg, 2004; 1188). Moreover, Sweden is the first country that prohibits sex purchase and enacts the Sex purchase Act in 1999. The representation of Thai women as prostitutes in Western media and Thailand as the destination of sex workers¹⁵ has positioned Thai women in a negative perspective in Swedish society. Therefore, the Swedish-Thai couples are considered deviant in the western culture as cited in Hedman *et al.* (2009). According to Ekberg (2004), prostituted women are considered victims of male violence. They have no way out but to tolerate the violent situation. The procurer and sex buyer exploited the vulnerability of women who experienced poverty, unemployment, gender inequalities and, domestic violence (1189). This practice commonly occurs in the patriarchal society where women are considered inferior and submissive to men. The grassroots of conflict created status injury toward women. The traditional value that women are expected to be submissive and obedient toward men. This concept could be developed how the Western considered the non-Western as uncivilized and backward. The East represents femininity which is connected to the "submissive" and the West represents masculinity and the conqueror (Cheung, 1993, as cited in Poltecha, 2017:9).

Besides the representation of Thai women as a sex workers in the media, the reality in Thai society is one of the main factors that reproduce the reputation of Thailand as a country of prostitution. Prostitution is the ugly truth of Thailand. Even though the act is considered illegal in Thailand, the availability of sex workers can be seen in a certain area in the country. Prostitution is a problematic issue in Thailand for many decades. The country became the destination of sex exploitation and trafficking. According to the report from UNDP¹⁶, the majority of sex workers

¹⁵ Patpong, Bangkok; Walking Street & Boyztown, Pattaya and Bangla Road, Phuket have been represented as the destination of sex workers also known as the famous red light district in Thailand.

¹⁶ Sex Trafficking and STI/HIV in Southeast Asia:Connections between Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Sexual Risk' accessed on April 20, 2021 from <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/hiv aids/English/SexTrafficking.pdf>.

are young girls from the Southeast Asia region. Besides the local media, there are many international reports about prostitution in Thailand. Even though the common stereotype called Thai women as prostitutes, some women accepted that truth because of their limited choices. The documentary, western media, popular culture are the major component that encourages Thailand as the destination for sex tourism. Referring to the statistics¹⁷, many foreigners came to buy sex in Thailand because of the common perception that Oriental women can fulfill their sexual fantasy (Kwan 1998, as cited in Poltecha 2017:8).

When western tourists think about Thailand, the country can be referred to as beautiful beaches, unique cuisine, and attractive destinations. Meanwhile, the dark side of the country has represented the land of sex tourism. Some famous red-light districts such as Soi Cowboy, Patpong, Pattaya, and Phuket have attracted many western tourists to experience exotic experiences (Poltecha, 2017; 29,80). Many western movies were produced in Thailand such as *The Hangover 2* is another example of how Western perceive the country and women in general. Even though Thai media has represented the issue of prostitution, the news has not received much attention. Thai People normalize prostitution because of the ineffective solution of the authority to counter the issue. There are many scandals that some authorities are corrupted and they received bribes from the procurer and prostitute (Poltecha, 2017; 85) . Therefore, the issue can not be completely solved. Some documentaries have represented the interview from the prostitutes themselves Even though the prostitute women realized that engaging in prostitution will further lead them to subordination, some did not have many opportunities to find a decent job and a friendly environment workplace. Referring to *Whore's glory* (2011) documentary, most women became prostitutes because of their poor educational background, illiteracy, and financial instability

¹⁷'The sex industry of Thailand' accessed on March 17, 2021, from <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/thailand/bangkok/background/other-features/b9e4d08a-a917-4bbb-8329-656c5e62bd6/a/nar/b9e4d08a-a917-4bbb-8329-656c5e62bdd6/357640>

9. Thai women: Public sphere

9.1 Conceptualize public sphere and Thai women

In the past decades, Thai women have become more sophisticated in their education skills and employment status. However, Thai women are not allowed to receive any education during the pre-modern period (Buranajaroenkij, 2017: 2) They are only allowed to receive cooking and embroidery skill to prepare themselves to become perfect wives. Temple is considered as a sacred monastery and school, which only men are allowed to enter because it is considered inappropriate for women. Therefore, men and women have a separate division of labor in the past. Women are only engaged in an expressive role such as cleaning, cooking, and nurturing to support their husband meanwhile, men play an instrumental role to earn financial income to support the whole family (Butratana & Trupp, 2014: 222). Even though women are allowed to develop vigorously in the present time, the arbitrary justification of men and women's roles in the past still affected and practice in women's lives today. Referring to the concept of German philosopher and Sociologist Jürgen Habermas¹⁸ of Public and Private sphere that separate the role of male and female. The term Public sphere is referred to the sphere or the space in which private people come together as a public, possibly socialize and discuss the matter of public concern or societal problem (Doneys, 2002: 163,165). The public sphere described the area of institution between public authority embodied in government and state institutions and the private sphere of everyday life such as family, friends, and daily life. The concept is involved with the freedom of speech, freedom to participate in an assembly, and political debate and decision making. The public sphere was the introduction of a democratic system and principles where men and women should be treated equally (*ibid*). However, the concept of the public sphere has challenged the authority of men to control the women aspect. Women became more independent and freely exercise their rights. They were allowed to discuss the matter of public concern without the repercussion of the men. The suppression of speech, public information,

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas (1929 - present) a member of Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and publish the book called the structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into category of bourgeois society. Habermas originally defined the term public sphere as a discursive space where private people come to together as a public. His work is extremely influential and powerful that had a major impact in variety factors such as social changes and globalization in the twentieth century, civil society, private & public life and democratization etc.

and press were under the surveillance of their husband, father, or any male members of the family.

During the 19th century, Thai women become more aware of their fundamental right to freedom of speech and opinion (Buranajaroenkij, 2017: 5, Doneys, 2002: 171). Women were allowed to vote, engage in government activity and participate in the peaceful assembly. The merging of the public and private sphere is the concept of democratization¹⁹where men and women have the same fundamental right (*ibid*). Despite the success of women's educational background and professional career, the separation of public and private still impact their gender, class, status, and profession. The traditional values, that males were the only breadwinner of the family, are still practiced in a patriarchal society. Male is responsible for the financial income of the family meanwhile, women were responsible for household duties and nurturing the children (Butratna & Trupp, 2014: 222). Even though males and females have the ability to share the same responsibility, the development put women into a more dilemma position because women have to balance their work and family life because household duties are still understood as women's roles.

9.2 The traditional role of Thai young girls

In some countries, daughters or young girls are innately acquired traditional value of gender role mostly from the global south. Thai families taught a young girl to be obedient to adults and prepare to be a perfect wife and mother (Buranajaroenkij, 2017: 5). Moreover, their priority is to express gratitude to their parent as a 'good daughter'. On the other hand, the girls who did not follow this traditional value will be considered deviant and peculiar. Many young girls took care of the household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their younger siblings to express their gratitude to their parents. In some circumstances, young girls who experienced extreme poverty become the financial provider of the family (Doneys, 2002) . Referring to the existing literature, many young girls (especially from rural areas) decided to dismiss from school

¹⁹The development of public sphere was connected to the concept of democratization and a minimization of censorship.

Information, material such as the newspapers and journal were no longer under the control and surveillance of the government. The government no longer make the decision for the citizen and viewed the information as sensitive or harmful.

because of the pressure and expectation of their families. However, there is irony in this situation. Many young girls decided to dismiss from school so their younger siblings can access education. Most families are prioritized education for their sons over their daughters because of the common perception that men can earn more financial income than the daughter. Therefore, many families are less likely to invest their money in their daughter's education. A recent report from International Labor Organization (ILO)²⁰ demonstrated that average wages for women in Thailand were generally lower than men. Consequently, many young girls decided to work in low-paid jobs because of their restriction to thrive in the labor market Elden & Alving (2016a). For example, factory, construction, and domestic work are very attractive to young female workers. Even though the task is very hard, it did not require a certain educational degree. Young girls, with limited choices, considered this an opportunity to earn financial income.

10. Employment Opportunities in Sweden

10.1 Thai women in the Swedish labor market

In the past decades, Sweden has employed Thai immigrant workers because of the limited worker's availability in the country who willing to do unprivileged work such as picking berries domestic work, and massage therapist (Yang 2016). One of the subcategories of domestic work is the Au pair. According to the existing literature²¹, Swedish families preferred to employ domestic workers or Au pair from the global south because the pay is lower than hiring inside the country. Even though domestic work is considered unskilled and low-paid work in Thailand, Thai young females found these opportunities as attractive invitations to travel to a foreign country and explore new languages and cultures. Since I specifically chose participants from employment sectors who are/were employed as an Au pair when they initially moved to Sweden, it will be very interesting to know how their experience contribute to their process of integration which could be different from the participants who moved to Sweden for interracial marriage and pursue higher education degree as their initial purpose. Referring to the existing statistics, the number of young women who have been seeking placements as Au pair is dramatically

²⁰'Thailand a labor market profile' Accessed on April 10, 2021, from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_205099.pdf

²¹ Precarious Care Labor: Contradictory Work Regulations and Practices for Au Pairs in Sweden, Nanny care in Sweden: The inequalities of everyday doings of care, New Ways of Doing (the Gender Equal and Good) Family. : Nannies, Au Pairs and Parents in Sweden *etc.*

increasing especially, from the young women from the global south (Elden & Alving, 2016a: 29). Correspondingly, the attractiveness of the domestic service has encouraged the Swedish family to hire Au pair from the global south because of the inexpensive cost compare to hiring local domestic workers (ibid). Some families specifically required Thai Au pair because of the portrayal that Thai women are more amiable and sympathetic in the media. However, the Au pair program is difficult to define in one specific angle because of the overlapping role of babysitter and housekeeper (Elden & Alving, 2019a: 121). According to the international definition of Au pair²², it is considered as a ‘cultural and language exchange program, where a young adult (both male and female) engage in the everyday life of a foreign host family and ‘do light housework’ and ‘child career in exchange for pocket money, free accommodation and language cost. However, the Au pair must be between 18-30 years old due to the specific requirement of the program. The policy of the Au pair program has opened the door for young individuals especially, Thai women to improve their foreign language skills, explore and integrate to new cultures, travel abroad, and gain valuable experience. In the meantime, the attractiveness of Au pair or domestic work creates a precarious status for Thai women because they are more pliable and easy to be manipulated (Virueaga, n.d.:9). Even though Aupair must have good English skills or other languages as the basic requirement before they can join the program, some families are willing to employ them and used this opportunity to exploit their disadvantages for unreasonable working hours (Elden & Alving, 2016a; Lee 1991; Lundberg 1999). Some participants have switched to different families because of the incompatibility of the host family. However, some participants are decided to tolerate and situation because they cannot find another host family. The disadvantage creates a misconception that women from the global south are willing to work for substandard wages in exchange to live in foreign countries (Elden & Alving, 2019b). The minimum wage of Au pair is 3,500 Swedish Krona before tax but the pay could be higher depending on the specific arrangement between the host family and Au pair (Elden & Alving, 2016b; 52). Even though Au pair does not have to pay for their monthly rent, the participants considered that the pay is very low compared to the expensive cost of living in Sweden.

10.2 The condition of working in Sweden

²² ‘Our basic idea of au pairing’ Accessed on April 20, 2021, from <https://www.aupairworld.com/en/tos/au-pair-regulations>

Since the role of Au pair is overlapped with domestic and care work and they performed behind a closed door, the job is lack transparency. Domestic workers from the global south are more vulnerable to triple discrimination - Gender, Foreign Origin, and Irregular status ((Elden & Alving, 2016a: 35,44). In terms of gender, 80%²³ of domestic workers are women because of the traditional perception that it is women's work. Furthermore, the workers are originally from foreign countries. They are vulnerable to be exploited in terms of payment because of the lack of knowledge of the law in the countries (Lee 1991; Lundberg 1999). Moreover, their irregular status has created an ambiguous status between domestic care and cultural program. Before Thai women can participate in domestic work, the contract has to be mutually signed by the employers and employee such as the duration of employment, working hours, wages, and benefits (Elden & Alving, 2016b; 52). Au pair and domestic workers have similar responsibilities such as cleaning, mopping, doing laundry, sweeping, washing dishes, grocery shopping, ironing, and baby or pet sitting. However, the role of the Au pair is different for each individual depending on the requirement of the family. The difference between Au pair and domestic workers is Au pair have the opportunity to engage in foreign language cost and they do not have to pay accommodation cost to live with the family. Meanwhile, the domestic workers can live in or live out of the family depend on the work agreement. Therefore, some families are more interested to employ Au pair because of the flexibility of the working hour and low minimum wages (Elden & Alving, 2019b; 623. Based on the interview, the participants stated that the satisfaction of their living conditions depends on the compatibility between the host family and the Au pair. Importantly, host parent is an important factor that indicates the overall happiness of Thai women because they have to interact with each other in their daily life.

According to the existing literature from Elden & Alving (2016 & 2019), Swedish families hire Thai women as domestic workers or Au pair has become more common in Swedish society. Thai women are more accessible to become Au pair in Sweden because of the availability of Au pair websites which is free of charge. The family can easily communicate and interact with Thai Au pair through website platform and further exchange personal contact. The duration process is variable depending on the agreement between the host family and Aupair along with the visa

²³Who are domestic workers Access on April 30 from <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/who/lang--en/index.htm>

process. Some participants have pointed out some interesting factors about the difference between Swedish and Thai family size. They stated that Swedish families are larger compare to Thai families. Therefore, the demand for domestic labor is also increased in the household. Since domestic labor is less attractive for Swedish nationals, the employment of domestic workers from developing countries is an additional solution to fulfill the demand for domestic labor in the household (Elden & Alving, 2016a; Lee 1991; Lundberg 1999).

10.3 The demand for domestic workers in Sweden

More importantly, Swedish authorities have acknowledged the demand of domestic labor in Swedish society. The migration agency (Migrationsverket) has a specific residence permit for the young individual to seek employment as Au pair. The regulation has become more flexible for Thai young girls or boys and more accessible for the Swedish family to employ domestic workers in Sweden. Despite the attractiveness of the employment, Thai women have experienced often discovered themselves in a precarious or complicated position because of the ambiguity of their position as an Au pair (Elden & Alving, 2019a: 35). In some circumstances, some participants admitted that they are more excited to travel to foreign countries and forgot to read the agreement properly. Moreover, they stated that the perception of the Au pair is completely different before and after they moved to Sweden. Participant M, initially thought that Au pair a cultural program that allows her to travel to foreign countries and learn new languages. She never realized that she has to do housework in exchange for domestic work because the family never mentioned it in the agreement. She further stated that because she was not fluent in English when she first moves to Sweden so it took a while for her to conform to Swedish society. In comparison, there is more supply of domestic workers compared to the demand. According to the interview, each family has different requirements based on the different qualifications and skills such as experience in child caring, child-loving characteristics, or multiple language skills (Elden & Alving, 2016a: 35). Some participants stated that the expectation is not the same as the reality. They further clarified that some families took advantage by gave extra work during the holiday. Furthermore, some participants have been threatened to kick out of the house or terminate their residence permit unless they complete the overtime work. Young workers are more vulnerable to a 'poor work' environment because of the appealing of the labor market.

Those who have little experience or training are more at risk to be exploited in cheap labor on low skilled exploitative task (Lee, 1991: 88)

It is undeniable that the attractiveness of the Au pair program has attracted many Thai young women to travel across the countries to perform domestic or care work. However, they also experience challenges to a friendly environment and decent work (Elden & Alving, 2016a; Lee 1991; Lundberg 1999). The Au pair program is another platform that encourages Thai women to reside in foreign countries especially, in Sweden. In exchange, they have more opportunities to broaden their horizon to explore new cultures and languages. On the contrary, the increase of Thai domestic workers has put their status in a precarious situation. Since domestic work is not attractive for the local people in Swedish society, there is an increased number of Thai women engage in domestic work in the Swedish labor market. The undefined definition of Au pair between domestic work or cultural program can create major complications between the Au pair and the host family (Elden & Alving, 2016a: 42). The fact that Au pair or domestic work is performed in the household and lack of transparency (Lee 1991; Lundberg 1999). They have limited right to complain to the authorities because of the lack of knowledge about the Swedish law despite unreasonable working hours or minimum wages, harsh punishment, and unfriendly living conditions. Participants, who were an Au pair, have admitted that they only knew the basic information about their benefits such as their flexible working hours, monthly pockets, and opportunity to attend free foreign language cost. According to the Domestic Work Act in Sweden, all au pair work performed in Sweden, regardless of the employee's nationality whether non-European or a European au pair, is regulated by the Domestic Work Act. This means that all au pairs should be acknowledged as legally considered workers (Eldén, S., & Anving, T., 2016a: 35). In Sweden, Au pair is classified under the domestic work act, regardless of the worker's foreign origin whether European or non-European. They are protected by Swedish law in relation to working hours, minimum wages, and other benefits such as insurance. According to Au pair policy²⁴, it is mandatory that the host family has to provide Au pair with comprehensive insurance. After Au pair has immigrated to Sweden, the host family has to registered Au pair

²⁴ 'Pocket money, working hours and contract in Sweden' Accessed on April 30,21 from <https://www.aupairworld.com/en/au-pair-programs/sweden/general-conditions#health-accident-insurance>

with Försäkringskassan²⁵ to obtain insurance coverage which will provide benefits including basic healthcare and disability coverage.

10.4 The paradox of Thai female work in the Swedish labor market

Even though Sweden has increasingly welcomed Thai female workers in the Swedish labor market, they are usually employed in domestic work because of the common perception of gender division of labor (Onsami Törngren, 2011; Yang 2016). It stated that women are only allowed in the private sphere. Their main role is the labor in the household meanwhile, men were allowed to engage in the public sphere and considered as the breadwinner who supported the family financially. Referring to the concept of McClintock (1995), home is identified as a sphere that a woman belongs. They are expected to be submissive and passive to their husband. Their priority is to manage household chores, providing food and emotional support to their husband and children (Butratna & Trupp, 2014: 222). Moreover, she introduced the concept of 'cult of domesticity' the prevailing value that marginalized women's class and status under the capital relation and affects gender division of labor until the present time. As has been previously mentioned, the concept of cult of domesticity is also can be applied to Thai women's status and position in the past and present time. The impact of patriarchal society has caused the conflict between gender and secured power position over men. According to McClintock (1995), "The patriarchal society has legitimized the right for women to access economic and political power including education disadvantage, domestic double workday, unequal childcare, gendered malnutrition, sexual violence, genital mutilation and domestic battery (14)."

Even though there is no interference that limited women to thrive in the labor market, domestic work is still perceived as women's work especially, for those who have lower educational backgrounds (Butratana & Trupp, 2014). Based on the interview, Thai women also acknowledge their disadvantages but they are willing to work in exchange for experiences. The paradox of gender, class, and status have limited Thai women's position in Swedish society. They further elaborated that the negative portrayal of Thai women in the media has affected their experience in Sweden. Some employers took advantage of them because of the common stereotype that Thai

²⁵Försäkringskassan is the agency in charge of social insurance in Sweden.

women are 'docile, inferior and obedient' (Poltecha, 2017: 9). They have to tolerate the exceeding number of working hours and verbal abuse. In some scenarios, there is no inspection or guarantee that the workplace is a safe and friendly environment (Eldén, S., & Anving, T., 2016a: 35). The situation of Thai women, who employed as domestic workers in foreign countries, has connected to the concept of maldistribution and misrecognition by Nancy Fraser (1947 - present). The term 'misrecognition' pointed out the status injury that commonly occurs to women such as sexual harassment in the workplace. Meanwhile, the term maldistribution has further elaborated on the grassroots of inequality that women repeatedly experienced in the patriarchal society. The concept has explained how the disadvantage has restricted Thai women in the unregulated care sector. Moreover, the status of Thai women in Sweden has raised the issues of exploitation, and subordination, submissive, inequalities, prejudice, and contradictory interest (Acker, 2006: 196). Referring to Michel & Peng, foreign workers are vulnerable to experience multiple forms of gender and racial stereotype. Even though those women are well educated and middle class, their foreign origin has restricted them to work for substandard wages in foreign countries (227). The precarious condition of women from the global south has created a powerful magnet to migrating to the western countries to perform domestic work.

11. The resistance to stereotype

Referring to existing literature, Thai women are more autonomous in terms of social and economic status compared to other women in Southeast Asia (Butratana & Trupp, 2014). However, there is numerous report that Thai women are vulnerable to discrimination and stereotype in Western society. Intersectionality and Orientalism are the major factors that helped explained how gender and race impact women. The theory explained the reason why Thai immigrant women often face discrimination and disadvantage in social mobility. In the past decade, many Thai women have immigrated to Sweden for different reasons such as Interracial marriage, pursue higher education, employment opportunities. Despite the differences in immigration, the data collection demonstrated that Thai women have experience with gender and racial stereotype in Swedish society. The complexities have caused the status injury of Thai women. Thai women have tolerated gender and racial stereotype because they are not aware to exercise their rights in foreign countries. They normalize the problem and chose to compromise the situation.

The representation of women as sex and domestic workers is the major element that Thai women unsuccessful to represent and achieve themselves in Swedish society. Although this research project has demonstrated different types of Thai women, they have been experienced stigma which includes stereotypes, social exclusion, and discrimination. Referring Ito & Peng (2017) ‘The phenomenon of the movement of females from the global south into domestic work in western countries contributed to gender inequality.’ When discussing domestic work, the gender division of labor becomes the centralized concept. The concept of domestic work has been devalued because it is not regarded as “formal” sector employment. The concept of working in another country has given women individual autonomy. Women become more autonomous and financially independent. However, it becomes problematic as the traditional value of the western empowered the non-western. The fundamental of the capitalist regime is to maximize profit and minimize production cost. This term is referred to how the Western power exploits non-Western workers in domestic and sex work because of the low cost of payment. This movement has supported the impact of westernization on non-western countries. Even though Westen countries have opened their countries for migrant workers, this could be the form of exploitation, *the*

colonizer and the colonized. The form of power relation and hierarchy causes the precariousness of women's gender, race, class has commonly existed in the patriarchal society

Due to the persistence of racial and gender stereotyping, Thai women have become more self colonize and reconcile with their power. One example of resistance is the forming of Thai Women in Sweden Empowerment or Thai wise, a non-profit organization that aims to reduce the exploitation and victimization of Thai women in Sweden. The organization has created self-awareness for Thai women toward stereotypes and become the supporter for women who are the victim of unfair exploitation. Referring to Thaiwise, Thai women are more aware of their rights and stereotype and discrimination. Even though gender and stereotype are unavoidable, The organization has taught women to handle the situation in an effective way. Even though the participants did not experience physical abuse, some participants have mentioned that they have experienced verbal and psychological abuse from their employers and colleagues. For example, Participant M was not allowed to have friends and talk to her family. The employer reluctantly to gave her pocket and complaint that she had not completed her job. Meanwhile, Participant F has experienced unwanted comments in the workplace. Her colleague talked to her inappropriately but pretend that it was a joke. The intersection of gender, race ad class has impacted Thai women, despite their education degree and professional career. The gender and racial stereotype have impacted the self-esteem and self-confidence of Thai women. Moreover, it also impacts Thai women who want to disassociate themselves from this racial and gender stereotype

In conclusion

Thailand is often known as the land of smiles where Thai women are portrayed as feminine, domestic, and good wives. In the meantime, the country is also perceived as exotic and a destination for sex tourism. The theoretical framework of Intersectionality, Orientalism, and Power & Agency has explained how gender, race, and class impact Thai women. The traditional value that the Western represents as the colonizer and consumer meanwhile, the non-Western represents as the colonized and the worker. The value creates the power relation and hierarchy which impact the process of integration in Sweden. Based on the data analysis, the majority of the participants, despite their high educational background and class, have experienced a certain

form of gender and racial stereotyping in Sweden. However, the number of Thai women who immigrate to Sweden is still increasing. The migration pattern is another interesting aspect to explore because it will explain how Thai became one of the largest foreign nationalities in Sweden. According to the existing literature, most Thai women immigrate to Sweden because of their partner. Globalization has created many international couples through dating websites and applications. However, the Thai-Swedish couple was seen as deviant in the discriminatory and stereotypical discourse. Thai women are usually portrayed as passive, obedient, and sexually available. Western media has supported this stereotype and portrays Thai women in a promiscuous way. Besides Thai women were perceived as sex workers, they were considered as domestic laborers. The data collection has demonstrated that Thai middle-class women have engaged in domestic work in Sweden because of the difficulty to find employment in the Swedish labor market despite the differences in the purpose of living in Sweden and their socioeconomic background. Even though they realized that their work will put them into further subordination, some women have lack of opportunities but to tolerate the situation. Due to the persistence of gender and racial stereotype, Thai women have begun to self colonize and reconcile the situation by forming an organization that supports Thai women communities in Sweden. Intersectionality, Orientalism, and Power & Agency is a powerful theoretical framework to understand the individual experiences of Thai women of gender and racial stereotype and how that impacts their process of integration into the Swedish society.

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Appendix 1:

Sample of Interview Question

1. Could you please introduce yourself briefly? (Name, Employment, Marital Status)?
2. May I know your year of birth?
3. Which part of Thailand that you come from?
4. Have you graduated from one of the universities in Sweden?
5. What is your education level?
6. Why have you decided to migrate to Sweden?
7. Have you lived somewhere abroad before living in Sweden?
8. Have you been to Sweden before? (Before permanently resided in Sweden)
9. When did you decide to migrate to Sweden?
10. Have you experienced any challenges in terms of residence permit in order to access Sweden?
11. Could you please describe your life before migrating to Sweden?
12. What influences your choice to reside in Sweden permanently?
13. Could you please describe your experience as living in Sweden? (both Simplicity and difficulties)
14. What is your impression after moving to Sweden? (In term of society, family and culture)
15. What is your impression after moving to Sweden? (Positive and Negative)
16. Since you moved to Sweden, have you felt any sort of culture shock, homesickness or any sickness that made you feel uncomfortable?
17. Has your daily routine changed after moving to Sweden?
18. Did you experience any stereotypes as a foreign immigrant after moving to Sweden?
19. Have you connected with Thai people in Sweden?
20. Are you comfortable speaking Swedish fluently
21. How often do you visit Thailand?
22. Have you kept in contact with your relatives in Thailand regularly?
23. Do you feel comfortable or satisfied to consider Sweden as your home?
24. Do you feel satisfied with the living conditions compared to Thailand?

Specific question for participants who currently married

- A. How did you meet your partner?
- B. Before marrying your partner, what is your perspective toward Asian and Western men?
- C. What has influenced your choice to engage in an interracial marriage?
- D. Have you experienced any difficulties when marrying someone of a different nationality?
- E. Did you change your opinion about Swedish men after living in Sweden?
- F. How interracial marriage is viewed by your family and your partner's family?

Specific question for participants who currently employed

- A. How is your experience in terms of job finding in Sweden? Have you experienced challenges or difficulties?
- B. Do you feel that you have equal job opportunities as a foreigner compared to native citizens?
- C. Before working in Sweden, could you describe your work experience?
- D. Could you please describe your work experience in Sweden? (In terms of Working hours, Working condition, Income)

Appendix 2

Participants who moved to Sweden for interracial marriage

Participant A: She recently resided in Sweden for 2 years but has visited Sweden every year. She met her partner 15 years ago and married for 10 years. In the past, she worked as a flight attendant and resigned to move to Sweden. She lives with her husband and children in Malmö.

Participant B: She has lived in Sweden for 5 years. Initially, she moved to Sweden on a Sambo²⁶ visa and lived with her ex-partner for 2 years. Currently, she has obtained a Swedish residence permit and works as a personal assistant for children with disabilities in Lund.

Participant C: She has lived in Sweden for more than 10 years. She met her husband while he was on vacation in Thailand and moved to Sweden. She decided to open a local grocery store to support herself financially.

Participant D: She met her husband while she was an exchange student in Japan 12 years ago. Initially, she lived in Japan with her husband but decided to move to Sweden 4 years ago. Now, She started her own business and lives with her husband in Lund.

Participant E: She moved to Sweden to be with her partner for a year. She met her partner through a mutual friend and moved to Sweden on a Sambo visa. Currently, She works as a shopkeeper in the Asian market.

Participants who moved to Sweden to pursue a higher education degree

Participant F She moved to Sweden to pursue her Master's degree in Biotechnology. After graduating, she received a Ph.D. position and met her husband while she was studying. She has lived in Sweden for 10 years.

Participant G: She moved to Sweden to pursue her Master's degree in Engineering. She met her husband through a mutual friend and decided to live in Sweden. Currently, she works as an engineering researcher in Lund.

Participant H: She moved to Sweden to pursue her Master's degree in Human Ecology. She met her husband while she was studying and decided to live in Sweden for 10 years. Currently, she works as a marketing web developer

Participant I: She moved to Sweden to pursue her Master's degree in the School of Economics and Management. She lived in Sweden for 4 years. After graduating, she worked as a strategic analyst and lived in Lund.

²⁶ Sambo is a one type of residence permit when citizens from non-European countries must apply when they want to live in Sweden with their partner. They will be granted a residence permit if they plan to marry or cohabit with someone that lives in Sweden.

Participant J: She moved to Sweden to pursue her Master's degree in Cultural criminology. After graduating, she received a Ph.D. position and decided to reside in Sweden.

Participants who moved to Sweden for employment opportunities

Participant K: She worked as a client partner in the marketing company for 7 years and moved to Sweden as an Au pair in 2019. She met her boyfriend and decided to reside in Sweden. Currently, she lives in Uppsala and is looking for employment.

Participant L: She worked as a receptionist in the hotel after she graduated with her bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hospitality management. She decided to become an Au pair because she wants to live in foreign countries and practice her English. She met her boyfriend last year and decided to stay in Sweden.

Participant M: She worked as an accountant in a private company in Thailand. She never traveled abroad before so she decided to become an Au pair.

Participant N: She was a teacher in the school from the north part of Thailand. She loves kids and traveling. Therefore, she decided to become an Au pair.

Participant O: She worked as a waitress in the restaurant and decided to become an Au pair because she wanted to live in foreign countries. Moreover, she wanted to practice English and learn new languages.