

SERVANTS OF GOD: SUPERIOR CHRISTIAN IDENTITIES AMONGST
FILIPINA DOMESTIC WORKERS IN HONG KONG

by

ANNEMARIE HULBERT

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Abstract

As Hong Kong's economy has grown, increasing numbers of middle-class Chinese women have entered the workplace. Many of them have passed the responsibility for domestic labour to migrant workers, most of whom are women from the Philippines. Although the Hong Kong and Philippines economies are dependent on their labour and earnings, these domestic workers are not treated with gratitude. Instead, multiple images of Filipina migrant workers construct them as inferior both to their Chinese hosts and to women that remain in the Philippines. One response of Filipina migrants is to turn to the Catholic Church to find alternative meaning to their lives and work. In this thesis I propose that Catholicism provides the tools for some domestic workers to construct counter-discourses about themselves that contrast with the negative imagery they encounter. I argue that the prominence of the Catholic Church amongst migrant Filipinas is partly due to the positive identity it offers to these women. By using alternative measures of value, religious Filipinas construct themselves as superior to those around them. However, in doing so they discipline themselves to conform more closely to the desires of dominant social groups, thus reinforcing existing inequalities.

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Chapter I: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis I examine how some disadvantaged Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong seek to counter the negative discourses that control and discipline them. I will focus on their use of certain aspects of Catholic Christian ideology to counter dominant ideologies. To begin, I will look at theoretical works which focus on the agency and resistance of subordinated groups. Several theories suggest that oppressed groups are actively involved in reinterpreting and redefining their position in society. Following Foucault's argument that relations of power in a society cannot be established without the production, circulation and functioning of dominant discourses, and that the production of counter-discourses can be a form of resistance, I will examine discourses created by religious workers to redefine their situation.

In order to provide a context for this analysis, I will describe the structures of global inequality that configure Filipinos as a cheap labour source for the Global North, and the structures of patriarchy that create a demand for female domestic workers. I will then turn to three discourses that purport to describe Filipina migrant workers which are prevalent in Hong Kong and the Philippines. Such discourses can be understood as forms of control, supporting prevailing ideologies that justify the exploitation of women's labour. As a prominent part of Filipino culture, the Church is one institution that aims to serve the needs of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong. Some domestic workers find within Catholicism the vocabulary to create counter-discourses, which give positive meaning to their work and actions. The discourses that control them criticise their sexual morality, filial piety and their inferiority as servants. Religious domestic workers use Catholic-based discourses to claim alternative identities, often constructing themselves as superior to others around them. However, while the Church assists workers seeking redress for obvious

maltreatment, it disciplines its followers into behaviour that conforms closely to the desires of workers' employers and families. In choosing the positive image the Church ascribes to them, these workers freely submit to its rules and discipline. Although Catholicism may lead to conformity, I will argue that Catholic domestic workers are not without agency. Adherence is a choice they make for its perceived benefits: respect from their employers, the Hong Kong public, and their families in the Philippines.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

In this section I will look at studies that have examined resistance of subordinate groups in order to gain a theoretical understanding of their resistance. I will begin by using Rollins' study of domestic workers, largely focused on the USA, to unpack the relationship between domestic workers and their employers. I will then focus on strategies used by disadvantaged groups to mitigate against their oppression. Following Foucault's arguments, I will examine discourses as an integral means for the production and maintenance of power relations in society. As Collins argues, discourses can be used as a form of control over subordinate groups. However, because they determine the way in which reality is perceived, Foucault claims that discourses can also be used as a strategy of resistance. I will then introduce theoretical concepts by several authors and interrogate their definitions of resistance in order to construct a framework for the analysis of domestic workers' discourses.

Judith Rollins (1985) examines how domestic workers are twice-burdened by inequality. Their work is devalued through gender inequality that categorises domestic labour as "women's work"; further, they are burdened by the employer's desire to assert her own superiority through the subordination of the domestic worker. Rollins argues that gender matters in this unequal working relationship. Both the employer's attempts to impose subordination and the worker's strategies to mitigate inequality draw on traditionally feminine qualities. It is the closeness of the relationship between mistress and domestic worker that distinguishes it from other manual occupations, and

that allows the employer to exploit the worker in order to affirm her superior status vis-à-vis the worker and validate the stratified society in which she lives.

Rollins argues that the employment of domestic workers reinforces patriarchal inequality. The low status of domestic work stems from its designation as devalued 'female' work. Although middle-class women have entered the labour market and negotiated new roles as career women, they have not significantly changed their attitudes towards roles at home. Rather than challenging the patriarchal division of household labour, career women continue to accept responsibility for the full burden of domestic maintenance. These women take advantage of inequalities of wealth to mitigate against their gender disadvantage. Rollins suggests that the domestic is an extension of the female employer, since this employer hires the domestic to do 'her' work in a way that the male employer does not. But since domestic labour carries low status, the domestic worker represents the female employer's most menial and subordinated self. Consequently, Rollins argues, employers seek out visibly subordinate 'others' to perform the domestic labour in order to heighten the distinction between them and distance herself from the devalued "women's work" performed. Many employers prefer a domestic worker of a different, "inferior", class and 'race', and do not employ a domestic that seems too educated, intelligent, materially well-off or attractive (Rollins, 1985).

Rollins argues that it is the mistress-servant relationship that distinguishes domestic service from other blue-collar occupations. This relationship takes place within private households between fairly isolated individuals. The close working relationship and clear power differential allows for a level of psychological exploitation unknown in other occupations. Employers do not simply look for a domestic who is competent in the performance of tasks, they seek a particular type of personality, that will reinforce their own sense of superiority vis-à-vis the worker. The inequality is enacted through the demand for deferential behaviour and through a system of "maternalism," which stems from paternalistic obligations of protection and guidance for servants but takes a feminine form.

Part of being a domestic worker is performing ingratiating behaviour towards the employer. According to Rollin's study, the better this performance of deference, the greater the probability of the domestic receiving more than the minimum in material and emotional rewards. If she does not perform deference, the domestic worker risks losing her job. Deferential behaviour takes many forms, including demeanor, linguistic markers and spatial limits. Speech patterns demonstrate inequality in the relationship. It is usual for employers to call workers by their first names while expecting domestics to address them by their last name. Employers initiate conversations and may ask invasive questions about domestics' personal lives, but do not appreciate reciprocation. According to Foucault, knowledge is not dispassionate but an integral part of struggles over power. In producing knowledge, one is making a claim for power over the subject studied (Mills, 2003). Within the house, space matters. The kitchen, a place of hard labour that is representative of inferior "women's work", is often given over to the domestic worker. In contrast, she may only enter the living room and bedrooms in order to clean them.

Rollins' concept of maternalism stems from the historical legacy of paternalism towards servants - an obligation of protection and guidance in return for loyalty and obedience. However, unlike a male head of household, a female employer does not carry full authority in the family. She ultimately defers to her husband. Maternalism reflects the traditionally "female" role of caring and nurturing rather than the authoritative character of a patriarch. Examples of maternalism include demanding to meet and approve friends, making travel arrangements for the worker, and giving gifts. "Gifts" are often poor-quality cast-offs, for which the (presumed destitute) worker is expected to be grateful. That she accepts them reinforces the employer's sense of her low status. Gift-giving is also a form of recognition that does not threaten the unequal nature of the relationship: to raise the worker's salary would be to admit she is worth more, whereas to give gifts reinforces her dependence. Maternalism, therefore, is not an expression of caring between equals but reinforces the subordination of the domestic worker by treating her as childlike and dependent. The belief system behind maternalism, despite its apparent benevolence, reinforces the employer's sense of superiority at the domestic worker's expense (ibid.).

If employers prefer to hire domestic workers that they already believe to be inferior, why does such behaviour take place? Rollins argues that superiority only exists in relationship; the employer is only superior in the presence of an inferior other. The employer requires the worker to recognise her as superior in order to confirm the inequality between them. Without such behaviour, a domestic worker challenges the employer's superiority and is likely to be dismissed. If domestic workers perform deference and receive the maternalistic "care" of employers, they reinforce the employer's sense that the relationship "should" be unequal. The subordinate behaviour of a domestic worker affirms the employer's belief that she is naturally inferior. This validates her lifestyle and ideology, providing a justification for the economically and racially stratified nature of the system in which she lives (ibid.). The domestic service relationship is both a product of and a reinforcement of stratification in society. The employer holds power, gives orders, and demands obedience; the worker is expected to know and accept her place.

While employers see themselves as superior to their domestic workers, domestics do not consider themselves to be inferior to their employers. Rollins argues that they perform ingratiating behaviour because it is encouraged by the employer. Some consider themselves successful at "fooling" the employer with phony performances of deference and submission. They may actually see themselves as superior to the employer through their ability to fool and manipulate the employer for reward. Others consider themselves superior by using alternative measures, such as their capabilities, especially in childrearing. The close nature of the relationship and the demand for domestics to pay constant attention to the employer results in what Rollins terms a "stronger consciousness of the Other" (op. cit.: 215). Working in the most private sphere of employers' lives allows a domestic worker to observe their human frailties and problems. Many make critical judgments about their employers' weaknesses. Some perceive their employers as childlike, dependent on the guidance and pragmatic efficiency of the domestic. Other alternative measures of worth included evaluation of character ("the kind of person you are") rather than material success, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. These measures of worth reflect

traditionally "female" value systems. However, while such alternative measures of worth allow workers to see themselves as equal or superior to their employers, they have a limited effect. The personal value judgements of workers do not openly challenge their inferiority; in contrast, ritual deferential behaviour towards employers provides everyday affirmation of inequality (ibid.).

Scholars disagree over the extent to which subordinated groups internalise or resist their subordinate status, and therefore produce conflicting definitions of resistance. Drawing on work by a range of scholars, I will seek to outline a framework for the analysis of discourse as a strategy of resistance, paying particular attention to issues of gender. In drawing up this framework, I note the Western cultural value that romanticises resistance. Non-Western scholars have criticised Western feminists for imposing Western values and understandings on women from the Global South. Rather than valuing resistance as *a priori* morally right, we should recognise that other forms of agency may be effective strategies and should not be dismissed as less worthy.

Louis Althusser (1971) argues that individuals come to identify with and accept their place within a stratified society. Ideology functions to produce an identity within an individual. This production of identity happens through the process of interpellation of a subordinate subject by a superordinate Subject. To interpellate is to hail or address a subject in such a way that the subject recognises that "the hail was 'really' addressed to him" (Althusser, 1971: 174). The subject then responds to this naming. Ideology recruits an individual through self-recognition. He or she identifies as the interpellated subject to whom the Subject was speaking, and in that moment of recognition is transformed into the subject that was hailed. In his discussion of subjectivity Althusser writes that the subject is at once both an agent, free to make a choice, and a controlled subject, submitting to the will of a higher power. With his word play on the double meaning of subject, he argues that "a person is interpellated as a (free) subject, the author of his own actions, in order that he shall freely accept his submission to the commandments of the Subject that calls him" (op. cit.: 182). In other words, the only freedom that exists for an individual is the freedom to willingly subject himself or herself to the interpellating Subject (ibid.).

According to Althusser's theory, individuals experience a seamless continuity of interpellation, and come to recognise themselves within the prevailing ideology. Althusser's subject forms his identity from the prevailing ideology that addresses him. Society is stratified through the pyramid structure of education: everybody is equipped with a basic level of literacy, but only a few are able to be admitted to the higher echelons that allow access to superior jobs. Althusser writes that each of these stratified groups in society is "practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfill in class society" (op. cit.: 155). Some are provided with a sense of duty to rule and give orders, others are provided with the ethic of hard work and compliance with orders. In Althusser's study of France, a highly centralised State, he argues that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) - religious, legal, educational and political institutions - all operate in unity. Since they are all subject to the dominance of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), they provide consistent reinforcement of the ruling ideology. Althusser's argument supports the theory of "false consciousness," that the subordinated in a society absorb the dominant ideology and so willingly accept their subordination. He presumes an ever-present link between ideology and identity, and it is through individuals knowing and accepting their place that the system functions. He does not adequately consider the possibility of individuals being confronted with multiple ideologies, or of them rejecting the prevailing ideology. Leslie Salzinger (2003) argues instead that instead of a seamless, consistent interpellation, individuals experience multiple interpellations, due to the diversity of the RSAs and ISAs that affect their lives (Salzinger, 2003). Transnational migrants are controlled by both the home state in which they hold citizenship and the host state in which they work. Underneath these RSAs, migrants also experience contradictory interpellation from a range of ISAs. ISAs do not always conform to the demands of the ruling apparatus: the Philippines Catholic Church, for example, has sometimes opposed the government (McFerson, 2002). At a more localised level, through daily interactions, discourses and counter-discourses, subjects are interpellated in varied ways; consequently their identities are not fixed but fluid (Salzinger, 2003).

Althusser consistently uses the pronoun "he," ignoring gender and subsuming women's

experiences in a generic, implicitly masculine, subject. Salzinger argues that interpellation is highly gendered: not only are women interpellated differently to men, but the manner in which they are hailed invokes explicit ideologies of femininity. In her study of Mexican factory workers, she notes that managers draw on discourses of natural femininity in their recruitment of women as "ideal" factory workers. However, the actual discourses of femininity invoked are not consistent but reflect managers' varying expectations. Rather than corresponding to an innate, already-present, feminine worker, managers' invocations actually *produce* the worker they desire. Management practices of hiring and supervision produce a certain type of femininity in the workforce, be it one that is sexually attractive, coy and attentive to managers, or a "modern" and more assertive femininity. "[H]iring and labour control processes emerge as messages which address potential workers with specific understandings of who they are and what the work requires" (op. cit.: 15). The categories of femininity and masculinity have fluid content, shifting across time, space and culture. But they are always defined in opposition to one another; female workers recognise themselves in the manager's address because they are interpellated as the "other" gender, presumed "naturally" different to men. Women are called upon to enact a range of "natural" femininities that differ between work and home and from factory to factory; this makes apparent the constructed nature of the ideology of innate feminine characteristics (ibid.).

How do certain ideologies become distilled in a society? In this thesis I have chosen to examine discourses, acknowledging the close relationship between discourse and power. Foucault argues that relations of power in a society cannot be established without the production, circulation and functioning of a discourse (Foucault, 1980). Although in his earlier work Foucault uses the term "discourse" to refer to the "general domain of all statements" (Foucault, 1972: 80), he later employs a more specific definition. He considers a discourse to be a regulated set of statements, ordered by a set of rules that lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and the restriction of others (Mills, 2003). In examining which discourses come to be accepted in a society, Foucault introduces the concept of a "regime of truth." Certain types of discourses are accepted because there exist in each society mechanisms that enable one to distinguish between "true" and

"false" statements. The battle for truth is not about discovering objective facts, but about control over the set of rules according to which statements are designated as "true" or rejected as "false" (Foucault, 1980).

Truth, power and knowledge are intricately connected. Truth is produced through power, since those who are not in positions of power are not considered to be speaking the truth (Mills, 2003). However, those who produce truth do not always have the right of sovereignty and the power to impose law. Instead, they invoke a "natural law," a norm, and exert pressure on the law to conform to these norms. Society therefore undergoes a process of normalisation (Foucault, 1980). The statements designated as true through a society's regime of truth come to underpin what is taken to be "common-sense knowledge" within that society (Mills, 2003). Truth and power dwell in a circular relationship. Truth is produced through power, and power cannot be exercised except through the production of truth (Foucault, 1980); the type of truth that is produced within a society serves to legitimate and reinforce the power relations within that society.

Patricia Hill Collins introduces the concept of "controlling images" (Collins, 2004: 56), a form of "truth" that is created in order to legitimate the power of the dominant group. Collins argues that in order to mask relationships of power, supporters of slavery created controlling images of Black men and women. These images justified and defended policies of oppression and reinforced status inequalities. The fictitious nature of the images is apparent by their inherent contradictions. The harsh conditions and hard manual labour imposed upon most Black men was justified by their construction as the "buck" - naturally violent and dangerously sexual, with the White man taming his brute strength by directing it into productive labour. Yet for a few, chosen to work within the domestic sphere, the contradictory image of "Uncle Tom" was created - safe, asexual and subordinated and thus suitable to serve Whites. Since slavery also relied upon gender oppression, the process of objectification took different forms for men and women. Women were a fragmented commodity; different images controlled each part of her body. To justify exploitation of her physical labour capacity, she was objectified as a "mule;" her sexual exploitation was hidden through the image of the sexually wanton "jezebel;" and her womb was utilised for profit

through the controlling image of the "breeder woman," expected to bear many children in order to supply the owner with another generation of slaves (Collins, 2004). For Filipina domestic workers, the controlling images ascribed to them serve to justify their regulation and exploitation. I will argue that as transnational migrants, they experience the effects of "controlling images" from both their "host" country and their "home" country.

Foucault's understanding of discourse is that it is a productive force. Rather than an expression of reality, Foucault argues that a discourse is a system which structures how we perceive reality (Mills, 2003). Consequently, the presence of unpalatable information, which challenges a society's structuring of true and false, is a form of critique. The production of discourses by oppressed groups could therefore be an effective counter-strategy against the powerful in a society (ibid.). Whereas Althusser sees an individual's agency as limited to the choice of submission to one ideology, other authors pay more attention to agency. These scholars argue that individuals exercise agency in the production of their identity, within the limits of the local repertoires available to them. According to Salzinger, it is the inherent contradictions that result from multiple interpellations that make fluctuation and resistance comprehensible. When individuals experience their identity as fluid, they gain the tools to challenge categorisations placed upon them and to negotiate new identities (Salzinger, 2003). As I examine discourses promulgated by Catholic Filipina domestic workers, I will analyse the extent to which these women enact agency and resistance against those who criticise them. In the remainder of this chapter I will look at some theoretical concepts of resistance, agency and conformity from previous studies of disadvantaged social groups.

Salzinger argues that as a result of interpellation, employees are actively involved in producing the specific and localised identities desired by employers. Rachel Sherman (2005) argues that low-status groups draw on the local cultural tools available to them to produce other identities of the self, identities in which they are superior to those around them. Sherman identifies ways in which luxury hotel workers mitigate their subordination in the face of inequality. The luxury hotel environment is one in which workers are in close proximity to others with considerably greater

wealth and social status than themselves. Unequal entitlements to both resources and recognition are obvious. The material resources of guests give them access to the physical and emotional labour of staff, allowing them to demand attention and recognition of their personhood without reciprocation. Workers are required to treat them with sincerity and deference. Sherman argues that luxury hotel workers make sense of inequality through the use of multiple comparative strategies that construct themselves as superior to those around them. Workers use a range of discourses, sometimes contradictory, rather than fixed 'mental maps' to establish their sense of superiority. Sherman terms these constructions "symbolic hierarchies" (Sherman, 2005).

As they establish superiority, workers normalise inequality. Vis-à-vis coworkers, staff in more senior or well-paid positions use their status and material privilege as markers of superiority. In Sherman's study, workers who were well compensated, such as doormen and concierges, frequently contrasted their pay, tips, and fringe benefits with those of their colleagues. In doing so, they reinforced the very measures of worth that disadvantaged them in the social order.

Since workers' comparisons of privilege fail in relation to guests, the hotel workers in Sherman's study found alternative ways to look down on them. They employed two hierarchies by which they constructed themselves as superior: a hierarchy of *need*, which portrayed guests as dependent on them, and a hierarchy of *worth*, which judged guests according to alternative measures of value. The hierarchy of need draws on a worker's access to intimate aspects of clients' lives. Observing guests' busy lives, workers consider themselves advantaged in terms of time, friendship and peace of mind. Workers also value their ability to control guests in a certain way, such as advising on restaurant choices or giving directions. The labour that workers are required to perform can be reconstructed as magnanimous behaviour towards needy and dependent guests. The hierarchy of worth measures workers' superiority using alternative measures including competence and a moral scale. Workers in Sherman's study circulated stories of guests' stupidity. They also criticised extravagant spending as unnecessary and morally wrong - one commenting "I don't have much compassion for them - there are people dying in the world" (op. cit.: 146). Such judgments draw on alternative, yet culturally available, measures of value such as intelligence, moderation and

concern for others. Under these contradictory hierarchies, of need and of worth, workers simultaneously demonstrate sympathy and criticism towards those they serve.

Sherman writes that the use of hierarchies does not, for the most part, constitute resistance, because it validates and does not challenge the social order. When workers compare themselves to other workers with less wealth or status, they act against collectivity, legitimate social inequality and perpetuate a system that disadvantages those with least wealth. By constructing guests as dependent, workers create discourses that validate the system under which guests "rightfully" consume workers' physical and emotional labour. Sherman concludes that since the discourses of luxury hotel workers unwittingly legitimate the social relations that disadvantage them, they cannot be considered a form of resistance (Sherman, 2005).

James Scott (1985) argues that resistance does not always take the form of an overt challenge to the social order. He challenges the tendency in social science to focus on revolutionary behaviour or open, confrontational resistance. According to Scott, when the coercive forces accessible to the dominant class preclude open, large-scale resistance, the oppressed are forced to outwardly comply against their will. The consequences to a disadvantaged individual of openly resisting exploitation are unlikely to be beneficial. If subordinate classes enact complicit behaviour in order to avoid retribution for non-conformity, this does not mean they "accept" their status and treatment. To focus on the magnitude of resistance, he argues, means allowing the structure of domination to define what is resistance and what is not resistance. He argues that since actions may be constrained by the exercise of power we should focus on the level of beliefs and interpretations; it is in this sphere that subordinated groups have most freedom. Scott suggests that a definition of resistance should include any act by a member of a subordinate class that is intended to mitigate or deny claims made on that class by a superordinate class (Scott, 1985).

Scott puts forward the concept of "ideological resistance," the promulgation amongst a subordinate class of an ideology that rejects (inferior) categories imposed on them and undermines the moral authority of the superordinate class (Scott, 1985). Ideological resistance stems from a

subordinate group's ability to penetrate the dominant ideology. Critique of the social order may draw on concepts from the ruling ideology itself. Scott gives examples from Western capitalist nations, where the poor may use the ideology of meritocracy to critique the reality of unequal access to superior education, or compare the slogan "one man, one vote" with the reality of corporate influence on elections (ibid.). It is easier for subordinate groups to penetrate ideology, since they do not have a vested interest in preserving the social order. As Paul Willis (1977) argues, in order to maintain a position of dominance, ruling classes must believe the myth that renders them justified in holding power (Willis, 1977). Ideological resistance challenges the dominant group's "right to rule."

In his analysis of peasant resistance, Scott looks at strategies that are concerned with immediate gains, not systemic change, and defines these as a form of resistance. Scott argues that the success of this de facto resistance is often directly proportional to the "symbolic conformity" with which it is masked. In other words, "real" gains are possible as long as they are framed in accordance with the symbolic order of a society. Drawing on feminist literature about peasant societies, he notes that women can exercise considerable power in formally male-dominated societies to the extent that they do not openly challenge the formal myth of male dominance. A strategy that employs symbolic conformity may be more effective in exacting change than overt criticism of the prevailing social structure (Scott, 1985).

Despite the efficacy of symbolic conformity, Sherman raises a crucial point. Can such strategies be classed as resistance, or does resistance require some form of opposition or challenge to the prevailing system? Sherman would argue that symbolic conformity, even if it is an effective strategy, does not constitute resistance since it adheres to and reinforces the prevailing ideology of inequality. Although symbolic conformity may achieve a level of emancipation, it mitigates against the subordinated group achieving equality. In order to make clear the difference between those strategies that challenge the prevailing social order and those that are complicit, the latter could more usefully be categorised as agency, preserving the term resistance for strategies with an oppositional element.

Sherman's use of the term resistance does not adequately distinguish between the intention of an act and its eventual outcome. According to Sherman, if a strategy unwittingly reinforces the prevailing social system, it is not for the most part a form of resistance (Sherman, 2005). Paul Willis (1977) provides strong evidence that even determined strategies of opposition may unwittingly reinforce inequality. In his study of working-class young men in Britain, he argues that it is resistance to middle-class ideology that channels these youths into the dead-end, low-paid, hard manual labour jobs required to sustain a capitalist economy. The actions and ideology of working class youth, including truancy, insubordination towards teachers, disregard for academic qualifications, the valuing of manual labour as masculine and the devaluing of mental labour as effeminate, demonstrate a refusal to submit to the demands of the State apparatus and a rejection of its ideology. However, their counter-ideology configures them as the low-skilled manual labourers needed by employers. The consequences of their actions serve to reinforce inequality in society and allow the superordinate class to argue that the stratification of society is legitimate (Willis, 1977). Unlike the subjects in Scott's study, their behaviour does not conform to the needs of capitalism because of any legal or other coercive threats; their "counter-culture" ideology inadvertently reinforces the status quo. Willis' case study demonstrates that a definition of resistance must separate intention from result; an act that intends to counter prevailing ideology may not actually achieve this.

Following these arguments, I propose a definition of resistance that examines the ideology supported by counter-discourses. Recognising that intentions do not always bring about the desired effect, if a counter-discourse used by domestic workers challenges the legitimacy of prevailing ideology it should be considered resistance regardless of any unintentional outcomes. Given the importance of discourse and ideology in the legitimation of power, a definition should distinguish between strategies that challenge prevailing ideology and strategies that reinforce it. A discourse that accepts and reinforces prevailing ideology may be an example of agency that in some way benefits domestic workers, but does not constitute resistance.

As I write about migrant domestic workers' strategies of resistance and agency, I am concerned

about my own position of power vis-à-vis these workers. My privileged status as a graduate student in a Western university allows me the opportunity to produce knowledge about others whom I have never met and to make value judgements about their attitudes and behaviour. I am aware that in the West, "resistance" carries positive cultural connotations. Movies and history lessons romanticise resistance, making heroes out of those who stand against dominating regimes, regardless of the cost involved. But as Scott and Willis point out, resistance does not necessarily improve the lives of the most disadvantaged in society. To regard resistance as *a priori* morally superior to other strategies is to impose Western values and priorities.

I also acknowledge Foucault's argument that "the binary division between resistance and non-resistance is an unreal one. The existence of those who seem not to rebel is a warren of minute, individual, autonomous tactics and strategies which counter and inflect the visible facts of overall domination" (Foucault, 1980: 257). Any categorisation of resistance and non-resistance must recognise that individuals choose strategies according to a range of desires and constraints. It is also important to note that any analysis of resistance undertaken in this study is restricted to a limited time frame. Strategies of negotiation and manipulation within the prevailing ideological framework can be a first step towards structural change. By way of example, if symbolic conformity allows women the opportunity to take on new roles and demonstrate competency in these areas, future resistance that challenges the ideology of women's restricted capacity will be more likely to succeed. Once a critical mass of agency has been reached, overt resistance becomes a more viable strategy. In conclusion, I do not want to imply a value judgement that resistance is always superior to other strategies; rather it is one form of agency that demonstrates penetration of the prevailing ideology and a decision to try and challenge it.

Chapter II: Context

In recent years some scholars have noted that studies of migration have paid scant attention to the subject of religion amongst migrant communities (Vertovec, 2002, Ley, 2004). Steven Vertovec (2002) notes that despite the proliferation of literature about migration and diasporas, religion in diasporas remains under-studied. He argues that religious institutions are a key site for immigrants to form social connections with other members of their ethnic community. Immigrant women, who are frequently ascribed the role of "guardians" of cultural heritage, play a key role within these institutions. Women often take the lead in organising and attending collective religious activities (Vertovec, 2002). In this thesis I consider one case study of religion amongst migrant women: Catholicism amongst Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. Given the highly visible and well-established meeting places of Filipinas in the Special Administrative Region, churches are not the principle sites for the establishment of social connections or the maintenance of Filipino culture. In order to attract devoted adherents, churches must have something else to offer. Literature on this religious adherence is limited. Nicole Constable (1997a) suggests that religion is a source of consolation that keeps workers placid during hard times, "a substitute for attempting to enact change" (Constable, 1997a: 192), whose ideology justifies the subservience they owe to their masters. Chang and Groves (2000) argue that religion is part of an active strategy by Filipinas to negotiate their negative reputation. Religious adherence evokes a romanticised version of a chaste and religious culture that they associate with life in the Philippines. They argue that Filipina domestic workers construct an "ethic of service" to the community, to God, and to their country, which gives them a sense of purpose. The identity they gain from the Church is a positive one, which contrasts with the negative stereotypes they face (Chang and Groves, 2000). Following from Chang and Groves, I propose that some Filipinas turn to Catholicism because it provides the vocabulary for discourses that mitigate against their subordination. By drawing on religious

imagery, these domestic workers produce counter-discourses that construct them as superior to those around them.

In the following section I will provide a context to the use of Catholic ideology by some Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. I will begin by examining the global economic processes which have led to Filipinas' migration to Hong Kong. I will argue that postcolonial economic inequality has constructed Filipinas as a cheap labour force. These domestic workers enable women in Hong Kong and elsewhere to enter the labour market without renegotiating the gendered division of labour in the home. However, although they meet an economic need of the Special Administrative Region, I will argue that Filipina domestic workers are subject to criticism and discipline from both their employers and the wider Hong Kong public. Finally, since I am examining the use of Catholic ideology amongst some domestic workers, I will provide an overview of Catholicism in Filipino society. I will focus in particular on the discourses around gender and family, discourses that continue to affect the lives of Filipinas even as they work abroad.

2.1 Overseas Contract Workers

The ongoing impact of colonial inequality has left the Philippines disadvantaged in the global economy and dependent on the remittances of its overseas contract workers. The Philippines were first colonised by the Spanish in 1564, a rule that lasted over three centuries. In 1898, the United States ousted the Spanish and occupied the islands. Despite movements by both Filipinos and some Americans, the Philippines remained under US control, and became increasingly dependent on American economic markets. The United States formally relinquished control in 1946 (McFerson, 2002); however, American influence, both political and economic, continued long after formal independence. The US government was blamed for supporting President Marcos and for increasing military aid for his regime after he declared martial law in 1972 (Claussen, 2001).

Economically, the US continues to control the Philippines' foreign market, purchasing one third of all exports (Parreñas, 2005). The case of the Philippines demonstrates that "the West has not yet relinquished power over its former colonies; we have not yet reached a post-imperialist era" (Williams & Chrisman, 1993: 3-4). Western control over the Philippines economy, and marketing of American goods as desirable, led to a balance of payments crisis in 1962 under which the Philippines accrued a national debt. Since then, the country has become trapped in a debt cycle, whereby 20% of the country's expenditures are spent on servicing the interest on debts (2001 figure). The government has resorted to borrowing money in order to service debts owed to foreign creditors, for which they must adhere to International Monetary Fund (IMF) regulations. Under these conditions, loans are tied to the purchase of foreign goods. For instance, more than 90 cents of every dollar loaned by Japan is used to purchase Japanese commodities or services. The mandatory Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) require the government to reduce salaries for public sector workers, increase taxes for consumers, and lower the quality of public services including education and healthcare. IMF policies are more beneficial to rich countries than the poor economies that adhere to them (Parreñas, 2005).

In seeking to earn foreign currency with which to service national debt, the Philippines government has encouraged overseas work. Initially, most Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) were male, working on ships or at construction sites in the Middle East (Parreñas, 2005). Since the 1970s, an increasing number of women have migrated to work abroad (Chang and Groves, 2000). As women in developed countries have entered the labour market, they have been faced with the "double burden" of economic and domestic labour. With neither state welfare policies to adequately care for children and the elderly, nor assistance from male partners, women in wealthier countries have turned to female migrant labour from poorer countries as a cheap source of domestic help (Parreñas, 2005). The Philippines government has responded to this need,

negotiating domestic service visas with a number of developed countries. This policy has created economic dependency. Between one third and one half of the Filipino population are now sustained by migrant workers, two-thirds of whom are women (Parreñas, 2002; Chang and Groves, 2000). With an average of 2,531 workers leaving the Philippines each day, remittances have become the country's largest source of foreign currency (Parreñas, 2005).

Overseas contract work offers some, but not all, Filipinos the chance to improve their family's standard of living. Funding cuts in the public school system have led some families to look to the private sector to give their children quality education and improve their future earnings potential. Similarly, government spending on healthcare has decreased despite a population increase, rendering public health services inadequate (Parreñas, 2005). For families wanting to access private education and healthcare, the Philippines labour market offers little opportunity. Unemployment is high, and professional salaries are low. For example, in 2001 public school teachers earned an average 200 pesos a day, whereas the daily cost of living for a family of six was 441 pesos a day (*ibid.*). Overseas migration is a strategy of the middle-classes. Global disparity of wealth means that migrants can earn considerably more than they would as a professional in the Philippines, even if their wage is considered low by the host country's standards (Chang and Groves, 2000). However, in order to obtain jobs abroad, migrants require cultural and economic capital. The success of Filipinos in the overseas labour market is attributed to their knowledge of the English language - a form of cultural capital restricted to those who attended better quality schools (Claussen, 2001). The government, seeking to raise foreign currency to service debt repayments, has levied fees and taxes on those seeking work abroad and on the remittances they send home. Pre-1994, some Filipina migrant domestic workers chose to find contracts abroad through personal contacts, but at that time the government issued a memorandum requiring all foreign contracts to be negotiated through licenced agencies. Would-be migrants are usually

required to pay placement fees to recruiters that average as much as three months' salary (Constable, 1997a). By using their cultural and economic capital to access overseas wages, middle-class families can afford to educate their children at more exclusive private schools, equipping the second generation with the potential to access better jobs. The higher wages of overseas work are not accessible to the poorest Filipinos, thus inequalities within the Philippines are exacerbated.

2.2 Domestic Workers in Hong Kong

Although Filipinas work in domestic service around the world, they are particularly noticeable in Hong Kong. In 1993, 130,000 Filipinos, 95% of them women, were employed as domestic workers (Constable, 1997a). Although the numbers have since fallen, there are still some 110,000 Filipinas in this tiny Special Administrative Region of China, making them the largest non-Chinese ethnic group. Foreign domestic workers were first allowed to enter Hong Kong in 1973. Initially, educated Filipinas' proficiency in English made them popular with expatriate employers. Wealthy Chinese families tended to employ poorer Chinese women as domestic servants, but growing dissatisfaction with these workers led Hong Kong Chinese families to employ Filipinas in their place (*ibid.*). During the 1980s' boom in Hong Kong's service industry, middle-class women were encouraged to enter the labour market. However, today care of children and the elderly remains a private responsibility, centred around Chinese traditions of filial piety. Although Confucian values expect an eldest son to provide care for his ageing parents, the work of care is actually performed by his wife. The act of caregiving is strongly tied to the ideal of womanhood, and failure to fulfill this role incurs social stigma (Lan, 2002). Rather than renegotiate the gendered division of household labour, many Hong Kong women now pass domestic chores and care to live-in domestic workers, 78% of whom are women from the Philippines (Constable, 1997b). The few men who are employed do not perform domestic or care

work, but are usually hired to be chauffeurs or gardeners (Constable, 1997a). Domestic work remains the gendered responsibility of women. Although their husbands may sign the contract, it is usually the wife who manages a domestic worker on a day-to-day basis and is regarded as the "employer" (Constable, 1997a). In this way, women fulfill gendered expectation by ensuring their families receive domestic care, yet the actual labour is "subcontracted" to another woman (Lan, 2002).

Legal impositions from both Hong Kong and the Philippines serve to make Filipina domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation. The work permits issued to migrant domestic workers stipulate that they may work for only one employer at a time and must live in the employer's home. This makes their situation very different from that of office or factory workers. Hidden from the public view during the working week, it is difficult for live-in domestic workers to prove contract violations or poor working conditions. They are isolated from the support of other domestic workers, and are usually outnumbered by the employer's family (Constable, 1997b). Foreign workers are more vulnerable than Chinese domestic workers because they do not have as many legal rights as permanent residents. Foreign domestic workers are subject to the "New Conditions of Stay", a policy imposed in 1987 to prevent overseas contract workers "job-hopping" between employers. If a domestic worker leaves a two-year contract with an employer she is normally required to leave Hong Kong before obtaining another contract. If her contract is terminated, she has just two weeks to find a new contract before she is required to leave. Domestic workers are legally exempted from these conditions if they have been underpaid or subjected to physical or sexual abuse; however, it is incumbent upon the worker to provide evidence, and since she is not allowed to work for another employer during the tribunal process, she would need the means to support herself in Hong Kong during this period. As stated earlier, placement agencies in the Philippines charge high fees, and many domestic workers go into debt in order to obtain work in

Hong Kong. Hiring agencies may offer employers a "free replacement contract" without fees if they are dissatisfied - the same offer does not extend to the employee. Workers do not want to return to the Philippines before they have repaid the debts incurred in obtaining a contract. Therefore they may be unwilling to report maltreatment (Constable, 1997a).

Although Filipina domestic workers provide a solution to Hong Kong's care crisis, letters to editors found in Hong Kong newspapers frequently focus on the undesirability of Filipinas' presence in the city. Negative articles about Filipina domestic workers first began to appear in the Hong Kong media in the mid-1980s. Since domestic workers are often forbidden from bringing friends home, they gather in public spaces on their day off. Central District, traditionally a public space used by the middle-classes, is now a gathering place for thousands of domestic workers on Sundays. Seen as "taking over" the space, these young women publicly conduct practices that Chinese observers felt should be "private." Subjected to dress and make-up codes within their employers homes, Filipinas apply make-up and give each other haircuts and manicures in public spaces (Constable, 1997b). Their "foreignness" is also keenly apparent as they speak in languages the locals cannot understand and sell Filipino delicacies on the street. From the mid-1980s onwards, the "problem" of Filipinas' Sunday behaviour has been the subject of many letters to the editor as well as articles in Hong Kong's newspapers. Filipinas are accused of gambling, hawking, and littering (Constable, 1997a). There are concerns over morality and claims that domestic workers moonlight as prostitutes (Constable, 1997b). While some newspaper articles have defended their right to access public spaces, most criticise their noisy and visible public presence and call for their control (Constable, 1997a).

Scott (1985) argues that in order to maintain systems of exploitation, the superordinate classes attempt to justify their behaviour not only to others but to themselves. They must believe themselves to be as badly off as those they exploit. In his study of a village in Malaysia, families

that had considerable wealth in comparison with their neighbours described themselves as barely managing (Scott, 1985). In a capitalist society, the dominant classes also justify their advantaged position by believing themselves to have earned their status through merit (Willis, 1977). A similar process occurs in Hong Kong, where discourses about foreign domestic workers call for controls that benefit the dominant social group. Evidence suggests that some employers believe themselves vulnerable to exploitation by their domestic workers. In 1986, concerned at the "growing problem" of domestic workers, a few hundred Chinese employers formed the Hong Kong Employers of Overseas Domestic Helpers Association. The group was formed in response to a perceived threat from domestic workers. The increasingly visible and audible presence of domestic workers was interpreted as their becoming increasingly demanding. Since its establishment, this group has campaigned on domestic worker policies, regulations and salaries, with the aim of protecting employers from "exploitation" by their workers (Constable, 1997a). Domestic worker agencies provide "tips" to keep workers docile and obedient in order to reduce employers' fears. These recommendations include lists of household rules to regulate and control domestic workers that extend far beyond, or even contradict, the official, government regulated contract (Constable, 1997a). The fear of exploitation belies the evidence that employers have considerably more power in the domestic service relationship.

The Catholic Church plays a critical role as one of the few sources of support available for these disadvantaged migrant workers. In some Western countries such as the UK and Canada, community-based charities that provide services to migrants are encouraged by the State. They may be partially financed by local or national government grants. This is not the case in Hong Kong, where welfare is traditionally viewed as a family concern and the State or community provision of welfare is limited and stigmatised (Chan, 1998). In Hong Kong, and in neighbouring Taiwan, Catholic institutions are the principle sources of support for migrant domestic workers

who seek redress for abuse and breach of contract. Catholic-run charities such as the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers provide legal, emotional and practical support and advice. These charities accompany domestic workers to court hearings, provide shelter if a woman leaves her employer, and document the extent of abuse across the Special Administrative Region (Constable, 1997a). In Taiwan, Catholic churches have earned such a reputation that some employers designate a weekday as the domestic worker's day off. This is a deliberate strategy to prevent her going to church and becoming "politicised," in other words, likely to seek redress for maltreatment (Lan, 2003a). In Hong Kong, most employers continue to designate Sunday as their domestic worker's free day, giving them the opportunity to attend church if they wish. The majority of Filipina workers spend their Sundays congregating in the open air in central Hong Kong, turning to the Catholic Church only if seeking their help for a specific purpose. However, some Filipinas, many of whom did not attend church in the Philippines, choose to spend Sundays devoted to church activities (Chang and Groves, 2000).

2.3 Catholicism in the Philippines

The Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in South East Asia. Christian imagery and artifacts are omnipresent, from lavish festivals to icons on car dashboards. Some Catholic institutions provide services to the community. Nunneries in Manila maintain innumerable hospitals, dispensaries, child welfare centres and homes for the aged. Most of the better-known schools in the Philippines are Catholic-run (Claussen, 2001). The Catholic Church as an institution is also a political force to be reckoned with. During the 1972-1986 Marcos dictatorship, the Church rose to prominence as the only viable opposition in the realm of local politics. In the early 1990s it campaigned against Value Added Tax, and during the 1995 elections it issued advice for parishes about evaluation criteria for the selection of local candidates. In 2001, the Catholic Church demanded President Estrada's resignation for using state revenue for personal

advantage rather than to fulfill his promises to help the poor (McFerson, 2002). Through the multiple means by which it affects Filipinos' lives, the Church institution holds considerable influence in the country.

Some 99% of Filipinos identify themselves as Catholic, but it is a markedly Filipino form of Catholicism to which they adhere. Despite the ubiquity of religious imagery, Christianity is a faith to be called upon in times of crisis rather than a constant daily concern (Claussen, 2001). Unlike Evangelical Christianity, which regards faith as an individual spiritual discovery, Catholic doctrine may focus on collective behaviour. The emphasis on community Christianity rather than individual commitment means that Catholics do not feel constant church attendance is required to "be" Catholic (Menjívar, 2003). Many Filipinos are ignorant of the actual content of the Bible (Hawwa, 2000). Thus Catholicism must be understood as an ideology that incorporates both Christian and Filipino cultural values.

The Spanish colonisation and introduction of Catholicism profoundly influenced gender ideology in the Philippines. Evidence suggests that prior to colonisation most tribes in the Philippines had granted spiritual authority to female priestesses, who were believed to be able to mediate between humans and the spirit world. When Spanish colonisers introduced Christianity in the 15th and 16th Centuries, missionaries targeted women specifically, persecuting the priestesses and introducing new ideals of the "spiritual woman" (Claussen, 2001). This ideal was based on European assumptions about the Virgin Mary. Although the figure of the Virgin Mary has enormous significance in the history of the church, images of her have differed widely across history and cultures (Brown, 1991). Amongst the Spanish missionaries, prevailing discourses characterised her as meek and submissive (Clausen, 2001). Hazel McFerson (2002) argues that the success of Spanish influence on women's status is demonstrated by the popularity of Jose Rizal's novels. Rizal, regarded as a national hero, created the character "Maria Clara," whom

many Filipinas emulate. This *mestiza* (mixed "race" Filipina) was portrayed as a beautiful, passive, demure, submissive and devoutly religious woman, who faithfully accepted the role prescribed her by Filipino society and the Catholic Church (McFerson, 2002).

Heather Claussen (2001) argues that contemporary Catholic practice in the Philippines is highly gendered. More women than men attend church and take up religious orders. The over-representation of women is not reflected in scholarly studies on Philippine Catholicism, which has usually focused on male-led religious practice. Claussen maintains that this scholarly imbalance exists in part because women remain marginalised within the official Church hierarchy (Claussen, 2001). Since the Vatican is completely opposed to the ordination of women to the priesthood, men hold most positions of power within the church. Catholic doctrine cites the female sex as "complementary" to, rather than equal to, the male sex. Discourses from the Vatican continue to regard women as distinct from men, emphasising that they should perform different functions in society. According to these discourses, the Church and the public sphere are to be presided over by men, while women should be mothers and homemakers (Walsh, 2005).

The doctrine of "complementary roles" simultaneously elevates and subjugates women. The Catholic Church contrasts with Protestantism in ascribing godliness to a female figure - a godliness attained through her maternal role. Women are thought to be divinely destined to fulfill a role as the central figure of family life. Pressure from Rome continues to stress that women should first and foremost be mothers (Walsh, 2005). Although they are denied a place in church leadership and may be restricted in public life, many Filipina women wield considerable power within the home (Claussen, 2001). However, the veneration of Mary as the Virgin Mother of Christ highlights the imperfections of mortal women. As Ann Brown points out, other women cannot be both virgins and mothers. Although the Bible does not suggest she remained a perpetual virgin, this was declared a dogma of the church in 649 AD (Brown, 1991). That this doctrine is

regarded as fundamental points to the association of female sexuality with impurity and sinfulness. Despite this association, Filipina women are supposed to aspire to motherhood and prioritise finding a husband and raising children. Although they are expected to maintain their virginity prior to marriage, celibacy, even within a religious order, is considered to be a deviant state for women. Women are trained to measure their value in terms of male attention (Claussen, 2001). Within Filipino communities, women's matrimony and maternity is regulated by the process of reward and stigmatisation. Women who win beauty contests or marry politicians have the ability to exercise power unofficially in Filipino society (McFerson, 2002), whereas unmarried women over the age of twenty-five are ascribed the derogatory label of "flawed femininity" (Claussen, 2001).

According to Bourdieu (1998), the definition of a normal family, while seeming to describe social reality, does in fact construct it. This is evident by the wide range of family forms that fall outside of the defined family unit. However, the dominant, legitimate(d) family form is presented to us as "normal" (Bourdieu, 1998). The State's monopoly on official classification allows it to define which family forms are valid. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Philippines, where the definition of a "family" is made explicit in the country's constitution. The 1986 constitution, which was ratified by an overwhelming majority of the people, declared the "Filipino family" to be the foundation of the nation. This "Filipino family" is a nuclear unit of husband, wife and children, under the husband's authority. The husband and wife are obliged to live together, and divorce is illegal. By defining the family in this way, the State establishes this family as the "right kind of family," and by implication, other forms are defined as "wrong" (Parreñas, 2005).

Dorothy Smith (1999) extends Bourdieu's discussion of the State's definition of the family by introducing the concept of the nuclear family as an "ideological code." In her analysis of the "Standard North American Family" (SNAF), she argues that an ideological code, in a similar

fashion to its biological counterpart DNA, generates procedures for interpreting and constructing texts and vocabulary. The SNAF is a nuclear household headed by a male breadwinner, with a wife who cares for him and their children. The code operates largely outside the conscious intention of researchers and writers, structuring the way in which all family units are evaluated. According to Smith, "[w]here data *can* be ordered according to SNAF, it will be so ordered; where it cannot, *SNAF ordering generates deviant cases*" (Smith, 1999: 167). It is the SNAF code that enables teachers and officials to label some families as "intact" and others as "not intact." Vocabulary such as "female-headed household" and "multi-family residence" is a product of SNAF, used to denote deviance from the implicitly "normal" nuclear family. The SNAF code reproduces itself in a wide range of discourses including government survey forms, ethnographic studies, teacher expectations and mass media.

Assumptions of innate gender difference generates discourses proscribing different roles for Filipino males and females. Filipino parents are expected to fulfill different functions within the family. Mothers, metaphorically termed the "light of the home," are expected to nurture the children, while fathers provide discipline. The father, the "pillar of the home," is also expected to be the main breadwinner and provide a house for his family (Parreñas, 2005). Although at least 45% of women work outside of the home and many families are dependent on the mother's income, prevailing discourses still construct women as homemakers and fathers as providers (ibid.). As part of the school curriculum, "Values Formation" lessons play an important role in emphasising to children the importance of the nuclear family and the different roles of men and women within this (ibid.), and assumptions of innate character differences are used to justify different upbringings for boys and girls (Claussen, 2001). Women are supposed to look up to men as patrons, protectors and providers, even though cultural stereotypes configure men as irresponsible and prone to affairs. It is somewhat socially acceptable for men to take mistresses because they are

expected to prove their masculinity by pursuing numerous female conquests. Such lapses are not tolerated for women, who are expected to be primarily family oriented (*ibid.*). Constructed as the "moral guardians" of the family, mothers bear the burden of responsibility for their family's morality. Women are thought to attend church not merely for themselves but for the salvation of their whole family. The family's wellbeing is also deemed dependent on the mother's domesticity. Discourses in mass media, school guidance materials and church sermons concur that it is the mother's domestic presence in the home that keeps a husband from "vices" and their children from delinquency. Consequently, mothers' overseas migration is viewed as a troubling trend that threatens the morality of the nation (Parreñas, 2005).

Given that Filipino Catholic cultural ideology demands that women remain in the home, it is perhaps surprising that many migrant Filipinas turn to Church ideology when abroad in order to justify their role. By focusing on some specific controlling images that Filipina domestic workers encounter, I will explore how church members negotiate new Christian identities within the overarching framework of Catholicism, resisting the identities ascribed to them by the dominant social order.

Chapter III: Discourses and Counter-Discourses

There are three main controlling discourses around Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong discourse of the "immoral woman" focuses on Filipina domestic workers' sexuality and constructs them as morally inferior to Chinese women. The second controlling discourse, widely promulgated in the Philippines, is of the "deviant woman" abandoning her family. Like the first, this discourse is highly gendered, and largely focuses on their rejection of "proper" women's roles. Finally, I will look at the controlling discourse of "inferior servants." I argue that Hong Kong employers desire a domestic worker of a markedly lower status to themselves. This discourse is used to justify discriminatory treatment that reinforces the differential between employer and employee. It also criticises and controls domestic workers who appear too demanding and assertive by comparing them with romanticised notions of servants from the past. Some Filipina workers employ elements of Catholic ideology to reject the derogatory labels placed on them. They use religious language to form counter-discourses that construct an alternative, more positive identity for themselves. Catholic Filipinas' counter-discourses create a set of hierarchies, sometimes contradictory, by which they measure themselves as superior to others around them.

3.1 "Immoral women": dangerous seductresses and vulnerable girls

Arguably the most prominent topic of discussion in Hong Kong media has been Filipina women's sexuality. Most of the domestic workers are aged between 25 and 35, and over half of them are single. Since they are unable to bring families with them, even married women are perceived as "unattached" (Constable, 1997b). Multiple and contradictory images of Filipinas' sexuality abound, presenting domestic workers as a threat to the moral order and giving employers a justification to exert control over behaviour that extends into workers' "free" time.

One popular image is of the Filipina as a "seductress," a hypersexual threat to the Chinese family. Filipinas first became associated with promiscuous sex during the American occupation, when poverty-stricken women earned meagre wages as "hospitality girls" around US bases (Chang and Groves, 2000). When the US bases were closed in the 1990s, rumours circulated in Hong Kong that the prostitutes would travel to Hong Kong in the guise of domestic workers (Constable, 1997b). Stereotypes of the "mail-order bride" help to constitute the controlling image of a sexually willing Filipina girl, prepared to seduce any man she can in the hope of finding a foreign husband for economic security - including the man of the house in which she works (ibid.). In an attempt to protect her marriage, an employer may take steps to reduce the domestic worker into an asexual, less "threatening" body by imposing dress codes, forbidding make-up and restricting hairstyles. A few domestic workers even had their contracts terminated on arrival because the (female) employer thought she was "too beautiful" (Constable, 1997b: 547). Some domestic workers felt that the regulations imposed on them were due to a legitimate mistrust of the husband being redirected towards the worker (ibid.). This control that an employer exerts over her domestic worker's sexuality is indicative of her inability to control her husband's sexual behaviour. In Han Chinese tradition, family membership, inheritance of property and distribution of authority are defined through the male line - women are able to gain power within the home only through their ability to manipulate emotional bonds with their husband and sons (Lan, 2002; Constable 1997b). Until the mid-20th Century, wives in Chinese households usually tolerated men's sexual access to concubines (secondary wives) and *muijai*, indentured domestic servants, since such relations did not disempower the first wife (Constable, 1997a). Today, although a wife now has rights to exclusivity, there is a risk that her husband will divorce her in order to form a bond with a second woman (Constable, 1997b). The sense of threat caused by discourses of Filipina promiscuity mask the real threat to Chinese women's well-being caused by gendered distribution of power within the family and men's sexual infidelity.

The image of the "seductress" Filipina restores Hong Kong Chinese men as objects of sexual desire after the indignity of colonial occupation, but this usurping of White superiority comes at the expense of Filipina women. In European colonial ideology, travel to the colonies promised White males sexual encounters with native women, a promise resting on the assumption that darker 'races' were libidinous and always desired White people (Loomba, 1998). British troops in Hong Kong often sought sexual relations with Chinese women (Enloe, 1990). In contemporary Hong Kong discourses, the Chinese male displaces the White male as the object of foreign women's sexual desire. Assumptions of sexual willingness that make women seemingly "available" to any man are a source of danger to them - their vulnerability to sexual violence is hidden by the belief that they are too promiscuous to be raped (Collins, 2004). In Hong Kong some male members of the household take for granted that a domestic worker will give sexual favours, and in reported cases of sexual assault, the man's defence was usually that the domestic worker had initiated the sexual encounters. Of the women who approach the Mission for Filipino Domestic Workers for advice, most simply want to terminate their contracts rather than report the behaviour. The controlling image of the "seductress" means that men can make sexual advances towards Filipina domestic workers with relative impunity (Constable, 1997b).

Filipina domestic workers have come to serve as a foil to Chinese female workers, constructed as the "immoral" woman against whom Chinese women are favourably judged. Since Filipina domestic workers enable Chinese women to leave the home and enter the workforce, their presence coincides with a fundamental societal change in women's roles. Although Chinese women have often contributed labour to family businesses, waged work done for *another* family was not considered proper for them. When the government sought to meet the 1980s' labour demand by encouraging women into the service sector, the previous social boundaries between morally acceptable and unacceptable women's work became blurred. New boundaries have been

drawn, in which the use of public spaces becomes a marker of morality. Filipinas' Sunday behaviour contributes to the perception that they are very different from Chinese women. The working Chinese woman travels swiftly between the spheres of work and home, with her time in public spaces limited to necessary activities such as shopping, errands, or playing with the children. For a woman to loiter in the street or public square without any obvious purpose is seen as evidence of lax morals (Constable, 1997b). Denied use of the private home for their social activities, Filipinas are unable to meet society's new standards of female morality.

A contradictory controlling image presents Filipinas as good, but infantilised, women who are unable to control their sexuality. They are therefore believed to be in need of the employer's help to protect them from getting into trouble. Rollins states that in all parts of the world, there is a tradition of referring to female domestic workers as "girls" rather than "women," denoting perpetual inferiority and denying full adulthood (Rollins, 1985). The Cantonese term *banmui*, commonly used for Filipina domestic workers regardless of age, is derived from the word for "Filipino" and the word for "girl" or "younger sister" (Constable, 1997a). This maternalistic view of a domestic workers as childlike justifies treating her in ways that one would not normally treat an adult (Rollins, 1985). Just as parents might protect children from staying out late and mixing with bad company, employers reiterate the idea that domestic workers must be controlled and disciplined. Many employers claim they serve as the worker's guarantor, responsible for her as a parent is for a child (Constable, 2002). As "unattached" women it is their sexuality that is of greatest concern. As one female employer explained, "even the most well-intentioned domestic workers need a bit of help resisting [sexual temptation]" (Constable, 1997b: 545). Both English and Chinese newspapers fuel fears of Filipina women being "lured" or coerced into prostitution after entering Hong Kong. Since domestic workers are willing to leave their families to earn money, they are assumed to be desperate, and likely to fall into the more "lucrative" trade of

prostitution (Constable, 1997b). Efforts to protect domestic workers from these "temptations" extend into a worker's free time: setting curfews, banning make-up, and imposing geographical restrictions - particularly to keep workers away from sailors at the docks (Chang and Groves, 2000: 78). In extreme cases workers were locked inside the apartment or in a room of the house, ostensibly for their own safety (Constable, 2002). By infantilising the worker, an employer can control and regulate her while maintaining her own sense of benevolence.

3.2 Counter Discourse: Superior morality

Domestic workers' livelihoods depend on their ability to convince employers that they are not as promiscuous as stereotypes suggest. Individually, domestic workers must protect themselves from accusations of immorality since it is considered reasonable to fire a worker on mere suspicion of having sexual relations (Chang and Groves, 2000). Collectively, Filipinas' continued employment in Hong Kong is dependent on their general reputation as "suitable" workers - concerns over ill-disciplined Filipinas was one reason for the increasing popularity of Indonesian workers during the 1990s (Constable, 1997a). For some women, their personal safety depends on their moral image, since the label of "promiscuous" leaves them vulnerable to sexual assault. In this section, I will consider how Filipina women negotiate the controlling discourse of sexual immorality, and argue that some Catholic adherents promulgate a counter-discourse of their own superior morality.

In her discussion of Black female sexuality, Collins (2004) explores how some Black women in early twentieth century USA worked to challenge the prevailing ideology of their sexual immorality. Middle-class women, especially church-goers, refuted the "jezebel" image by advocating a politics of respectability. By avoiding the streets and dance halls, and claiming respectability through cleanliness, manners, and sexual purity, these Black women sought to win

White approval by attaining Whites' standards of morality (Collins, 2004). Similarly, some Filipinas in Hong Kong urge other women to counter negative stereotypes by behaving in a "respectable" manner. The measures used to judge moral respectability are the measures used by Hong Kong employers, such as modesty of dress and avoidance of the locations where Filipinas are thought to engage in "licentious" behaviour (Chang and Groves, 2000). The popular domestic worker magazine *Tinig Filipino* frequently instructs women to improve their behaviour to counter negative stereotypes. This magazine, edited by a former domestic worker, is a source of advice for many new arrivals (Constable, 1997a). Rather than questioning the accuracy of Hong Kong popular discourses, *Tinig Filipino* articles frequently hold Filipinas accountable for their public image. One article states, "the way we are treated in this territory depends mainly on the way we present ourselves - the way we look, the way we speak, and most of all, the way we behave" (Perez, 1994: 10). Like their African-American counterparts, *Tinig Filipino* writers encourage self-discipline as a strategy to win the approval of the Chinese population.

Some Filipinas believe that all-female church groups, presided over by nuns, older domestic workers, and male clergy, carry a wholesome identity that protect members from the label of "prostitute" (Chang and Groves, 2000). In the Philippines, earnest Catholicism may earn a woman respect; for example, criminals are much less likely to target nuns than lay women because the nuns are widely respected as religious figures (Claussen, 2001). Thus some Filipina women use church membership as a strategy to try and demonstrate to their employers or families back home that they are "good, straight, proper girls." (Chang and Groves, 2000). In order to join, women must regulate their behaviour. In their study of a Catholic choir and shelter, Chang and Groves (2000) found members were required to adhere to curfews, spend their free time engaged in church activities, and stay away from Central District and the docks. Most members willingly embraced these requirements, believing such rules gave a good moral image to all the members. Church

attendance was viewed as a strategy to challenge controlling discourses of Filipinas' immorality (ibid.).

Concerns about Filipina domestic workers' sexual activities do not reflect actual licentiousness or lax morals (Constable, 1997b). Filipinas do not recognise themselves as seductresses in the home or potential prostitutes. According to Althusser's theory, subjects choose to freely submit to a Subject because they are interpellated in such a way that they recognise themselves. I would argue that, unlike employers or the media, Catholic churches and missions address Filipina women in a form that corresponds to the way some of them view, or would like to view, themselves. In the Philippines, female promiscuity is strongly discouraged, and women are expected to remain virgins before marriage and sexually faithful within marriage (Claussen, 2001). Rather than labelling them as "immoral" or imposing regulations against their will, the Church interpellates Filipina domestic workers as sexually pure, inviting them to submit to rules and practices that demonstrate their morality. Association with a church is one way for domestic workers to counter stereotypes and claim a more positive identity. Whereas employers' rules are viewed as enforced and undesirable controls, submission to the church is viewed as a choice that earns adherents respect and status (Chang and Groves, 2000).

Not all women adhere to such forms of self-discipline. Some women use Sundays as an opportunity to escape the role of "maid" by which they feel confined during their working week (Constable, 1997b). The multitudes who gather in Statue Square and Chater Road defy attempts to spatially control them and continue to "loiter" in a manner that Hong Kong observers disapprove of. Some Filipinas may be surprisingly assertive on their free day. Gaining strength in numbers, they may respond in kind to insulting comments, or complain to the manager if shop and restaurant staff give them poor service (Constable, 1997a). Chang and Groves identified some domestic workers who embrace their own sexuality, resisting the prevailing ideology that demands women's

sexual passivity and purity (Chang and Groves, 2000). Since domestic workers can be dismissed for having sexual relations, those who participate in activities that recognise their sexuality do so in a manner that is hidden from their employers and does not involve actual sexual relations with men. As Scott argues, the forms that resistance may take depend on the institutions of repression (Scott, 1986). These activities include beauty pageants, talent shows with erotic themes, and sexual jokes and innuendo. Some express their sexuality through lesbian relationships. They may ridicule compatriots, labelled as "saints," who blindly follow priests, and defy efforts to engage them in spiritual activities. Such women have typically been in Hong Kong for longer periods and want to enjoy their time there. Some were previously church adherents, but found the regulations too controlling. These women resist the call to self-discipline, instead choosing to resist controlling discourses and reclaim a sense of power through other means (Chang and Groves, 2000). Through such covert actions they assert their independence and reject the controls imposed by employers, the Hong Kong public, and the Catholic Church, without openly risking dismissal and deportation.

If they reject the church's high moral standards, domestic workers are vulnerable to criticism from the "saints" within the Filipina community. These women may use gossip to exert power over their peers. By criticising others' morality, a woman portrays herself as chaste and thus superior to those around her (Chang and Groves, 2000). The label "barracuda" (man-eater), is used to chastise and insult women who appear too loose and immoral (Constable, 1997b). Failure to attend church or church-run activities is criticised as a sign of sexual immorality, since loitering outside in the public sphere is interpreted as loose morals. Even seemingly innocuous acts such as wearing jewelry may be considered evidence of having an affair, leading to gossip and public scrutiny. Such rumours may cost a domestic worker her job or her reputation if word spreads to her employer or her family back home (Chang and Groves, 2000). Domestic workers may blame

their peers for men's sexual harassment. Annabelle Bassabica, writing in *Tinig Filipino*, criticised women who "dress up" then complain of a male employer's sexual molestation, writing that it is due to their own mistakes. "Could you expect a man to act like a saint when you are garbed in sexy clothes?" (Bassabica, 1993: 37). Her article earned many accolades from fellow domestic workers. The discourse of superior morality therefore serves as a form of control and discipline against other domestic workers (Chang and Groves, 2000).

The discourse of superior morality allows individuals to resist the controlling image of "seductress" or "potential prostitute," but mitigates against resisting norms that measure women's worth by their sexual behaviour and conformity. While religious domestic workers may see church membership as a means to counter controlling images, their strategy cannot be considered ideological resistance. According to Scott (1985), ideological resistance consists not only of the rejection of categories imposed on the subordinate group but also a challenging of the superordinate group's moral authority and right to control them. Although Catholic domestic workers contest the label of "promiscuous" that is placed on them, they do not refute the moral authority of those who label them. By urging Filipinas to earn the respect of the Hong Kong Chinese population, these domestic workers affirm the employer's right to judge their sexual behaviour.

Religious adherents' strategy to gain a more positive self-identity can be understood as the construction of a hierarchy of worth vis-à-vis other domestic workers, particularly their non-religious peers. By accusing other domestic workers of sexual immorality, they construct a symbolic hierarchy which divides domestic workers and serves to reinforce the conditions that disadvantage them. By seeking to "prove" their own morality to win approval of the Hong Kong Chinese, religious adherents fail to recognise that the controlling images of promiscuous Filipinas are not dependent on the actions of domestic workers themselves. Moreover, some of them

legitimate the discourse that blames Filipinas in cases of sexual assault. By placing themselves under the authority of priests and nuns, these women reinforce the ideology that claims Filipinas are incapable of controlling their own sexuality and require the supervision and control of others. Thus the hierarchy of worth employed by religious domestic workers is demonstrative of agency but not resistance, since it does not pose a challenge to the prevailing ideology through which Filipina domestic workers are disadvantaged.

3.3 "Deviant Women": neglecting the family

As transnational migrants, Filipina domestic workers are subject to controlling images from the Philippines as well as Hong Kong society. Catholic cultural influence emphasises women's maternity and role as the central figure of family life. Whether single or married, mothers or childless, migrant Filipina women do not fit the narrow definition of ideal womanhood, and are constructed as deviant.

Filipino expectations of parental care are highly gendered. Whereas men are constructed as the "economic provider" for the family - a role that they can fulfill in the Philippines or abroad, mothers are expected to provide care within the domestic sphere. Just under one half of Filipina migrant workers are married, and many of these have children (Parreñas, 2005). Both the media and academic discourses within the Philippines claim that the children of migrant mothers have more problems than other children. Regardless of the actual labour performed by extended kin, these children are widely assumed to have been abandoned without love or care. The controlling image of the mother who "abandons" her children holds migrant mothers responsible for the increase in incest, drugs, gambling and drinking. Moreover, single mothers, already stigmatised in

Filipino society as "bad mothers," are over-represented in migrant communities. Priests, school guidance counsellors, and organisations that support the families of migrant workers, all concur that the migration of mothers is harmful to children because they are abandoned without adequate care (Parreñas, 2005).

The controlling image of "abandonment" is used by the state to avoid provision of services to families, and passes blame for societal problems onto the migrant workers. In 1995, President Ramos called for initiatives to keep migrant mothers at home. In doing so he masked the country's financial dependency on remittances. At present, female overseas contract workers pay high fees to the government, yet the government does not support their families with services. While incest, drugs and drinking may be real social problems in the Philippines, correlation to mothers' migration is unproven speculation - no studies show rates are higher amongst families of migrant mothers (*ibid.*). Migrant mothers have become scapegoats that absolve the society from taking action to tackle its problems.

Single, childless domestic workers are controlled by discourses that promote women's dependence on men and emphasise women's obligations to have a family. The "naturalness" of women's family role is upheld by the controlling image of "flawed femininity" which is attached to spinsterhood. Young women are expected to prioritise finding a husband and starting a family (Claussen, 2001). As Mary Louise Adams argues, a process of moral regulation that limits the number of acceptable social identities makes normalised behaviour appear "natural" (Adams, 1997). Single young domestic workers, leaving home in the very years when they should be aspiring to matrimony and motherhood, risk the stigma of spinsterhood. Whereas male Overseas Contract Workers are likely to marry and have children, unmarried women who work abroad for long periods are likely to remain unmarried and childless (Constable, 1999). Daughters have a filial obligation to provide their parents with grandchildren and a national duty to reproduce the

population (Claussen, 2001; Parreñas, 2005). Without children, these women fail to fulfill their biological duty to parents and the state (Claussen, 2001).

In the Philippines, the ideology of a male breadwinner and dependent wife supports both patriarchy and capitalism. Drawing on Smith's concept of an "ideological code," I would argue that discourses of female domesticity and male provision order the way in which men's and women's work is viewed, generating interpretations that downplay women's economic contributions. Within the Philippines, although almost half of mothers work outside the home, it is expected that such work should not interfere with their primary duty of providing care for children (Parreñas, 2005). Female careers are undervalued by both family members and employers, often presumed to be a "hobby." The assumption that women are provided for by men is used to justify paying women less than their male counterparts. Maintaining the myth that women are supported dependents provides the capitalist system with a pool of cheap and flexible labour. Unmarried women, without a husband to support them, challenge the logic of women's underpayment and the devaluing of their careers. By ascribing the image of "flawed femininity" to these women, the "rightness" of women's dependency is upheld. Within the family, the valuing of males' careers above females' careers means that men demand a reprieve from domestic chores and childcare. The importance of women's contributions to the household purse is downplayed, justifying their responsibility for the full burden of housework (Claussen, 2001).

The significant earnings of female migrant workers challenge the logic of prevailing gender discourse. Whereas women's economic earnings in the Philippines can be labelled as "supplemental" income, the same is not true of migrant women's remittances. Many Filipinos are dependent on remittances from unmarried migrant daughters and siblings, demonstrating a contradiction between the ideological discourses of filial piety and women's matrimony. When husbands are dependent on their wife's earnings, it calls into question their reprieve from domestic

work. However, in her study of the families of Filipina migrant labourers, Parreñas found few men took on any responsibility for chores or childcare, instead passing this labour to female extended kin (Parreñas, 2005). Controlling images that focus on women's "abandonment" of their families ignore or invalidate migrant workers' economic contributions and direct attention away from men's failure to undertake an equal share of labour. The problematisation of female migrant labourers upholds a system that benefits capitalism and Filipino men at the expense of Filipina women.

3.4 Counter Discourse: Superior mothers and dutiful daughters

Scott argues that "real" gains are possible for subordinate groups as long as the symbolic order is not openly challenged (Scott, 1985). As might be expected, the Catholic Church in Hong Kong reinforces the ideology that a woman's primary focus should be her family. In the Philippines, such an ideology translates into restricted life options for women. Any deviation from matrimony, motherhood, and the full burden of domestic chores is viewed as a lack of filial piety and causes a woman to lose respect and status in the community. Migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong draw on religious vocabulary to lend credence to a range of alternative lifestyles. By emphasising their commitment and sacrifice for their family, domestic workers symbolically conform to expectations of filial piety while resisting its restrictive demands.

The understanding of "love" in the Philippines is gendered - for women, it is typically understood in terms of service and self-sacrifice (Claussen, 2000). "Sacrifice" is a central value of Christian doctrine, with Christ's death as the ultimate example of sacrificial love for others. Filipina domestic workers can counter the accusation that they have neglected filial piety by emphasising

that they are working for their family's benefit (Chang and Groves, 2000). Since women's "natural" place is with their family, they describe their time in Hong Kong as a hardship due to separation. They have sacrificed their life at home in order to provide a better future for their parents, siblings and children (Constable, 1997a).

Although patriarchy in the Philippines confines women within the domestic sphere, Filipina women may not want to pursue the resistance strategies of Western feminists. Since their status and emotional support comes through relationships with the family, strategies which maintain family harmony are valued as preferable to oppositional tactics. While Western feminists have sometimes dismissed Asian women as passive, some Asian women have highlighted their ability to successfully manipulate their situations. Filipina women may prefer gentle encouragement and persuasion over conflict as a means to achieve happiness in family relationships (Constable, 2003). The strategy employed by domestic workers allows them to maintain emotional bonds and status within the family unit while negotiating a broader range of roles and lifestyles. In the Philippines, women are expected to live with their parents until marriage, and thereafter cohabit with their husband. Divorce is illegal and abandoning the family warrants condemnation, especially for women. Women are expected to be financially dependent on men and their careers are devalued (Claussen, 2001). It is the religious-infused language of sacrifice that provides an acceptable face for an otherwise unacceptable practice: living independently from their families. To be geographically apart from one's family is a bodily form of resistance to the demands of Filipino priests, teachers and the government.

The discourse of "sacrifice" can mask the fact that some women do not find leaving their family to be a purely negative experience. By working abroad, women can escape from abusive or unfaithful husbands, gain independence from their parents, or relinquish the more mundane responsibilities of childcare, all the while stating that they put their family first (Constable, 1999).

For women who do not wish to marry, the discourse of sacrifice offers a means to remain single without the stigma of flawed femininity that is usually attached to unmarried women (Claussen, 2001). By providing remittances for dependent elderly parents or siblings' education, women can argue that they are more "family focused" than those who seek marriage, because delaying or sacrificing marriage for the sake of one's parents and siblings is considered honourable and admirable (Constable, 1999). Since Filipino society does not regard women as legitimate breadwinners, migrant domestic workers construct their remittances as a gender-appropriate form of care. Rather than "sending money," women describe their financial contributions as the provision of quality private education for their children or healthcare for their parents (Parreñas, 2005). By symbolically adhering to gendered expectations of filial piety, migrant women negotiate access to lifestyles and roles outside the confines of dependency, compulsory matrimony and maternity.

Filipina domestic workers use religious vocabulary to challenge conventions by giving alternative, positive, meanings to such actions. A notable example of this is the descriptions given to same-sex relationships between Filipinas in Hong Kong. Discourses about same-sex relationships focus on "T-birds" and their "Juliets." T-birds or tomboys wear their hair short and dress in blue jeans and men's T-shirts. A "Juliet" is considered to be heterosexual, attracted to a T-bird in the same way as she might be to a man. Traditionally, the Catholic Church condemns sexual relationships between members of the same sex as sinful. While many Filipinas in Hong Kong criticise same-sex relations as immoral (Constable, 1997b), some, even within the church, view them more positively. T-birds state that their blue-jean outfit conveys a clear message that they are not after men, protecting themselves from male advances and female employers' jealousy. For the "Juliets," relationships with tomboys are constructed as a form of faithfulness - a means for a woman to find companionship without threatening her family unit. Since Catholic ideology places great

emphasis on women's maternity, Filipino society sees childless relationships as "incomplete" - a family becomes a family through the birth of children. Since a sexual relationship with a tomboy brings no possibility of bearing children, some Filipinas argue that it will not break up the family in the way that a heterosexual affair might. Many women agreed that a relationship with a tomboy was in fact a means of remaining faithful to one's husband; a woman who missed her husband could find a temporary, "safe outlet" with a T-bird without breaking her marital vows. Even within a church setting, "sinful" lesbianism has become successfully reconstructed as heterosexual purity and fidelity (Chang and Groves, 2000).

Although they are geographically separated from their natal and marital families, domestic workers can also describe themselves as "family focused" through their interactions with the employer's family. Many domestic workers provide care for the children of their employer. Within Christianity, high status is given to the care of children, and some domestic workers pride themselves on the mothering skills they show to their charges. The editor of *Tinig Filipino* urged readers to "Filipinize" their employers' children, so that they would "possess moral, spiritual and emotional strength" (Layosa, 1994: 6). The Chinese mother becomes a foil - believed to be career-focused and working out of selfish ambition rather than dedicating herself to the care of her family. In her study with Filipina carers in Taiwan, Pei-Chia Lan (2003) found several of them gained self-esteem from their emotional closeness to their employers' children, looking down on the employer for opting to work outside the home and thus "neglecting" her children. They believed that the employers' children preferred them to the biological mother, confirming their motherly capabilities (Lan, 2003b). This comparison fits Sherman's concept of a critical hierarchy of worth. Workers who care for children use an alternative measure of worth, childrearing abilities, to compare themselves favourably with their employers. This hierarchy draws on gendered ideology that equates femininity with motherhood and values stay-at-home mothers above

working mothers.

Scott (1985) might define such behaviour as ideological resistance since it challenges the employer's moral authority in the family. Since women's status is derived from maternity, describing her as a neglectful mother challenges her right to authority in the home. However, such as discourse mitigates against women's access to a choice of life roles, reinforcing the ideology of stay-at-home motherhood. It is this very ideology that criticises and controls many Filipina migrant mothers.

Because discourses in the Philippines disapprove of mothers leaving the home, migrant mothers must perform emotional labour to demonstrate love of their family in a way that migrant fathers need not. School "Values Formation" lessons give children romanticised images of a biological mother's care, leaving children of migrant mothers feeling "unloved" even when extended kin provide considerable support. In order to convince these children that they have not been "abandoned," mothers must demonstrate their migration to be a sacrifice by such evidence as frequent phone calls, letters, and even weeping. Children find solace in the thought that their mothers suffer by being separated from them (Parreñas, 2005). Such labour is not required of fathers, whom children automatically believe to be showing them love through their financial contributions (ibid.). The construction of migration as "sacrifice" also creates a worrying logic; it implies that domestic workers should be prepared to endure unpleasant working conditions and maltreatment from their employers. In Tinig Filipino, many letters and articles remind readers that they came to Hong Kong "for the sake of their loved ones" and encourage them to stay "no matter how hard [their] work is. When they go through hard times, domestic workers tell each other to "remember why we are here" - to think of their families and the benefits that the remittances will ultimately bring to them (Constable, 1997a: 193-194). In their efforts to promote women's family devotion, church members may become involved in policing each other's behaviour. Chang and

Groves found Catholic domestic workers to be critical of those women who spent money on themselves, telling them that they should be sending it home to their families (Chang and Groves, 2000). Women who are thought to be reluctant to go back to the Philippines become the subject of gossip; it is assumed that their desire to stay in Hong Kong is due to "problems at home" (Constable, 1999). Thus, although working abroad presents Filipinas with an opportunity to free themselves from the restrictive gender conventions of their home society, they remain restricted by those around them.

3.5 "Inferior Servants": putting them in their place

As argued above, employers desire that their domestic workers appear and act inferior to themselves. Patriarchal power relations ascribe domestic chores an inferior status as "women's work." The lower status of a domestic worker allows the (female) employer to distance herself from the devalued domestic work she is responsible for. It also reinforces her belief in the legitimacy of social stratification and the "rightness" of her privileged position (Rollins, 1985). Filipina domestic workers produce themselves as asexual, low-status and obedient in order to access the Hong Kong labour market, and are regulated to maintain this inferior identity within the employers' homes. When Filipinas consciously or inadvertently challenge the status differential, they threaten the social order. One response is the invocation of romanticised images of servants of the past. These images are not accurate reflections, but are a discourse to control contemporary domestic workers.

Domestic service is not simply another low-paid job, but is closely tied to its unpaid counterpart. In many households, domestic work is denied legitimacy as a form of "real work." Willis (1977)

argues that in a patriarchal society that allocates domestic chores to women, housework is presumed to be neither as difficult nor as productive as masculine work is held to be (Willis, 1977). The demanding nature of the work is often ignored by those who do not have to do it: in her work as a domestic helper in the USA, Rollins found that most of her employers demanded more than any one person could accomplish in the given time (Rollins, 1985). In Hong Kong, hiring and contracts are government regulated, but rarely enforced by the law. At the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers, domestic workers frequently reported being underpaid, most commonly through failure to reimburse fees and travel expenses (Constable, 1997a). The fact that many employers disregard legal requirements in employing a domestic worker suggests that domestic work is seen as exceptional, not quite as legitimate a job as others (Rollins, 1985).

Bridget Anderson (2002) argues that global inequity of wealth allows some employers in wealthy countries to see employment as an expression of generosity. A place in the home is proffered as a form of charity, and the value of labour power extracted is downplayed (Anderson, 2002). Scott argues that economic power needs to be euphemised: an employer transforms his or her disproportionate economic means into status, prestige and social control by acts that are *passed off* as voluntary acts of generosity or charity (Scott, 1985). Underpayment, long hours and abusive language can be misrecognised by an employer as "fair treatment" if she believes the employment relation to one of generosity, more beneficial to the domestic worker than to herself. When Filipina domestic workers resist the debased position assigned to them, they are criticised for not being grateful for the privilege of working in Hong Kong (Constable, 1997a).

Several authors have noted that domestic labour is deeply embedded in status relationships. Anderson argues that the labour of a domestic worker leaves the visible imprint of affluence on the house: ironed clothes, polished floors and clean windows are not a necessity but markers of household status - luxuries that a household could not maintain without a servant (Anderson,

2002). Lan argues that Taiwanese employers display their wealth to others by heightening their Filipina domestic worker's visibility, requiring her to greet guests at the door or answer the telephone even if she speaks no Chinese (Lan, 2003c). Employers prefer a domestic worker who is seen to be of an inferior social status - through class, 'race', gender and educational attainments - since this heightens the differential to the employer and enhances the domestic worker's usefulness as a status symbol (Rollins, 1985).

The popularity of domestic workers must, therefore, be understood not only in terms of labour shortfall but in terms of status and power. In the first decade after foreign domestic worker visas were approved, Filipinas were largely approved by Hong Kong residents because they were considered cheap, docile solutions to a labour shortage (Constable, 1997a). Constable argues that the growing sense of threat posed by foreign workers stems from their reluctance to accept or enact the role of servant. Even claiming the title of domestic "worker" is considered proud and a refusal to accept their debased position. Once viewed as "naturally" suited to service, Filipinas are challenging social boundaries (Constable, 1997b).

How did Filipinas first come to be seen as "naturally suited" to service work? Salzinger (2003) writes that although capitalism draws on an ideology of "naturally docile Third World women," such docile labour does not exist for the buying; rather, it must be produced. Employers' fantasies are brought to life through their own management strategies - it is through rhetoric and supervision that workers learn what is desirable and come to align themselves with those messages. This production of workers is effected through tropes of femininity and masculinity. Rather than being fixed categories describing biologically determined traits, femininity and masculinity have fluid content. It is the insistent invocation of a certain kind of femininity that produces the docile woman worker (Salzinger, 2003). In the case of migrant Filipinas, the production of the "natural" servant begins with the hiring process.

Filipinas' entry into the migrant domestic labour market is legally controlled by licensed hiring agencies. As part of the selection process, women are interviewed to assess their suitability - an interview for which they are frequently coached by friends or relatives. Learning to give the "right" answers is part of a process in which they fashion themselves into the worker desired by employers, consequently learning to be obedient to the demands of others. Potential workers are advised to downplay their financial status as a way to reassure employers that they will work diligently. It is believed that the more desperate they are, the greater the chance of them accepting whatever work is given to them. The domestic worker's body is fashioned into one that emphasises her inferiority to the employer and reduces her potential threat as another female in the home (Constable, 1997a). In Philippines culture, women are judged on appearance and usually try to make themselves look attractive to men through dress and make-up (Claussen, 2001). Through the file photographs shown to employers, the Hong Kong public comes to expect a different sort of Filipina femininity. Potential workers are photographed dressed in a uniform, subsuming their individuality under their categorisation of "maid." In the photograph they are de-sexualised: instructed to wear little or no make-up, sensible shoes, and hair that is short or tied back. In their attempt to attract employers, hiring agencies play a critical role in the production of domestic workers, creating the myth of Filipina femininity as asexual, low-status and obedient (Constable, 1997a).

It is not just hiring agencies that work to produce the "inferior," low-status Filipina. Many employers impose regulations to ensure the "maid" is in a suitably inferior position within the household. One way in which this inferiority can be produced is through spatial control within the house. Certain areas, such as the living room, may be off limits to the worker - or she may be required to work in them but not make use of them. For example, a domestic worker may be expected to serve meals to the family in the dining room but take her own meals in the kitchen

(Constable, 1997a). Some rules demonstrate a fear that the domestic worker's body will contaminate the employer's home (Anderson, 2002). A domestic worker may be chastised simply for walking in front of the fan or air conditioner, as her "air" will blow onto the employer. In extreme cases workers are forbidden to sit or lean on any furniture other than their own bed and chair; one worker was required to clean seats with rubbing alcohol after she sat on them (Constable, 1997a). If children become fond of the domestic worker who cares for them, this may result in jealousy. Domestic workers thus find themselves in a precarious position. While her employer expects her to dedicate herself to the care of the children, if a worker earns their emotional attachment she has challenged the family structure. Employers can enforce household hierarchy by telling children a worker is "just your maid" and failing to punish children for hitting, kicking or verbally abusing her (Constable, 2002). Such actions are justified by an ideology that looks down on those who serve others and demands that they "know their (inferior) place." The regulation, poor treatment and criticism of domestic workers reinforced status differentials and heighten the employer's sense of power.

The controlling image of the traditional, lower class yet beloved Chinese "amah" has been created to coerce behaviour that is closer to that desired by employers. Filipinas' ambiguous class status is a cause for concern because in order to serve as a status signifier, a domestic worker must be seen to be inferior to her employer. The rise in criticisms that Filipinas did not "know their place" coincided with the increasing numbers of "new middle class" households employing domestic workers for the first time. A number of Hong Kong employers hold low level clerical occupations, and their status may appear quite precarious to them. A Filipina domestic worker may have previously held a "high-status" occupation in the Philippines similar to that of the employer. The middle-class cultural capital of the domestic worker can provoke an employer's sense of insecurity. In the past, Chinese servants employed by wealthy Chinese families were uneducated and came

from considerably lower class backgrounds to their employers. The "rightfully inferior" status of servants is invoked by recollections of Chinese domestic workers. The Chinese servants to whom Filipinas are usually compared are the "amahs." These women, sworn spinsters, widows, or otherwise separated from their families, might stay with the same employer for decades or for life (Constable, 1997a). They are remembered as loyal and committed to the family they served, working out of devotion rather than economic concerns. The sense of loyalty was reinforced because the relationship was viewed as an emotional, pseudofamilial bond rather than one based on an official contract. In contrast, Filipina domestic workers spend an average of four years in Hong Kong and are seen as primarily committed to their family "back home". The terms of employment are officially regulated by the government and set up through agencies, so cannot be reconfigured as an emotional bond through metaphors of fictive kinship (Constable, 1997b). Filipina domestic workers are believed to be working solely for financial reward, which carries stigma because of the social belief that care is demeaned by commodification (Lan, 2003c). In reality, the "amah," to whom Filipinas are now compared, are the very servants who were criticised and rejected by Chinese employers in the 1970s and 1980s. Nicole Constable therefore argues that discourses about the amah are romanticised notions that serve as coercive symbols against foreign domestic workers (Constable, 1997a).

3.6 Counter Discourse: Superior servants

The criticisms of Filipinas as sub-standard servants stems from an ideology that sees domestic service as low-status and demeaning. Rather than accepting this prevailing ideology, Catholic Filipina domestic workers construct their role as one of high status. By calling upon Christian ideology, domestic workers claim for themselves a moral value to their work, not as dedicated

unpaid family members but as servants of God. The high status they accord to service work is a form of resistance in that it rejects the prevailing social ideology, yet it conforms to the needs of the superordinate class since it encourages them to embrace work that others are unwilling to perform.

Lan argues that domestic labour is entangled with an interchange between emotional value and monetary value. Whereas unpaid household labour carries moral value, waged domestic work is stigmatised as unskilled and demeaning (Lan, 2003b). Biblical passages readily offer those in domestic service an affirmation of the moral value of their work, mitigating against the stigma and infusing it with religious overtones. To willingly serve others is a holy task. The incarnation of Christ is described in terms of God willingly taking the nature of a servant on earth (Philippians 2: 5-7), and St. Paul instructs servants to work for their earthly masters as if working for the Lord. By defining themselves as servants of God rather than the physical world of men and women, domestic service becomes an almost sacred activity (Chang and Groves, 2000).

By viewing service as a sacred activity, Christian domestic workers believe their behaviour will have positive consequences - giving them a sense of control over a situation in which they otherwise appear to be powerless. Some pray for their employers, asking God to change their attitudes. As God's servants, they consider themselves to be a good influence on the employer and family - a superior example for the family to follow. A writer to *Tinig Filipino* advised domestic workers that their good example can change the employer, stating that children will become more courteous and parents will argue less. "You still have much to do for that family. God has put you there for a purpose...you are His instrument." (Pelican, 1992: 10). Through Christianity, a domestic worker gains a sense of control over her situation. With prayer and superior conduct, some domestic workers believe they can change employers' behaviour for the better (Constable, 1997a).

Some domestic workers even view themselves as missionaries, not only giving them a sense of control over employers' behaviour but over their ultimate eternal destiny. Just as St. Paul used his trade (tent-making) as a means to bring Christianity to other parts of the globe (Acts 18: 3), some Filipinas view their domestic service as a means to evangelise non-Christian families. In an issue of *Tinig Filipino*, the editor composed an imagined letter from God to Filipina domestic workers, instructing them to bring "true Christian values" in their "special mission" to serve (Layosa, 1994: 6). Belief in the afterlife also promises Christians a reversal of fortune. Jesus taught his followers that meek would "inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Whereas Judith Rollins' interviewees performed deference for its expected material rewards, these women perform deferential behaviour for an expected additional, Heavenly reward. The material rewards of deference will always be small in comparison with the wealth of the employer; Christian domestic workers expect their reward in Heaven to be greater than that of their employers. "Mommie Jingco" a missionary writing to *Tinig Filipino*, reminded readers that Christ promoted servanthood, pointing out that "those who humble themselves to others will become great" (Constable, 1997a: 192).

The belief that "the least will become the greatest" could arguably be considered a challenge to the employer's authority, since it is the domestic worker who claims the ultimate moral authority. However, according to the logic of the reversal of status, a domestic worker's Heavenly elevation is dependent upon the earthly dominance of her employer. The servant will become great precisely because she is the least in this life. Thus she "gives" her employer the moral right to be greater than her, albeit temporarily.

Sherman (2005) argues that contradictory hierarchies may be simultaneously invoked to establish a sense of superiority. In her study of luxury hotel workers, she argues that these hierarchies promote opposite emotions towards their guests: a hierarchy of *need* sympathetically establishes their guests as dependent on them, and a hierarchy of *worth* critically establishes their guests as

deficient (Sherman, 2005). Both hierarchies are called upon in the ideology of "mission." The employer is inferior in behaviour, to be corrected by example, and in need of salvation that can be provided through the missionary activity of the domestic worker.

Willis (1977) argues it is only the dominant classes who are required to believe the dominant ideology in order to justify their own existence; those who are disadvantaged are in a better position to penetrate this ideology. In his study of working class British youth, he argues that the middle-classes believe those at the bottom of a class society are there due to their smaller capacity to achieve, as if the lower factions were a sub-species. The middle-classes claim superiority through a hierarchy that values mental labour above manual labour. What is surprising is that a portion of the social whole voluntarily take upon themselves the definition of being manual labourers. This section of the working class reverses the valuation of the mental/manual divide, and its members instead affirm themselves through manual labour. The brutality of the working condition is partially reinterpreted into a heroic and manly confrontation with the work in hand - one which not all are capable of achieving. Labourers' tasks are understood through the toughness that is required to survive them, and the stigma of manual work becomes positively expressed (Willis, 1977).

In Willis' study, gender ideology plays a key role in the production of manual labour as valuable. Mental labour is dismissed as "effeminate" in comparison with the "masculine" nature of manual work. This valuation only holds because women are restricted into a passive and subordinate role (ibid.). Gender also plays a critical role in the ideology of domestic service as sacred. The idealised "Christian role model" is one of a caring, submissive example to the family. Such an ideal corresponds with the Filipino Catholic image of the "light of the home" - a feminine image. A man - constructed as the "pillar of the home" - would not be able to perform this function without transgressing gender boundaries (Parreñas, 2005). Ignoring the inherent irony that Jesus

was himself male, the image of the ideal "servant of God" conforms to gendered expectations of ideal womanhood.

Catholic domestic workers are encouraged to embrace their lowly position and the submissive behaviour it requires. The term "Domestic Helper," their legal job title in Hong Kong, is considered demeaning by some because it diminishes their occupation. Many prefer to be referred to as "domestic workers" (Constable, 1997b). One *Tinig Filipino* writer, exhorting fellow Filipinas to show exemplary behaviour to the Hong Kong Chinese, reconfigures the label "DH" into "Doctor of Humanities" (Constable, 1997a: 187). This creative acronym ascribes cultural capital to domestic workers whose educational and professional achievements are denied value. However, the comparison with a degree is not a positive one - the implication is that the more difficult the "tests" she passes, the more professional she is. This encourages her to passively accept an essentially exploitative situation (ibid.). Although her personal motivations for deference are positive, this ideology of submissive servanthood proscribes that the domestic worker *should* act as if inferior to her employer. According to Rollins, the performance of deference serves to validate the employer's social world. The presence of a subservient Other who accepts her place reinforces the employer's sense of innate superiority and strengthens her belief in the rightness of stratification and inequality (Rollins, 1985).

Within Catholic teaching there is considerable emphasis on striving for social justice and the rights of the poor (Menjívar, 2003). However, while the Church in Hong Kong is actively involved in taking care of exploited workers, it does not encourage them to assert themselves. The Church's social action appears to keep domestic workers disempowered and dependent. The use of Biblical passages is selective, focusing on instructions to endure suffering and ignoring examples of more assertive behaviour. Such selective teaching is embedded in Catholic ideology that reveres suffering as spiritual. Catholic women in particular are praised for their Christian goodness if they

demonstrate submissive and passive behaviour when they are subjugated and oppressed (Brown, 1991).

Many Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong are acutely aware that women of many other nationalities are willing to work in the Special Administrative Region. They recognise that vocal protests could cost them their jobs and want the right to continue to be domestic workers in Hong Kong (Constable, 1997a). As Scott argues, resistance may be discouraged by fear of reprisals (Scott, 1985). In 1993 the Asian Domestic Workers Union campaigned for a wage increase and limits on working hours. Many domestic workers opposed the campaign for fear that employers would no longer hire them, and some stayed well away from the protests in case their employers saw and dismissed them (Constable, 1997a). For many, domestic service is a means to an end; they are looking to gain economic advancement in the Philippines. They are more concerned with finding the support they need to complete their contract than taking action which could place their jobs at risk (*ibid.*). Religion is one such means of support to help them "endure" their contract and secure long-term goals.

Some domestic workers question the efficacy of overt resistance. They argue that campaigns for "formally" better working conditions such as pay increases will achieve nothing but the loss of their contracts. Instead of radical change, they express a desire to be treated with "empathy" and greater personal consideration. Most believe they can best achieve this by earning respect from employers rather than by making demands (*ibid.*). These domestic workers view resistance as unwise, choosing to distance themselves from protests and pursuing alternative, gentler, strategies to try and effect change.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that domestic workers in Hong Kong do not accept discourses that present them as morally inferior to those that they serve. The controlling images found in the media and society, constructing Filipinas as inferior, are more reflective of the societies that create them than the women they purport to describe.

The Catholic Church addresses Filipina domestic workers as moral women who freely choose to behave in a manner that they believe is superior to the behaviour of those around them. By selecting religious ideology, these religious Filipina domestics claim a superior identity for themselves. The language of the Catholic Church provides women with multiple discourses, constructing themselves as superior in their sexual conduct, filial piety and service to their employer. Overall, these discourses do not resist prevailing ideology but manipulate it to redefine religious domestic workers' actions.

Adherence to Catholic teaching demands that women discipline their behaviour in such a way that they conform more closely to the desires of their employers and their families. In a global economy that disadvantages Filipino workers, migrant women may have little choice but to outwardly conform. These discourses of religious superiority increase their self esteem and may help them cope with the conditions they experience. However, the actions that this ideology produces reinforce the dominant class' belief in its own ideology. Ultimately they uphold justifications for the exploitation of migrant women's labour and reinforce current inequalities between Hong Kong and Filipino citizens and between men and women.

In order to counter discourses of Filipinas' promiscuity, Catholic domestic workers willingly accept spatial controls and restricted interactions with men. Such actions protect their reputation

in the Philippines and enhance their status in their family. However, their strategy reinforces the ideology which demands women's sexuality be controlled and judges women by their sexual behaviour. In seeking to assert their own superiority, these women criticise peers who embrace their sexuality, an action which jeopardises their jobs and family status. In this way, domestic workers who penetrate and resist the prevailing ideology are policed by their fellow Filipinas.

Filipina women who leave their families are subject to critical discourses that construct them as deviant and lacking in filial piety. Since their status and emotional bonds are largely acquired through family relationships, these women seek to counter such discourses and emphasise their love for their families. Religious language provides the vocabulary to ascribe positive, family-focused meaning to their migration, opening up new roles for women whose options in the Philippines are restricted. This discourse does not, however, lead to gender equality, but requires women to perform greater emotional labour than men. While it provides only limited gains, such a strategy is seen as preferable to open resistance, since it does not jeopardise women's family bonds.

The discourse of superior servanthood gives women a positive self-image as they perform demeaning and stigmatised work. Rather than viewing themselves as low-status, they find their work is valued and respected within the Church community. Belief in a Heavenly reward enables them to endure poor conditions and achieve their long-term goal of completing their contract. However, it mitigates against women asserting themselves in the face of exploitative working conditions. Rollins argues that a domestic worker's deferential behaviour and willing acceptance of poor treatment ultimately serves to validate social stratification and ideologically justify the employer's actions.

The women who choose religious adherence expect benefits which they could not obtain using

overt forms of resistance. Their behaviour does not indicate unqualified acceptance of their status but agency to manipulate their situation. On occasions, Catholic ideology does provides a means of resistance. Women's very presence as migrant workers in Hong Kong resists prevailing ideology of women's domesticity within the Filipino family, and it is religious-infused discourses which serve to enable women's emigration. It is to be hoped that, in time, their strategies of agency will create space for a future change in ideology that allows Filipina women more life opportunities and the personal respect that they hope for and deserve.

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