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Abstract (EN)

Using a methodological framework based on Winker & Degele's (2009) multi-level intersectional analysis, this thesis investigates a specific form of marriage migration referred to as commodified transnational marriage migration (CTM) based on qualitative research conducted in southern Vietnam in 2019, while drawing on materialist, post-structuralist, and feminist theory to examine complex structure-actor interactions. From a political economic perspective, this thesis argues that CTM remains deeply embedded in sending communities and actor livelihoods despite government bans and propose that even after their ban, for-profit brokerage firms have laid the groundwork for informal transnational matchmaking networks on a much larger scale. Furthermore, Kneebone's (2023) concept of structural exploitation was used to connect interpersonal coercion and macro-structural power relations. On the actor level, the thesis seeks to identify structural coercions and capacities in relation to actor possibilities for action. Moreover, it explores current concepts in migration research such as global householding and multi-directional precarity based on empirical material. From a development studies perspective, the thesis proposes a relationship between a hegemonic development discourse and the world views of involved actors.

Abstract (DE)

Auf der Grundlage eines methodologischen Rahmens, der auf der intersektionalen Mehrebenenanalyse von Winker & Degele (2009) basiert, untersucht diese Arbeit eine spezifische Form der Heiratsmigration, die als kommodifizierte transnationale Heiratsmigration (CTM) bezeichnet wird. Basierend auf qualitativer Forschung, die 2019 in südlichen Vietnam durchgeführt wurde, stützt sie sich dabei auf materialistische, poststrukturalistische und feministische Theorie, um komplexe Struktur-Akteur-Interaktionen zu untersuchen. Aus einer politisch-ökonomischen Perspektive argumentiert die Arbeit, dass CTM trotz staatlicher Verbote tief in den *livelihoods* von Herkunftsgemeinschaften und Akteuren verankert bleibt, und stellt die These auf, dass gewinnorientierte Vermittlungsfirmen auch nach ihrem Verbot den Grundstein für informelle transnationale Matchmaking-Netzwerke in viel größerem Maßstab gelegt haben. Darüber hinaus wird Kneebones (2023) Konzept der *structural exploitation* verwendet, um zwischenmenschlichen Zwang und makrostrukturelle Machtverhältnisse zu verbinden. Auf der Akteursebene versucht die Arbeit, strukturelle Zwänge und Kapazitäten in Bezug auf die Handlungsmöglichkeiten der Akteure zu identifizieren. Darüber hinaus werden aktuelle Konzepte der Migrationsforschung wie *global householding* und multidirektionale Prekarität anhand von empirischem Material untersucht. Aus einer entwicklungswissenschaftlichen Perspektive wird ein Zusammenhang zwischen einem hegemonialen Entwicklungsdiskurs und den Weltbildern der beteiligten Akteure hergestellt.

Note regarding translations: All German to English translations in this thesis were completed by the author.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Transnational marriage has become a common phenomenon over the last few decades worldwide (Beck-Gernsheim, 2011) and across Asia (Lee, 2012). Beck-Gernsheim (2011) summarizes a variety of factors contributing to this trend, including increasing global inequality between states, the “compression of time and space” (ibid., p. 61) caused by advances in information and telecommunications technology, the globalization of media exposing more people to often romanticized portrayals of life abroad in relative security and prosperity, and more restrictive regimes of migration in the “developed” countries. Simultaneously, the feminization of migration in general is an increasingly prominent topic of interest in migration research allowing for the comparative study of different forms of migration in different contexts, including marriage migration out of Vietnam, which is the topic of this thesis.

One prominent and relevant subtopic in research on feminized migration is “care” migration. Migration for the purpose of care work, which includes childcare, elderly care, and more broadly “domestic” work, plays a significant role in increasing migration of women¹ (Lutz, 2018). Aging populations, budget cuts to social services and pressure to reduce the cost of care have generated a massive demand for care workers in the Global North (and outside of it), a demand that is often met by female migrants from outside of the global North (Lan, 2008; Lee, 2012). Political-economists, especially feminist materialists, have argued that the increasing cost of care work is based changes in the global regime of capitalist accumulation in the neoliberal/Post-Fordist era (Soiland, 2012).

In order to manage these rising costs as well as personnel deficits, states, firms and households with the economic means have found different strategies of provisioning care through migrant women (compare Cheng & Choo, 2015), creating a global care economy (Lutz, 2018). Although marriage migrants are not usually considered to be intimate or domestic workers, scholars like Piper & Lee (2016) identify marriage migration has a distinct but related form of feminized migration shaped by similar power relations and deeply involved with care work, also known as reproductive labor. Cheng & Choo (2015) call for additional empirical work that considers the

¹ Usage of terms men/women does imply the author is making claims about the biological essence of individuals, nor that heterosexuality is the only of natural form of sexual orientation, but rather I am describing the context specific social reality in which only the heterosexual male-female gender binary are visible and accepted in public discourse and trans and more broadly all non-binary identities remain invisible. To underline the centrality of the category “woman”, using Atlas.ti concept mining function, the most common word/concept in the empirical research by far was simply “woman/women”.

interaction of paid and unpaid work in regard to marriage migration as well as marriage migrant aspirations within a political economic framework that does not ignore diverse lived realities. This thesis addresses the above-mentioned research gap as well as building on current research (e.g. Kneebone 2023).

Especially concerning eastern Asia, there has been significant academic and media interest in the brokerage of transnational marriages. This is partially due to the fact that various commercial brokers and brokerage networks mediate these marriages, which involve a very short period of courtship between partners from different countries (Yang & Lu, 2010). This leads to the argument that marriage migration has become monetized or *commodified* (Constable, 2009; Wang & Chang, 2002; Wang & Chang, 2009).

My research topic is this specific form of marriage migration, *commodified transnational marriage migration*, that I analyzed based on qualitative empirical research that was gathered in Southern Vietnam in 2019 and drawing heavily on current migration research on the topic. This thesis builds on a subsequent report by the same research group (Hass et al., 2019), and intervening work I have done on the topic (Hass, 2022).

The thesis uses a methodological framework based on Winker & Degele (2009), namely a multi-level intersectional analysis, to encompass the multi-directional, multi-faceted and transnational interactions involved in this migration process drawing on both materialist, post-structuralist and feminist theory to examine complex structure-actor interactions. Specific research interests include the role of global or translocal householding (compare Lee, 2022; Ramamurthy, 2020) and actor's collective strategies in the migration process, as well as connections between precarity, global economic inequality, global care economies, and factors that shape actor potentials for action. However, the qualitative content analysis involves a circular process of abstraction and concretization inspired by grounded theory that leaves open the possibility for new research interests, conclusions, and theoretical developments.

Innovative approach of this work is its empirically-founded perspective on marriage migration at the intersection of political economy and more micro/meso focused feminist and postcolonial migration research, and explores ways to productively bridge the gaps between feminist intersectionality theory and feminist materialist theory to ideally produce new scientific insights. This thesis aims to provide multi-level intersectional analysis of the phenomenon of monetized/commodified transnational marriage based on the empirical material, without economizing away the agency of the actors or ignoring larger macro-structural relations and processes.

1.1. Commodified Transnational Marriage Migration out of Vietnam

While there are different definitions, this thesis starts with the premise following (Kim, 2010) that marriage migration is “marriage across national boundaries (...) [which] entails changes in, or the prospect of changes in, one spouse’s legal status as well as the physical movement of one spouse across borders” (ibid., 719). I use the term ‘transnational’ in my description of commodified transnational marriage migration (CTM) because it emphasizes the ongoing links migrants have to their places of origin (Rigg, 2016, p. 97) although other terms are common such as cross-border or international marriage migration. These ongoing links can take many forms, such as financial support through gifts and remittances, facilitation of migration of others in the family, and more generally continuing social and emotional ties (Rigg, 2016; own research).

The commodification of this marriage migration involves brokerage of the marriage, mainly by a profit-seeking actor, in which the prospective husband pays money to be matched with a prospective wife and, often, upon marrying, pays money to the wife or the wife’s family. Wang & Chang (2009) argue that “international marriage and related activities are gradually being transformed to enhance profits to the various intermediaries” which they call the “process of commodification” (ibid., p. 213). The payment seems to be viewed by involved actors as a form of bride wealth, that is payment by the groom’s family to the bride’s family (Graeber, 2009), as opposed to dowry in which the payment goes in the opposite direction.

Based on the empirical research done in the context of the KNOTS project (2019), and a review of relevant literature (e.g. Cheng & Choo 2015), this type of marriage migration out of southern Vietnam occurs, in most cases, with the consent and active choice of the potential bride. However, I argue against a naive concept of freedom of choice. Structural pressures and extremely uneven power relations between the actors (e.g. men from ‘developed’ countries [often] choose from a selection of potential wives from peripheralized countries (compare H.-H. Tseng 2015, Lee, 2012)) constrain and shape marriage migrant’s possibilities for action and agency. Migrants must negotiate their interests within these constraints (see chapter 3 for more details on my theoretical framework to conceptualize these constraints).

Southern Vietnam (Mekong River Delta) is a major ‘sending’ region in Vietnam and also the site from which the larger part of the empirical research I am using was gathered. The most common

“destination” for the participants in the empirical research was South Korea although Taiwan remains an important “destination”. This increase in marriage migration is not limited to Vietnam. However, the “local” subsection covered in my empirical research is certainly a product of specific historical-material developments which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The practice is, however, diverse and complex in nature involving the interaction of many different actors under a wide variety of often-changing circumstances. My empirical data involves not only marriage migrants, former marriage migrants, their birth and de jure families, as well as (ex) husbands, but also marriage brokerage firms and interpersonal brokerage networks, often involving familial relationships, as well as the KOCUN center (Korean Centre for United Nations Human Rights Policy²), a local subsection of the larger KOCUN organization, the Vietnamese Women’s Union (VWU), and on the macro-level the policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) led state of Vietnam, as well as the states of South Korea (Republic of Korea) and Taiwan (Republic of China). Even the auto production giant Hyundai (Hyundai Motor Company/Hyundai Motor Group) comes up in the research.

1.2 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1, “Introduction”, has given a brief introduction to the topic of the thesis, its place in the academic discourse (see Chapter 3 for more details), and its theoretical approach (see Chapter 4 for more details).

Chapter 2, the “Historical Chapter”, sets out to explore the modern history of Vietnam with a specific focus on the changing regimes of accumulation and state policy that led to economic upheaval and transformation. And second, by examining which historical conditions surrounding the genesis of commodified transnational marriage migration out of Vietnam, especially concerning historical transformations of gender norms.

This is followed by Chapter 3, “State of the Art” which offers a thorough literature review. Specific focus on the state of research regarding transnational marriage migration, and its embeddedness in broader trends in migration research.

² See kocun.org

Chapter 4, “Theory”, will describe key theoretical conceptualizations of the thesis. On an abstract level it draws on both materialist and post-structuralist theories, relating them to a concept call the “multi-level intersectional analysis” (Winker & Degele, 2009), while also including elements more directly related to migration research and theory.

Chapter 5, “Methodology” focuses on methodology including a description of the empirical data set, its limitations, and related issues of research ethics. It goes on to address my positionality and epistemological approach to thesis. The third section goes into detail about the qualitative content analysis using multi-level intersectional analysis(ibid.) as a methodological framework and my adjustments to it.

Chapter 6, “Empirical Analysis” presents the results of my analysis in detail organized using the multi-level intersectional analysis as a framework. It includes a brief presentation of current quantitative and statistical information on marriage migration out of Vietnam, a subsection dealing with the often macro and abstract topic of the practices embeddedness in a (global) political economy, and subsections looking at CTM on the structural, representational, and actor/identity level.

Chapter 7, “Conclusions and Outlook” summarizes and interprets the most important conclusions of the empirical analysis, offers up some suggestions for future research and policy based on these conclusions.

Chapter 2: The historical chapter

In the first two interviews with the Vietnamese Women’s Union (VWU) in Cần Thơ Province (CT1 & CT2), representatives of the women’s union portrayed economic motivations as the drivers behind female transnational marriage migration. Specifically, in CT1, the Women’s Union representatives explained that it was economic desperation caused by the 2001 sugarcane crash, a then major industry in Cần Thơ, that had driven so many women to marry foreign men through international marriage brokers. They went on to tell how the ban of international marriage brokers and government programs to provide women with more economic opportunities at home, including those led by the women’s union, had led to less (commodified) transnational marriage migration and how the number of (commodified) transnational marriage migrants was

going down year by year. When asked what they think about people marrying foreigners, they reply:

“There are two cases in which this happens: 1) Low income and low education. [The] family relies on them [the marriage migrants] for remittances. 2) People getting married internationally because it is the trend (and/or?) they are too lazy to work on their own. In general, international marriages are good because they provide remittances. Remittances are good because they help the economy and families. “ (CT1, reformatting & additions by the author).

This chapter sets out to contextualize these claims by the modern history of Vietnam with a specific focus on the changing regimes of accumulation, social and state policy that led to upheaval and transformation, and by examining the historical conditions of changing gendered power relations that underlie commodified transnational marriage migration out of Vietnam.

Gainsborough (2018) postulates that research on Vietnam shows a tendency to overestimate the unity, authority, and centrality of the Vietnamese state, i.e. to overestimate or misrepresent it, and the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) as a single unit that smoothly directs the country. However, neither the state apparatus nor the CPV is a monolith, nor do they exist in a vacuum. The reader should keep this in mind over the course of the following chapter. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, Chapter 2 focuses largely on the macro-level and strategic simplification is necessary. This does not imply a denial of the ways that individual actors have affected these developments, while simultaneously being “conditioned” (Mader, 2013) by structure-level developments, or the important developments on the levels of symbol and discourse (see Chapter 3 for an in depth explanation of this paper’s theoretical framework).

2.1 A Very Brief History of Modern Vietnam

Although a longer-term historical analysis would surely result in valuable insights, this section will focus on the period of decolonial struggle, civil war, and anti-imperial struggle that led to a unified socialist state. These events as well as the consequent challenges the unified state faced and perhaps more importantly its handling of these crises most directly relate to the emergence of commodified transnational marriage within a larger paradigm of out-migration.

Vietnam has undergone significant transformations over the past century. From colony status as part of French Indochina and war against the Japanese occupation flowing almost seamlessly into a battle for national independence against the French empire. After France's defeat, the country was divided in two during a peace conference in Geneva, the Northern portion being ruled by the Marxist-Leninist-oriented Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) headed by Ho Chi Minh and the southern Portion ruled by the U.S.-backed Diem regime. Planned elections to unite the country were abandoned after U.S. resistance and Vietnam slid into civil war. This situation had from the beginning become ensnared in the so-called Cold War becoming a proxy conflict³ that eventually led to a large-scale invasion by the United States, another imperial power and leader of the Western/capitalist bloc. This led to protracted war between the U.S. & its client regime in the South⁴ and the CPV-led North and its client guerilla force in the South, the National Liberation front A.K.A the *Viet Cong* (Martini, 2012). The CPV-led North was backed with arms and expertise from both sides of the Sino-Soviet divide, although the Soviet Union remained and would remain the CPV's partner of choice. Years of costly stalemate and a souring public mood in the U.S., as well as an increasingly militant anti-war movement, eventually led to the withdrawal of U.S. forces. A continuation of the civil war between the U.S. backed South Vietnamese regime, it's economy devastated and now mostly devoid of U.S. troops, and the CPV led North Vietnam ended in the conquest of the South by the North (compare to e.g. Brazier, 1992; David W.P. Elliott, 2012; Vu, 2016; Wischermann, 2018). In the aftermath, the now much larger communist state was renamed the "Socialist Republic of Vietnam" (SRV) (Vu, 2016).

Decades of conflict⁵ up until April, 1975 had unsurprisingly massive effects on Vietnam and its inhabitants. Somewhere around three million Vietnamese were killed and five million injured in the wars for decolonization, national independence, and national unity under communist rule (Brazier, 1992; Großheim, 2018)⁶ leading to trauma on a massive scale. Furthermore, major infrastructure was destroyed and damaged throughout the country, in addition to battlefield residue needing to be cleared, dangerous unexploded mines and ordinance, and serious environmental damage from what Brazier (1992, 44) describes as *ecological warfare*. Most of this ecological

³ Albeit the U.S. was much more actively involved than the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China (PRC) who simply helped to finance and supply the communist North.

⁴ Diem had since been assassinated in a U.S. backed military coup d'etat.

⁵ Often divided into the First Indochina War, in which the French empire was eventually defeated, and the Second Indochina War, in which regimes backed by the U.S. (to a greater or lesser extent) and U.S. forces were eventually defeated.

⁶ My description of the nature of the wars, numbers from Großheim 2018, p. 58 & Brazier 1992, p. 44.

warfare consisted of the large-scale usage of defoliants and herbicides by the U.S. military⁷ causing long term negative impacts on local forests, croplands and those who came into contact with these chemical agents (compare to Brazier, 1992; Martini, 2012). Such mass-destruction forms the backdrop to the political-economic changes in Vietnam in the following years.

After the CPV/North Vietnamese victory, the governing CPV attempted to absorb the South into the state socialist system and to quickly achieve “socialist revolution” in the entire country. However, the established centrally organized economy in the North, let alone the ambitious goals set by party leaders, proved difficult to implement in the South. Furthermore, the Soviet-inspired, Stalinist strategy of first focusing on heavy industry and rapid industrialization as well as the collectivization of agriculture (Brazier 1992) led to large scale economic disruptions, e.g. in food production, and Vietnam was soon even more reliant on aid from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc to stabilize its economy (compare to Vu, 2016; Elliot 2012; Brazier, 1992⁸). Eventually these policies caused near famine level food shortages and economic standstill (Brazier, 1992). Moreover, the occupation of Cambodia in the course of Vietnamese-Cambodian war⁹ and the resulting Western sanctions¹⁰ put significant pressure on an already struggling Vietnamese economy (Vu, 2016, Elliot 2012).

It must have seemed like a state of near constant siege from the perspective of those leading the CPV with threats looming on every side. From the perspective of ordinary citizens, after years of food crisis and rationing the regime was mocked by some by “joking that ‘CNXH’, the acronym for socialism in Vietnamese (...), really stood for ‘the country has fallen into a hole’ [a sentence in Vietnamese that can be similarly acronymed]” (Vu, 2016, p. 240, my brackets).

In any case, by 1989 with the Warsaw Pact state-socialist regimes (except for the Soviet Union) in Eastern Europe collapsing it was clear to all that “the winds were not blowing in a direction favorable to socialism or the remnants of the Soviet *camp*” (Elliot, 2012, p. 28, my italics to avoid triple quotation marks).

⁷ With the intention of robbing the *Viet Cong* guerrillas of cover and food.

⁸ Although as Vu (2016) also notes, this was not just a relation of dependence but there was also genuine motivation outside of the economic and geo-strategic on the side of the CPV to deepen relations with the UDSSR based on common worldviews and what were perceived as common struggles.

⁹ Which also led to a brief armed conflict with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) at the Vietnamese/Chinese border because of the CPV’s overthrow of the PRC-backed Pol Pot/Khmer Rouge regime.

¹⁰ On top of the already existing U.S. trade embargo (see e.g. Chapter 7 in Vu 2016).

2.1.1. Doi Moi

The Doi Moi (*new thinking*¹¹) reforms starting in 1986 were an attempt to overcome the shortages and economic crisis in Vietnam through tightly controlled market reforms. This despite ongoing and significant internal debate and resistance within the CPV, which continued well into the 2000s, and perhaps because of similar reforms taking place in the Soviet Union, which remained Vietnam's largest ally and benefactor (compare Vu 2016, Chapter 8). The reforms contained a shift towards tolerance of the private sector, a redirection of state aid away from heavy industry and towards development of the agricultural sector and a strategic pivot towards market incentives over directives¹² (Vu, 2016, p. 250-252). This involved, e.g. the leasing of land back to autonomous farmers with authority to make their own production decisions and a phasing out of state subsidies in agricultural production (Brazier 1992), and meant a marked break with the Stalinist methods employed up to that point. The reforms also coincided with the beginning of negotiations to end the occupation of Cambodia (compare to Vu 2016 chapters 8 & 9).

For example, agricultural reforms led to increased food production, an end to the shortages, and, in a complete turnaround, to rice exports (Brazier 1992). Furthermore, the Doi Moi reforms form the background to Vietnam's transformation from one of the *poorest* nations in the world to a *lower-middle income country*¹³ (Nguyen, 2018; The World Bank in Vietnam: Overview, 2022)¹⁴. In terms of foreign policy, the regime reoriented, moving away from reliance on and orientation towards the Soviet-bloc and towards a strategy of integration into the (capitalist) world market and political order with the goal of spurring Vietnam's "development" (Elliot, 2012) and a strategy of "proactively (*chu dong*) shaping the external environment" (ibid., p. 63) to achieve economic stability and security (ibid.). This is exemplary of a new paradigm turning around the idea of comprehensive security and comprehensive strength, that is strength and security on all fronts. This implies achieving security not only through military might and internal stability but also through diplomacy, good relations to neighbors, and more broadly, a strong position in the world political economic order (compare Elliot, 2012). Market reforms and world market integration led to drastic changes in the political-economy of the country.

¹¹ According to the translation in Brazier 1992.

¹² Still with the goal of achieving socialism, just on a different timeline (ibid.).

¹³ Using the common neoclassic-inspired terms which can be criticized on a number of grounds, for example, their overfocus on the quantitatively measurable, their extremely limited demarcation of the economic and the collapsing of complexity in human social relations through using an approach of methodological individualism. See e.g. Jäger & Springler (2015) or Peet & Hartwick, (2015) for deeper exploration of these criticisms. Not to mention the broader de/postcolonial epistemological criticism, see e.g. Smith (2012)

¹⁴ Neither the actual distribution of this wealth among the population nor its purchasing power are not explored on the WTO website.

As Brazier notes in their 1992 text, there were also negative sides to the reforms. Despite economic difficulties, the pre-reform CPV regime in Hanoi managed to provide relatively equal access to extensive healthcare and education systems. The *Doi Moi* led, however, to increasing inequality and the hollowing out of the once comprehensive social services¹⁵. One example of this growing inequality was the dismantlement of land collectivization. In the South this meant that large amounts of land was returned to its previous owners. While certainly benefitting those with a clear title to land, the landless¹⁶ did not benefit from this redistribution and in fact saw the quality of state services plummeting and the prices of staple foods rising, and (at least in 1992) only few job opportunities to show for it (compare to Brazier, 1992).

According to Brazier, in the early 1990's the reforms were popular as illustrated by this quote by a (male) Vietnamese tailor:

"We feel a lot better off as a result of doi moi. (...) If you looked at this village and actually weighed up how much more or less people earned you might say the changes had been small - and that some people have ended up poorer. But we just feel it's a better, more sensible way of operating." (Brazier 1992, p. 23).

Doi Moi did not lead to significant internal reforms within the CPV. The socialist-oriented market economy of the party was described as such: "In [the] period of transition to socialism, policy should aim for developing commodity production through market relations adjusted by state plans"¹⁷ (Vu 2016, p. 247¹⁸). As illustrated, the CPV maintained and maintains clearly stated Marxist-Leninist principles and uses Marxist-Leninist technologies of rule (compare Vu, 2021; Wischermann, 2018). However, the form of these technologies and their ideological underpinning has changed.

As Verhoeven (2021) and Vu (2021) argue, Marxist-Leninist technologies of rule (as well as institutions, imaginaries and practices) have played a key role in the durability of many *communist* regimes long after the "collapse of world communism" (Vu, 2021, p. 624)¹⁹ including mass organizations like the Vietnamese Women's Union that plays a central role in the empirical

¹⁵ See Brazier (1992) pages 32-33 for an example of this hollowing out in reference to the healthcare system.

¹⁶ And those without a claim to land.

¹⁷ As mentioned in the introduction, Beresford calls this model the "market-oriented socialist economy under state guidance" (Beresford, 2008: 221)

¹⁸ In Vietnamese "Bai phat bieu cua dong chi Truong Chinh tai Hoi nghi lan thu 9 Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang" [Speech by comrade Truong Chinh at the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee], December 11, 1985. VKD TT, v. 46, 361–363, 369 quoted in Vu 2016. Add to Zotero.

¹⁹ Verhoeven (2021) also states that: "Perceiving twenty-first-century Ethiopia, Viet Nam, Eritrea ... and above all China as authoritarian systems having abandoned their ideological aspirations has been considerably less threatening to the transition orthodoxy than conceding how relevant Marx and (especially) Lenin remain to these polities – and, in some ways (see Vu and Verhoeven in this collection), perhaps once again increasingly so in the last decade or two." (ibid., 453-454)

research. Strauss (2021) argues that durable one-party states have been one of the most lasting real-socialist legacies, pointing perhaps to one of the most prominent of such technologies. Most of these regimes have followed a similar course of market liberalization as well as seeking new means of securing ideological legitimacy (Vu 2021: 624).

In the case of Vietnam, after the fall of the Eastern Bloc and then the Soviet Union, the CPV continued the world market-oriented reforms while doubling down and pivoting on the ideological front and against political liberalization in the face of this new, strange and (perceived) hostile environment (Vu 2016, chpt. 8 & 9). A fear of “peaceful evolution” in the CPV steers it away from any risky reforms, especially in terms of civil liberty (Vu, 2021, p. 625). The post-reform ideological paradigm involves continuing repression through a large state security apparatus and control of the *ideological state apparatus*²⁰ (compare Vu, 2021), combined with a strongly nationalistic discourse around the figure and thought of Ho Chi Minh over traditional Marxist-Leninist concepts and thought²¹ (Werner, 2009, p. 4).

Moving away from macro-level deliberations, Gainsborough (2018), points to Fforde who calls into question the top-down direction of these developments, claiming that the reforms were a bottom-up process to which the state eventually adjusted its policy (Fforde, 2009). This would imply that both the economic/ political crisis and popular disobedience forced the CPV-led state to quite radically change its direction. The fact that many narratives of the pre-reform period point to wide-spread deviations from official CPV policy in the newly-conquered South by local party officials in order to prevent starvation or attempt to soften the economic crisis (compare Vu, 2016; Elliot, 2012) support this argument.

Somewhat to the contrary, Werner (2009) argues that during Doi Moi the state in Vietnam essentially returned the means of production to the household as a strategy to achieve economic growth including a new family and gender order built around ensuring the household's, and thus

²⁰ I mean this only partially in *Althusserian* terms as his definition had a wider scope and a different target, whereas in the case of the SRV the delineation of this apparatus is much clearer: all those CPV and state-led organizations that contribute to producing state ideology.

²¹ For example, the official party newspaper website the biography of Ho Chi Minh presents him as having creatively applied Marxism-Leninism to the specific situation of Vietnam to lead it to victory and underscores that: “Today, in the cause of national renewal and integration with the world, Ho Chi Minh's thought is a great spiritual asset of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Vietnamese nation, forever paving the way for the cause of national construction, and protect the country of the Vietnamese people for the goal of rich people, strong country, democracy, justice and civilization.” (accessed on 15.03.2022 from <https://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/c-mac-angghen-lenin-ho-chi-minh/ho-chi-minh/tieu-su-cuoc-doi-va-su-nghiep/tieu-su-chu-tich-ho-chi-minh-52> using Google translate for the English). Original: Ngày nay, trong sự nghiệp đổi mới đất nước, hội nhập với thế giới, tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh là tài sản tinh thần to lớn của Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam và dân tộc Việt Nam, mãi mãi soi đường cho sự nghiệp xây dựng và bảo vệ đất nước của nhân dân Việt Nam vì mục tiêu dân giàu, nước mạnh, dân chủ, công bằng, văn minh.

women's, roles in production and reproduction while maintaining social "values" and discourses conducive to state purposes. To quote one of Werner's statements in the context of her research, (2009, p. 80) "(...) it was clear that the Doi Moi state was promoting conservative family values after decades of revolutionary discourse", *conservative* in this case referring to a Confucian-inspired hetero-patriarchal gender order, which will be discussed in section 2.2. Werner (2009) furthermore argues that this change in governmentality/mode of regulation involved an expansion of the breadth and reach of state power in line with the CPV-led Doi Moi states goals.

This specific and changing constellation of Marxist-Leninist technologies of rule, despite drastic changes in state policy and discourse, forms the institutional and ideological background to the massive economic, accumulation, and social reproduction related transformations that have occurred in ongoing Doi Moi era and thus the background to the emergence and continuation of the practice of commodified transnational marriage migration in Vietnam²².

However, the interpretations of who did what and why, and to what effect, before and during Doi Moi remains a contested field of research. I will not be able to give these debates the level of attention they deserve. However, there are some well-founded insights that can be drawn from the literature:

- 1) the Doi Moi reforms were followed by significant economic growth in classical macroeconomic terms
- 2) they also caused massive and still ongoing changes to the role of the state in Vietnam and the CPV, and massive shifts in accumulation and anatomy of production in Vietnam.
- 3) this involved disruptions in both the spheres of productive and reproductive labor and a changing the prevailing gender order (the latter will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2)
- 4) all of these concomitant changes created and stimulated an environment of increasing migration.

Turning first to the current economic situation in Vietnam, Vu describes rather bleakly that "State enterprises in alliance with foreign capital dominate the economy, and no independent labour unions are tolerated." (Vu 2021: 625). However, such interpretations are also contested. Two scholars more supportive of the regime describe the economic situation as follows in their

²² These changes did not, however, happen all at once. Rather in a slow process over two decades with fits and starts depending on CPV-internal decision making processes, disputes and power struggles, as well as world events (compare to Vu, 2016 & Elliot 2012).

article lauding the response of the CPV-led government to the 2007/8 economic crisis: “From dealing with the crisis we are trying to find the best way to combine market economy with socialism to achieve a crisis-free and sustainable development”, going on to say, “The socialist-oriented market economy aims to create a kind of balance and harmony between private and the public, profit and wages, the market and the state” (Van Duc & Phong, 2010, p. 727-728).

These quotes represent two poles in the academic and general discourse around the Vietnamese state and economy, of which the former is much more heavily represented in the Western academy and the latter unsurprisingly much more common in Vietnam. In terms of the empirical research, the idea of the CPV and Vietnamese state as seeking to find the best way to achieve balance and harmony in a volatile global (economic) environment can be recognized in the narrative of the Women’s Union representatives in CT1. This ‘balance’ is characterized by a large contingent of state-owned firms and large-scale state investment in firms (compare Elliot, 2012; Wischermann, 2018) with simultaneous opening up and courting of foreign direct investment. The state in Vietnam continues to control firms producing about one third of industrial output (Vu 2021).

Furthermore, the rapid economic growth and industrialization in the post-reform period has required the expropriation and usage of large amounts of previous farmland for e.g. infrastructure development, and the prices paid by the state in these compulsory purchases are often below market value and, when necessary, accomplished by force (Großheim, 2018). This expropriation, according to Großheim, caters to the interests of state and non-state firms over those of the rural worker/farming class, on whose support the CPV has always relied, and is often quite lucrative for local officials (ibid.). Furthermore, as will be discussed more in the following section, the expropriation of land involved with state-led rapid industrialization is also accompanied by a less expansive social state and the active promotion of shifting reproductive labor that had been, at least partially and theoretically, collectivized (Werner, 2009) in state socialism back to the private sphere, and thus the sphere of unpaid, feminized labor.

Nguyen (2018) argues against the “myth” of the unresponsive authoritarian state pushing its will on the population, saying that the CPV actually uses a strategy of both consent and repression to maintain popular legitimacy while nipping threats to its monopoly on political power in the bud. Wischermann (2018) argues similarly, that the CPV follows a strategy of often incorporating its critics into the existing structures in order to diffuse threats.

Moving away from the strategic essentialism used up to this point in the chapter, Nguyen (2018) argues that the central government (and party) in Hanoi often places blame for social conflict on local governments and their failure to “properly” implement the law, thus playing the role of peacemaker between angry (and organized) residents and often violently repressive local governments. However, it is the economic policies of the central state and the political-economy it attempts to steer and maintain that are often the cause of conflict between these two parties (compare to Großheim 2018). Furthermore, Großheim’s (ibid.) arguments about the centrality of local government and personal connections in Vietnam take on a new light in comparison to Nguyen’s (2018) arguments, as they imply that the central CPV essentially outsources the “dirty work” of industrialization to local governments and their security forces, who manage to enrich themselves along the way in this arrangement, to supply state and often foreign firms with the land and locations they desire, all the while working hard to keep up its image as the guardians of Vietnam and its future.

Aside from these discourses, the high GDP growth that market reforms helped achieve, did not happen in a vacuum. They coincided with a general re-emergence of eastern Asia as an economic center, that must also be understood as a regional phenomena not reducible to the borders or actions of a single state (Arrighi et al., 2003). That is, Vietnam’s world market integration began after a period of post-1945 economic resurgence in the region known as the “East Asian miracle”. This was characterized by a temporal hierarchization with first Japan in the 50’s, followed by Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea in the 60’s started to “develop”²³, that is they used the global labor intensive, low wage industrial production as a springboard into a broader process of industrialization. The same countries whose “development” would make them such attractive migration destinations for the post-war generations of Vietnam.

Vietnam and Southeast Asia became major apparel players in the 90’s following a similar strategy of rapid industrialization based on low comparative wages in labor-intensive industries (Staritz et al., 2022). This “miraculous” type of industrialization is dependent on labor / wage suppression by the state and capital (despite resistance), and the feminization of labor is key to this suppression as it enables the payment of lower “women’s” wages and the outsourcing of work to the household (Marslev et al., 2021; Mezzadri, 2016; Wright, 2006).

²³ Not to mention some of Vietnam’s nearer ASEAN neighbors and the People’s Republic of China who also experienced high rates of economic growth in the 80’s and 90’s.

Today, in terms of the orthodox development discourse, Vietnam is considered a (lower-)middle income country which aims to reach the status of high income country by 2045²⁴. It is portrayed as a success story of development with continuing and decades-long high rates of growth²⁵ based on the aforementioned industrialization and concomitant social transformations. Comparing this to the interview CT1, the VWU representatives on the one hand reproduced this optimistic outlook with their insistence that the government had nipped the poverty leading to transnational marriage migration in the bud.

A brief overview of poverty in Vietnam during the mid to late 2010's²⁶ shows rather unanimous praise of Vietnam's continuing strides in reducing poverty from major multilateral institutions (Ngo Ha Quyen, 2019; The World Bank, 2018a, 2018b). However, it is also clear from the data that poverty reduction (i.e. gains in income/wellbeing measures) are concentrated among the majority Kinh and Hoa population²⁷ while poverty itself is concentrated among the non-Hoa ethnic minorities²⁸, whose population is concentrated in rural, remote, highlands (ibid.) and among those drawing their income from agriculture (World Bank 2018b). However, a general gap between households in poverty and those above the poverty line exists concerning the percentage of households experiencing deprivation related to key infrastructure & (state) services²⁹, specifically regarding post-secondary(adult) education, hygienic sanitation facilities (World Bank 2018b; Ngo Ha Quyen 2019), and health insurance (MOLISA et al., 2018). Furthermore, only around half of the country's poor are covered by the social safety net and direct support payments are not considered adequate to cover the cost of living (Ngo Ha Quyen, 2019), underlining the abovementioned points about state withdrawal from the provision of services related to social reproduction and the return of the household as the site of care with largely women as the unpaid providers of care (compare Nguyen & Locke, 2014).

There is a geographic diversity of provinces that “send” most the marriage migrants to Taiwan and South Korea and they are not concentrated in the rural highlands (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017). This speaks at least against the notion that participation in CTM is strictly concentrated among the country's poorest, which are often Vietnam's most remote rural

²⁴ See <http://hanoitimes.vn/vietnam-sets-sight-on-becoming-high-income-country-by-2045-state-president-314062.html>

²⁵ See for example <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview#1>

²⁶ Focusing on pre-COVID publications, as the majority of interviews were conducted in 2019, and quantitative data created by major institutions as a baseline that I will critically challenge in later chapters.

²⁷ Kinh being the ethnic majority in Vietnam and Hoa the ethnic Chinese minority in Vietnam.

²⁸ In 2018 making up more than 70% of the countries poor (WB 2018a).

²⁹ i.e. using multidimensional measures of poverty, an approach that Vietnam implemented in 2015 (MOLISA et al. 2018).

citizens and often belong to ethnic minorities. However, there is of course widely agreed-upon inequality across the entire population concerning income, post-secondary education, hygienic sanitation and access to the social safety net, etc., and poverty in every region.

This leaves open the possibility that regional poverty concerning the main “sending regions” is nonetheless a major driver of CTM, or that multidimensional poverty vs. income-based poverty may be the more important measure. However, it is questionable whether poverty alone is the driver behind CTM as per the VWU narrative. These questions and topics will be explored in more depth in Chapter 6.

2.2 Changing gender regimes in Doi Moi Vietnam

State-led, rapid industrialization and the concomitant social and cultural transformations have involved shifts in discourse, policy, and the gendered division of labor indicating changes to gendered power relations in Vietnam during this period.

From a historical perspective, *Confucian family values* are often used to describe long-term gender relations in Vietnam. In my brief experience, this narrative was widespread among colleagues and students during the KNOTS 2019 program in Ho Chi Minh City³⁰. Vo et al. (2008) argue in their introduction that such Confucianism engenders a society characterized by male domination and a subordination of women to second-class status, and as Vo (2008) describes in the same volume, this entails subordination and submission to specific men in their lives, obedience and a dis-individualization of women. This includes an extremely regimented and restrictive role for women as housewives and ideals of absolute obedience and fidelity (Vo, 2008), both of which contribute to a specific gendered division of labor. Of course, these rather ancient ideals have always been just that, ideals, however, they have had and still have a significant weight in Vietnam and other countries and areas with a history of Confucianism.

The staying power of such ideals can be exemplified by the gap between Marxist-Leninist ideals of women’s liberation and the staying power of “traditional” gender roles. Although women’s

³⁰ During which the lion's share of the empirical data for this thesis was gathered. It will be described in more detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

rights are part of the SRV's constitution³¹ and state ideology and multiple laws exist concerning the responsibility of husbands to help with child rearing and the joint responsibility of married couples for household labor and childcare (Brazier 1992), this has not had radical effects on the “traditional” gendered division of labor³² (Werner, 2009). There may be women in the workforce and in the military, but the top leadership of the CPV is and has been almost exclusively male (Brazier, 1992).

As described by Werner (2009) gender equality was a central pillar of the CPV platform and post-1945 communist rule did bring many improvements for women, as a social group, such as the socialization of what was previously “family labor” (which usually means women's labor), public participation in political organizations and the labor force and formal legal equality. These changes undoubtedly undermined the Confucian family order and traditional hierarchies that subordinate women (ibid). However, despite these policies hierarchical gender roles in the family continued bringing the subordination of women to the “private sphere, i.e. sphere of reproductive labor” (ibid).

Doi Moi signaled an at least partial end of state policy aimed at the socialization of reproductive labor related to a Marxist-Leninist tinged policy of women's liberation. This involved the resurgence of the family as “the basic unit of production” (Werner, 2009, p. 4) and the state discursively and materially repositioning “the household as a central location of productivity and an anchor for Vietnam's entry into the global economy” (Werner, 2009, p. 3), accompanied by a discursive continuation of state ideology around “women's liberation”. However, Werner (2009) describes fundamental changes in state-led discourses around gender in the Doi Moi era that specifically targeted women and pushed changes in the gendered division of labor. Namely, women were repositioned once again as the guardians of the household as a central site of production and reproduction, and, to an increasing extent, as the guardians of national virtue. Women in hetero relationships who have children receive generous state support (compare Werner, 2009) while state media disparages “*loose* women as symbols of Western depravity, social marginality, and feminine disorder: the reverse of the wholesome Doi Moi womanhoods promoted elsewhere in the media” (my italics to avoid triple quotation marks, Werner, 2009, p. 4). These changes are notable for the break from what had hitherto been state ideology and a partial return to Confu-

³¹ Although in Nghia-M.-Vo et al. (2008), Vo notes in chapter 5 that the republics in South Vietnam also guaranteed women at least *de jure* equality. However, at least one driving force behind this break with Confucian patriarchal traditions was the massive labor shortage caused by the number of (male) soldiers needed to maintain the war effort.

³² Vo (2008) also lays out the hypothesis, that the brutality of the Confucianist social formation for women led them to support communist (Marxist-Leninist) movements, who generally have an at least rhetorical commitment to women's liberation, and that this perhaps explains the staying power of communist regimes in East/Southeast Asia, as a great majority of the still existing communist states also have a Confucian background.

cian gender roles; especially when they play a central role Vietnam's economic development and as sites of counterbalance against the massive insecurity caused by such abrupt changes the state and regime of accumulation. A more context-specific and in-depth analysis of the gendered power relations in Vietnam that affect transnational marriage migration can be found in chapter 6.

Chapter 3: Theory

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe key theoretical conceptualizations of the thesis. On the highest level of abstraction, this thesis seeks to explore how CTM is embedded in global capitalist political-economic relations connected by what the world market, as well as the social transformations that they have brought about, while being interwoven in other pivotal structural power relations such as heteronormative gendered power relations. An interest in this question after gathering the empirical research was my original motivation to begin this project.

The political-economic/materialist starting point and my background have given the theoretical framework a certain shape. I argue against overly structuralist positions while maintaining the importance of not losing sight of capitalist dynamics and mechanism nor the generally materialist or materialist-inspired analysis of these dynamics, especially as they interact with and are acted on by individuals and groups of actors.

However, feminist migration research and epistemologically critical feminist, queer, and post-colonial theory have introduced important insights, as well as the paradigm of intersectionality (also more on this in methodology chapter). Furthermore, research on marriage migration often uses sociological perspectives that are (often) more oriented towards post-structuralist theory and the investigation of power relations on the micro and meso levels. As Bohrer (2018) and Winker/Degele (2009) argue, strands of materialist theory and post-structuralist theory, especially of the feminist variety, can greatly complement one another despite significant points of contention. This mutual enhancement forms the basis of my theoretical framework which will be laid out in the following section.

What this thesis offers in terms of empirical conclusions is also a set of empirically-based theory constructions. On the other hand, the empirical material and analysis serves to interrogate and

complicate the theoretical framework. This section lays out general background theory on which I will build in chapter 4, concerning the state of research in migration studies on CTM and related topics, in chapter 5, concerning the methodology of this thesis as well as my positionality, and chapter 6, in the analysis of the empirical material.

3.2 Theoretical contentions and synergies concerning intersectionality

Intersectionality theorists in recent decades starting with Black feminists in the United States have continued to investigate how different power relations interact as they intersect in specific times, places and actors. Kimberlé Crenshaw is usually attributed with at least coining the term, while the Combahee River Collective largely provided the theoretical framework on which the concept is based (Taylor, 2017). It is not an overstatement to say that it has contributed to a paradigm shift in the social sciences. The paradigm of intersectionality has shaped post-structuralist thinking in the critical social sciences bringing in a keen focus on the interaction of power relations as expressed the micro level and the specific effects of co-constructing power relations on individuals and social groups, often expressed through privilege and discrimination (compare Soiland, 2012)

Intersectional approaches are especially fitting for this thesis' case study as the practice of CTM out of Vietnam sits at the intersection of multiple structural power relations, multiple scales, and multiple and multidirectionally interconnected social locations and processes (compare Piper & Lee, 2016).

As with any theoretical paradigm, intersectionality too has drawn criticism. Marxist-materialist criticisms of intersectionality theory generally involve its lack of holistic theory of capitalism and thus the capability to analyse and criticize it (Bohrer, 2018). In other words, in focusing on multiply positioned actors and specifically the power relations that intersect in their lived experience their indirect macro interactions do not receive enough attention. Concerning the mechanisms of capitalist accumulation und inequality, some political economists criticize that intersectionality theory for its inability to offer explanatory frameworks outside of time and place specific effects on social groups or individuals (compare Soiland, 2012). This mirrors criticism of the partiality/particularity of post-modern critical scholarship and the infinite set of factors that shape individuals and their agency that cannot see the forest for the trees, so to speak (compare Jessop, 2001).

Bohrer (ibid.) posits that the disagreements and conflicts between (feminist) materialist scholars and intersectionality-inspired scholars turn around fundamental questions of epistemology, iden-

tity, systems of oppression and their hierarchization and the nature or importance of capitalism for social analysis. These tensions lie more specifically in “conceptualising the relationship between oppression and capitalism” and an “intense debate over the precise nature of this relationship” (ibid., p.1).

Bohrer (2018), however, argues that the theories are not hopelessly estranged as there is actually relative agreement about nature of identities as “effects of structural, material and historical processes” (Bohrer, 2018, p. 56) to be found in both bodies of theory, in contrast to the frequent contention between the two around the (un)importance of identities, actors, and the micro in general (ibid.). The author (ibid.) also contends that Marxism has intersectionality or intersectionality-based ideas at its core even though the term was not explicitly used and inadequately theorized by Marxists. This is exemplified by the long tradition of Marxists thematizing relationships between capitalism, race, and gender, as in the case of colonization/imperialism (ibid., 63). For example, Federici’s (2004) historical study of the relationship between modern gendered power relations, capitalism and colonialism, or C.L.R. James’ (1963) exploration of the intersections between class, race and colonialism during the Haitian revolution.

Furthermore, intersectionality also has Marxist-materialist tradition. The Combahee River Collective explicitly located their project as an extension of Marxist critique not as a rejection of the centrality of capitalist relations of domination and exploitation (Bohrer, 2018, p. 62; Taylor, 2017). They found, and Bohrer (ibid.) finds, however, class-only, class-primary accounts of social inequality inadequate, and identify a need to develop a theoretical framework which can adequately address multiple structural relations of exploitation and domination.

Bohrer (2018) proposes “when intersectionality scholars argue for the centrality of identity politics, they are arguing for the fundamental truth that the oppressions which have been most explicitly theorised in relation to individual identities are precisely the oppressions that must be interrogated as the basis for any structural analysis of domination in the contemporary world.” (Bohrer 2018, 69). While Marxist analysis is central to understanding capitalism as a coherent system and “(...) as the original synthesis of these systems of dispossession” (ibid., 64). Bohrer (ibid.) agrees „with Lugones that interwoven oppressions are the best way to render racism, exploitation, white supremacy, colonialism, heterosexism, cissexism.” (ibid., 70). However, Bohrer (ibid.) also argues that the claim identifying capitalism as the root of modern oppressions does not imply that class should be the most important structural power category.

Here certain ambiguities and contrasts become clear: describing something as the root of modern relations of domination contains an implicit claim to totality. This line of reasoning allows the implication that capitalism is the root of colonialism and heterosexism and thus their time and place specific effects.

I argue instead drawing on a wide range of theoretical inspirations that capitalism, at these currently, acts as a paradigm, influencing everything around it, as the global dominance of the capitalist mode of production expressed exerts influence (a gravitational pull so to speak (compare Rigg 2016)) on the social structures around it. Debates about causal primacy and deep historical origins are unnecessary for my theoretical framework. Rather I seek to provide a framework for exploring the relative “generative power”(Jäger & Springler, 2015; Mader, 2013) of structural power relations in their interaction with agents, and in the modern world this more often than not involves at least secondary interactions with capitalist processes.

I share an aspiration with Bohrer (2018) to “move toward the development of a theoretical framework that can adequately account for relations of domination and exploitation” without creating a hierarchy of oppressions. Thus, I synthesize multiple strands of Marxist-materialist, especially feminist materialist, and intersectionality-based theory to allow for clearer conceptualization of feminized care and labor migration to render more clearly broader processes in which CTM is presumably embedded.

3.3 Winker & Degele’s Multi-level Intersectional Model

There has also been significant contention in certain German-speaking academic discourses concerning intersectionality (compare Soiland, 2012), although this has arguably been a constructive of theoretical development. For instance, Winker & Degele’s (2009) work, which I draw from, is very much a product of these debates.

I identify the usefulness of Winker & Degele’s (2009) concepts for the task of developing a holistic theoretical and methodological framework. Although published almost a decade previous, it is an innovative attempt to conceptually fill this gap and constructively resolve debates turning around the same issues discussed by Bohrer (2018). Both Bohrer (ibid.) and Winker & Degele (ibid.) argue that that capitalist accumulation is the backdrop, that is an overreaching social formation, in which relations of domination and exploitation play out between actors, and for understanding the social formation as co-constructing sets of power relations with no primary relation of domination. Furthermore, both include the dominant feminist materialist criticism that

unwaged reproductive labor (more on this in the following section) is central to the capitalist mode of production.

Following Knapp (2005; cited in Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 29), Winker and Degele (2009) also see it as a necessity that feminist intersectionality approaches move beyond a primarily microanalytical focus and towards structural power relations and their interdependencies in order to produce knowledge with more explanatory power and social relevance concerning social inequality. The authors (*ibid.*) suggest a specific theoretical framework and methodology that they call the multi-level intersectional analysis as way to perform more holistic analysis in the social sciences.

Winker and Degele (2009) identify four structural power categories (gender, race, class and the body) as well as the interplay between them as co-constituting relations of domination within a capitalist social formation based on dynamics of uneven accumulation and profit maximization in regard to how they affect the spheres of production and reproduction, while also identify two further levels of analysis: the level of symbolic representation (discourse) and the level of actors and identity construction (these will be discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter). The author's see relationality/reciprocity between the categories on all three levels and the power relations between them can only be understood in relation to one another (*ibid.*). The interplay between the micro and the macro as well as interdependent and multi-locational power relations also play a central role in this thesis.

Thus, the structure level in their (*ibid.*) theory is limited to four categories (sex, class, race & body) which represent specific sets of power relations, namely. classisms, heteronormativities, racisms and bodyisms. The inclusion of "bodyisms" represents an expansion of the "big three" dominantly discussed in intersectional literature. The four structure categories represent a complex set of context-specific power relations along which resources, exploitation, different forms of capital and access (social, economic, political, etc.) and privilege are divided (compare Winker & Degele 2009). For the purposes of this thesis, I use the following basic definitions based on Winker & Degele (2009) as theoretical starting points for the analysis on the structure level.

- The category race involves racializations and ethnicizations along which marginalization runs defining in groups and out groups also affecting privilege and access.
- The category gender involves heteronormative gender constructions based around male dominance, the sanction of otherness, and unequal division of reproductive labor.
- The category class involves hierarchies of exploitation and access to (economic) resources based on ownership, privilege and labor relations.

- The category body consists of marginalization and favorization of othered bodies based on health, correspondence to norms, and age also leading to unequal privilege and access.

Although they are treated as theoretically distinct in some phases of the methodology, I follow the premise that they are intimately interwoven, intersecting and shaping each other in different ways and different social positions.

Winker and Degele's (ibid.) framework helps is a key inspiration for my methodology. The multi-level intersectional analysis offers a way to analyze CTM while being able to encompass its multi-leveled, multi-directional power relations and interactions as well as multiple positioned actors. This theoretical model aspires to bring in the intersectional without losing sight of macro transformations that significantly contribute to the scope of action that actors have. To make this background clearer before going into the methodological details, the following section describes in more detail the theoretical conceptions of capitalism and capitalist processes of transformation used in this thesis.

3.4 Conceptualizing the relationships between power, oppression and Capitalism

This thesis begins with the base assumption that capitalism is a historically-specific yet paradigmatic set of social relations that make up a sort of paradigm, a system or network of global scope that almost all living humans interact with and that co-interacts with most if not all other micro, meso and macro power structures (compare Brand, 2022; Jäger & Springler, 2015). This coincides with Winker & Degele's theoretical framework in which the capitalist mode of production based on dynamics of profit maximization in society forms a theoretical backdrop (Winker & Degele 2009). The authors (ibid.) investigate the four pre-determined structure categories, as well as the interplay between them, as relations of domination within a capitalist social formation in regard to how they affect the spheres of production and reproduction (and productive and reproductive labor). Generalizing this conception, I start with the assumption that all social power relations interact with a capitalist social formation as well as with each other.

To conceptualize capitalism, this thesis draws inspiration from global political economy which analyzes "the (world) market as a historically specific social relation, that is, a part of social relations of (re-)production (including distribution and consumption) and of social power relations. Such a perspective is helpful to describe not only the capitalist societal nature relations, but also their patriarchal, imperial and neo-colonial characteristics." (Brand, 2022, p. 28). This theses

similarly relies on a critical political economy approach to conceptualize capitalist accumulation as historically contingent and embedded in the interactions and relationships (i.e. relations), between individuals, social groups and institutions. Furthermore, critical political economy focuses on the importance of material production and power that is not limited to how human being discursively interact, i.e. it recognizes the importance the distribution of labor and resources within social relations, also in terms of macro-structural interactions.

Such an approach should, as Winker & Degele (2009) suggests, take heteronormative and gendered hierarchies, constructions of race and ethnicity, and other structural power relations (such as bodyisms) into account. For example, theorists like Silvia Federici (2004) have argued that the transformations in gender relations, race/ethnicity and class, during the genesis of the capitalist mode of production and today, are exceedingly intertwined if not inseparable. This mirrors post/de-colonial theorizing that attempts to expand a critical perspective to the *industrialization thesis* of capitalism (compare Parreñas 2008) lengthening the historical perspective back to the origins of European colonialism and conceptually expanding the framework outside of political and economic processes, as also post & decolonial authors like Quijano (2000) (“The coloniality of power”) and Lugones (2016) (“The coloniality of gender”) have done.

The idea of interacting and concomitant power relations within/around capitalism (and the salience of gender) offers a means to connect intersectionality theory and more micro-focused critical migration research with concepts from political economy, which is one of my goals in this thesis. The background capitalist social formation does not imply class is the primary power relation in all situations, rather that directly or indirectly capitalist dynamics has become a global paradigm affecting all social relations. This compliments Winker & Degele’s (2009) view of the capitalist economy as a self-reproducing set of processes and power relations that change over time in their interaction with society down to the level of individuals.

However, it is difficult based on such a general conception to clearly identify what is and is not a capitalist dynamic. For more clarity, I turn to Brink and Eagleton.

Brink (2014) argues that while there are constitutive features of capitalism (such as wage relations and pressure to accumulate [capital]), there is no single factor shared by them the determines their variation, nor that could explain their multifaceted interaction with specific social forces and institutional settings at specific times. Thus, specific and changing historical-material context must always be considered as it relates to broader processes of accumulation. The interaction of the capitalist mode of production with other social relations is always context specific.

Despite socio-historical and geographic variance there are family resemblances that connect the features and practices that are identified as capitalist. Here I draw on Eagleton who describes bourgeois ideology as a set of “family resemblances”³³, that is bourgeois ideology can be describe as a “network of overlapping features” rather than a static category or “essence” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 193). The same principles can be applied to the political economic “background” assumed in this thesis, i.e. the analysis looks for the network of overlapping features in observable social practice rather than an abstract totality. This is especially important moving from abstract theoretical considerations to concrete analysis in chapter 6.

Regarding the feminization of migration and commodification of care, Constable concludes that “social relations have become evermore geographically dispersed, impersonal, mediated by and implicated in broader political-economic or capitalist processes.” (Constable, 2009, p. 49). I connect this to Flatschart’s (2021) *form-oriented materialism* in which capitalist social relations are not the result of constant class struggle, although struggles around the distribution of resources certainly play a role, but rather a partially self-reproducing, transforming set of abstract and impersonal power relations, with their origins in specific economic forms, which shape social relations. The mediation of social relations and practice regarding both capitalist processes and (structural) power relations will play a central role in this chapter and this thesis.

The abstract and impersonal power relations referred to theoretically lend the capitalist paradigm a certain stability (despite recurring instability) as production and accumulation continue despite intermittent periods of crisis (compare Piketty, 2014). This stability is partially maintained by the capitalist state, although the state certainly cannot be reduced to a simple functional role in the capitalist mode of production, and represents “an emergent, partial, and unstable system that is interdependent with other systems in a complex social order” (Jessop, 2001, p. 166). Still, political economic regulation largely occurs at the nation-state level including the regulation of international migration, which is inherently an inter-state process. This is also a central tenant of Flatschart’s (2021) conception of form-oriented materialism as the state interacts with and maintains abstract and impersonal power relations connected to specific (capitalist) economic forms.

Nation-states however only exist as part of a plural system of states largely connected by a set of economic relations I will call the **world market**³⁴. This is what world systems theorists refer to

³³ Eagleton references the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s doctrine of family resemblances without citing a specific text.

³⁴ Brink describes the world market as the (natural) result of capitalist accumulation as the “pressure for immeasurable and endless capital accumulation” inevitably internationalizes capital in the search for higher returns. For the purposes of this thesis no theoretical interrogation around the progeny of the world market is needed. A more sim-

as the world system. On the abstract level, these states exist in hierarchical power relations based on unequal divisions of wealth and characterized by “uneven economic development” (H.-Z. Wang & Tien, 2009, p. 33). But concretely, interstate relations exist alongside a myriad of interpersonal, interorganizational and interfirm relations that are often transnational. While world systems theory is not central to this thesis, my conception of the state assumes a system of states in dialectic interaction with the world market, domestic markets, individual states, and their constituent parts, not to mention the myriad of actors involved. This forms the theoretical basis for analysis of the state especially in terms of migration policy as it relates to this thesis.

Because of the role that international hierarchies of wealth play in the process of CTM, it is also important to theoretically conceptualize these hierarchies. Drawing on critical GPN scholarship, which, for example, investigates states attempts to “upgrade” domestic industries, that is, to foster firms that capture a larger share of added-value (i.e. wealth generated) in global production and the effects of these attempts, I posit a polit-economic hierarchy between states. The hierarchy of wealth between states is based on different levels of wealth (capital) and domestics industries that capture different levels of added value in global production, as well as political relations. This mirrors the ways that through wages or ownership most members of society capture different levels of capital (e.g. money) and different portions of profits and resources produced.

Bair (2005) conceptualizes power relations between states as multifaceted positions in the hierarchy of the global economy consisting of nation-states (compare to Bair 2005) in which the “capability of the state to appropriate the benefits of the world division-of-labor is determined primarily by its position, not in a network of exchanges, but in a hierarchy of wealth” (Arrighi, 1990, p. 15 quoted in Bair 2005, p. 171). They exist in the globalized world within an interconnected yet contradictory social formation that both transcends and remains compartmentalized within the nation state (Jessop, 2001). According to World Systems theorists, a contradiction exists between the momentum of the world market towards integration and its division into discrete spatio-regulatory territories (Bair, 2005). And nearer to the topic of this thesis, these contradictory forces also shape the lives, strategies, and possibilities of individual actors. Flows of migration and the process of migration are historically specific, changing (not inherently connected to a specific country or region) and do not act outside of a hierarchically organized, although often contradictory, global capitalistic economic system.

plified definition of the world market would be the totality of economic relations running between states in the capitalist system rather than within them.

My premise for this thesis is that the hierarchies of wealth between the “developed” nations of northeast Asia and the “developing” nations of Southeast Asia, in the case of this research the destination and origin countries respectively, is based in a dynamic system of world production in this paper referred to as the capitalist world market in which capital and the ability to capture added value of global production are unequally divided between states, and that these relations affect the scope of action of individual and collective actors including transnational migrants. The study of transnational migration needs to take into account this migrations embeddedness in this web of states connected through a world market of capitalist relations that need to perform a certain kind of governmentality to exist – i.e. the creation and policing of borders, citizenship, etc., as well as the connections between abstract/impersonal power relations, specific economic forms/processes, and nation states.

The next section deals with feminist materialist theory, i.e. feminist political economy, as it relates to the theoretical foundations of this thesis.

3.5 Feminist materialisms

The term commodified transnational marriage migration while containing a specific reference to capitalist commodification and inter-state relations (addressed in the previous) is lacking a specific reference to the deeply gendered nature of the practice, although gender plays a central role in (marriage) migration. Feminist-materialist/ feminist political-economy theory is helpful to theoretically connect capitalist social relations and gendered power relations. There is already a wide body of theory exploring the relationship between heteronormative/patriarchal structures and the capitalist mode of production. Parreñas (2008), for example, points out the ways that previously existing patriarchal structures shape the formation of capitalist production processes, e.g. when labor is feminized to drive down wages. Pomeranz (2003) similarly describes the exploitation of unpaid wage labor as made possible through the alliance between the imperial state and the patriarchal family order, i.e. state policy and gendered power relations shape this unwaged labor and especially its exploitation. This points to the perhaps most important contributions of feminist materialisms, namely theory and research concerning social reproduction.

Feminist political economists have offered theoretical frameworks to analyze networks of power and exploitation on a much larger scale than singular case studies, especially in their more holistic, i.e. including hitherto ignored forms of labor, attempts to theorize the reproduction of society as a whole (Dunaway, 2013). These largely focus on the investigation of labor that occurs out-

side of capitalist wages relations or that is overlooked in capitalist wage relations, like Dunaway's (2014) conception of household labor and the ways it becomes drawn into capitalist commodity production (e.g. families engaged in fishing in Philippines wherein the entire family contributes to the labor but only the adult man receives a wage while the fish sold becomes part of global networks of commodity production).

Scholars using a political economy framework, particularly of the feminist variety, have made important contributions to research on (women's) labor migration, including domestic labor migration and sex work migration, as well as marriage migration (Cheng & Choo 2015), especially considering the interactions between gendered relations of domination, the state and global capitalist transformation. This investigation allows an insightful perspective, although certainly not the only one, for conceptualizing migration within a hierarchy of states exerting a specific kind of governmentality over their territories and borders coinciding with interconnected and unequal relations of wealth between and within states

Conceptions of care work and a global care economy play a significant role in feminist migration research. Care work, also known as reproductive or household labor, requires more exact definition to be theoretically useful. The perhaps oldest materialist definition of reproductive labor understands it as "the work of sustaining the productive labor force" (Engels, 1990 quoted in Parreñas, 2008, p. 12). I.e. household labor serves to maintain and prepare workers for the labor force. However, this basic definition reifies a binary division between productive and reproductive labor and leaves out key facets including a definition of what exactly the household is.

Dunaway (2014) offers a clearer conception of the household defining it as a culturally-specific "unit in which members inequitably pool and redistribute labor, resources, and survival strategies that are grounded in both unpaid and paid (nonwaged and waged) income sources" (ibid., 57). While these units are often organized around marriage and various forms of family ties, they are certainly not limited to them. Dunaway (ibid.) explicitly argues against the reification of (Western) conceptions of the nuclear family. She considers for example groups of non-kin street children and collectives of ostracized Indian widows that perform the functions described above to also be households (ibid.). Furthermore, households are the most common sites of reproductive labor and this labor is most often organized around heteronormative gendered power relations.

Piper and Lee (2016) go into more detail offering a workable definition of reproductive labor which will be used in this thesis, although I expand the definition of the household following Dunaway (2014) outside of traditional notions of “family life”:

“Reproductive labor refers labor that creates or aids in creating labor power. It includes biological reproduction, as well as nurturing individuals throughout their life cycles through education, child rearing, and nursing. It also includes the social reproduction of units deemed essential to the maintenance of society, such as family life and labor associated with families such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry work, as well as kinship ties. In this sense, it includes not only the biological (re-) production of citizens but also the ways society regenerates itself.” (Piper & Lee, 2016, p. 475)

This makes clear that reproductive labor involves a broad range of different labors often completed in the family or the household. They share two common features: they often considered to be part of “private” life as opposed to “public” wage labor, although Dunaway (2014) and others problematize this binary, and they contribute to the day-to-day reproduction of society, whether that society be capitalistically organized or otherwise. Terms like “intimate” and “domestic” labor refer more strongly to this supposed private nature. The interaction of capitalist social formations and this necessary labor shows some specific dynamics, especially in regards to migration.

Modern migration research has produced multiple theoretical concepts such as the global care economy, the concept of care circulation, and global care chain concept (Lutz, 2018) to describe the various ways that specifically feminized migration plays a role in the provisioning of this reproductive labor. Authors such as Lee (2012) have also connected transnational marriage migration to these networks of care provisioning. Lutz (2018) makes a key point clear, namely these migration networks revolve around transnational social inequality based on hierarchies of wealth (see chapter 4 for more details).

There are also theoretical concepts to explain not just the how but why of the global care economy. Aulenbacher et al. (2018) sum up two important contradictions that have been thematized by (materialist) feminists and social scientists: the capitalist mode of production requires (unpaid) reproductive labor in order to maintain the workforce (and thus capitalist accumulation) and simultaneously it destabilizes the provisioning of this care (reproduction of the workforce).

“Nancy Fraser (...) points to the following contradiction regarding the functioning of capitalism: ‘on the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other, capitalism’s orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies’.” (Fraser, 2016, p. 100 cited in Aulenbacher et al., 2018, p. 518;)

Care work, as Aulenbacher et al. (2018) refer to it, is expected to be “life serving” (ibid., 8), i.e. there is a quasi built-in social expectation that childcare should nurture or at least not harm children, while capitalist dynamics of profit-maximization, growth imperative, market organization and “efficiency” undermine this “life-serving” expectation. In addition to the processes of commodification that have been described in the SOA chapter (subsummation of previously independent social relations under capitalist logics), Aulenbacher et al. (2018) also use the Polanyian term of “quasi-marketization”: in which market principles and ideas (e.g. entrepreneurship) are applied to areas of life where no real commodity producing market exists. E.g. the marketization of state services in the neoliberal era in which non-profit seeking state institutions introduce market principles in order to ostensibly improve efficiency.

The complex and contradictory dynamics briefly touched on here cannot be explored in detail in the scope of this thesis, however, they will play a role a central in research on feminized migration that will be discussed in the next chapter as well as in the empirical analysis in chapter 6. The following section will touch on neoliberalism theory, as it often plays a role in migration studies literature (see next chapter) and a range of critical theory outside of the political economic – offers a more differentiated “era-specific” analysis of the global political economy.

3.6 Neoliberalism and gender

Although there is an argument to be made for a shift in the era of climate crisis, sustainable development goals, and re-emerging populist nationalisms and ambivalence about what form the central tenets of neoliberal hegemony take, many political economists argue that neoliberalism is the dominant political and economic discourse of our time (compare Demirović, 2008). This regime of accumulation, also sometimes referred to as Post-Fordism in political-economic literature (e.g. Chorus, 2013), largely expresses the interests of international capital and transnational firms, with a focus on the unification of the world’s markets (i.e. expansion of the world market) and the protection of shareholder value based on neoclassical (political)economic principles (compare Peet & Hartwick, 2015) and specific regimes of reproductive labor (Chorus, 2013). This includes neoclassical³⁵ state model, in which the state should function as the guardian of the “free market” and the enforcer of flexibilization (precarization) of the national labor market (Candeias, 2007) has become dominant. This connects to the push towards flexibilization and precarization to the above-mentioned contradiction between expanding accumulation and main-

³⁵ Referring to neoclassical economics.

taining social reproduction, as these are also strategies to increase profit margins without increasing productivity.

On the global scale, the neoliberal era has involved unleashing the mobility of capital that Harvey (2001) refers to in his infamous description of the “spatial fix”: In the case of eastern Asia the fixes involve the movement of capital to areas with low labor costs or the movement of “cheap” labor to the sites of production in the form of labor migration (*ibid.*). This can be observed in mass labor migration towards the economic centers of eastern Asia, the simultaneous outsourcing of labor-intensive production to the region’s relative peripheries, the cooperation of states with different industries / capital fractions to exploit low-wage labor, and modern regimes of global care migration (see chapter 4).

There is certainly an argument that such abstract theoretical assertions are unable to do justice to complex, “real-world” social dynamics and remain too abstract. Here I would draw once again on Eagleton (1991) arguing that neoliberalism represents a paradigmatic set of “family resemblances” between context-specific neoliberalisms and not an abstract essence. In this sense, neoliberalism theory can be viewed as a means to identify trends that can then be more closely interrogated with context-specific empirical research.

The neoliberal paradigm also affects gender relations and expresses itself in specific regimes of social reproduction. The “adult worker model” suggests that all able bodied adults, including women, should participate in the labor market (Décieux & Sennewald, 2018). Despite ostensible opening up of the labor market to women, continues to assign women the primary responsibility for reproductive labor, because the narrative of “personal responsibility” pushes reproductive labor (back) into the private sphere which usually entails its feminization (Décieux & Sennewald, 2018; Ludwig, 2007). This leads to a situation in which some women’s ability to enter the labor market is contingent on them being able to afford to pay for reproductive labor or the ability to outsource this labor within the household (compare Parreñas 2008).

Furthermore, the (discursive) devaluation of women and their separation from the sphere of productive labor and placement in the sphere of unpaid reproductive labor allows for even more exploitation through the payment of “women’s wages” (see for example, Wright 2006; Dunaway 2014), another kind of possible “fix” to reduce costs and increase profit margins. However, these trends show large local variations, and theorizing about neoliberalism often starts with a Western-Eurocentric bias. Still, Parreñas’ (2008) position that “cultural notions of gender, (...) are

constituted in the context of global capitalism” is plausible and will explore global-local interactions concerning gender in the empirical chapter.

In the current neoliberal phase, the pressure to expand accumulation leads to the subsuming of reproductive labor / care work under market principles, often as means to solve acute care labor shortages in specific locales. Feminist materialists attribute these shortages to the relative divergence of productivity increases possible between commodity production and the care economy, because the previously mentioned “life serving” nature of reproductive labor limits to productivity increases (Aulenbacher et al., 2018; Soiland, 2012), i.e. waged care work becomes steadily more expensive compared to the production of goods and delivery of non-care services. For example, Lee (2012) describes the various attempts South Korean state “solve” demographic crisis and care labor shortage, including the promotion of transnational marriage. Furthermore, Lee (2012) argues: “With the decline of the welfare state and neoliberal restructuring, public services were under pressure to privatize, whether this involved a transfer to the market or to the family.”, either expanding accumulation or transforming it (back) into unwaged (and usually feminized) labor.

This can be connected to the Vietnamese states arguably neoliberal policies in regard to development and gender, already discussed in chapter two. Strong integration into global production networks and sometimes coercive state interventions to ensure this integration both involve the attraction of foreign capital and the establishment of Vietnam as a site of low-cost manufacturing labor. Furthermore, as Werner (2009) argues, this has involved a restructuring of the state along neoliberal principles including scaling back social services leads to a reprivatization³⁶ of reproductive labor as households are forced to pick up the slack of caring for sick family members and making sure that children are raised and educated.

More concretely for this thesis, Pipier & Lee (2016) argue that academic and policy discussion about the relationship between migration and development has long been dominated by (neoclassical) macro-economic discussions on migration as means to escape/alleviate poverty and the supposed development benefits to host and origin countries of migration. This concept is referred to as the “migration development nexus” and often draws on typically masculinized forms of labor migration. Although it is clear that reproductive labor migration is connected to global hierarchies of wealth and accumulation, the migration development nexus offers a flattened explanation of the complex dynamics surrounding this migration (i.e. by reducing them to economic,

³⁶ Privatization in this context refers to a return to the “private”, household sphere.

job-related factors). Piper and Lee (2016) argue that an analysis of development in the context of marriage migration is incomplete without consideration of neoliberal economic development and consideration of forms of unwaged (reproductive) labor and social practice.

While this thesis uses political economic theory that often puts poverty and precarity at the center of analysis, migration cannot be reduced to simple economic explanations (double-sided sword of the “market mechanism”, aspirations) nor can it be separated from local context. I would furthermore argue that the local or the national are also formed in interaction with the global. Specific social relations while not reducible to global trends certainly cannot be separated from them.

Furthermore, I explicitly attempt while writing this thesis to avoid the reification of neoclassical/neoliberal principles, especially concerning (economic) development, that often involve simple and sanitized explanations of what are in reality overdetermined and deeply social phenomena. Some concepts of neoliberalism theory are useful for the analysis of the modern social transformations that I connect with commodified transnational marriage, and they can furthermore be interrogated based on context-specific empirical research.

3.7 Theorizing structure-agent interaction

Up until this point, this chapter has considered largely macro or structure level theory that attempt to describe broad trends concerning social production and reproduction. However, this thesis is based on empirical interviews with actors/groups of actors that cannot be reduced to macro-theory and seeks to implement a social practice-focused methodology. I find sometimes migration studies literature has an underarticulated conception of agency. Furthermore, the question of how structural power relations are reproduced and what role actors play in this reproduction is an ongoing point of contention between more structuralist political economic theory and post structuralist frameworks. Thus, a clear conception of actors, agency, and the relationship between structure and agency is paramount.

Margaret Archer’s deliberations on structure and agency offer the basis for my analysis of the empirical material and a means to navigate these tensions. Archer (2007) argues the following points:

“1. Structural and cultural properties objectively shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and inter alia possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to

2. *Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as subjectively defined [...].*

3. *Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of agents who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances.*"

(Archer, 2007, p. 17; quoted in Mader, 2013, p. 223)

Based on these premises, one can presume that agents and their ability to act are involuntarily shaped by the structures before and around them, however, that they through their agency simultaneously can reflectively choose their actions despite this conditioning. Thus, while agents have their own causative powers and subjective decision making, structures have their "own momentum" and create "objective coercion" (Mader, 2013, p. 222) for the agents, to use Archer's term. They are conditioned and limited by social power structures, for example gendered expectations concerning reproductive labor, however their specific thought processes and resulting actions, i.e. what they do within these often multi-leveled constraints, is not reducible to structure and furthermore contributes to the change and/or maintenance of structural power relations (Mader, 2013). Thus, as Archer argues and Mader quotes in the title of their article, "conditioning is not determinism" (Archer, 2007, p. 10; quoted in Mader, 2013, p. 219, 222).

Brink (2014), whom I previously mentioned concerning the unpredictability of capitalism due to multifaceted interaction with specific social forces and institutional settings at specific times, suggests a similar and complementary view on actor-structure interaction and social transformation. Brink posits that:

*"Social change has to do with the **structural capacities** of actors to transform their surroundings. The institutional context in which agentive subjects or collective actors move is extremely important, as the term 'structural capacities' suggests. We must therefore assume that different actors have different structural capacities available to them at any given time. The specific ensemble of social relations creates various constellations that condition individual and/or collective actors, providing them with different potentials for action."* (ibid., p. 120).

Brink (2014) implicitly suggests that both individual and collective actors can be considered concerning their structural capacities. Both show different structural capacities to change their surroundings (or situation) based on the social/institutional context in which they exist and the constellation of social relations in which they find themselves, which are time and place specific, that is they are locally specific and change over time.

Furthermore, of the key insights of intersectional theory since its inception has been that multiple power relations intersect in one individual or situation. In other words, as Mader (2013) puts it, actors are multiply positioned, i.e. they occupy multiple social positions, e.g. the roles of wives, mothers and workers, and more abstrusely, identify themselves around their role as a member of

a friend group, or a manga reading club, or as the practitioner of a particular sport. These roles can strengthen, weaken and contradict one another and have different relationships to social relations and structural power (compare Mader 2013), and also hegemonic symbolic representations and discourses (Winker & Degele, 2009). Here I draw on Wright's (2006) application of feminist/poststructuralist theory to materialist theory and argue that the production of subjectivity is never complete and always open to contestation.

As has been made clear, the authors cited above show relative agreement that actors (both individual and collective) are conditioned by structural power relations outside of their control but still have room for maneuver, i.e. potentials for action, and that these actions then go on to shape the very structural relations and structural capacities that condition in the first place (Archer, 2007; Brink, 2014; Mader, 2013). This allows for the theoretical representation of dialectical multidirectional interaction of agency and social relations. And according to Brink (2014), this dialectical relation is an engine of social change over time.

However, Winker & Degele's (2009) framework although it implies similar conclusions has a different theoretical underpinning. The author's (ibid.) framework, based on their interpretation of Bourdieu theory of practice, starts with the assumption that power relations are constantly reproduced and contested by the actors themselves through their actions, which can be ascertained through observable social practice. This focus on observable social practice (praxeological approach) always grounds the analysis back in the actor level.

I argue, as has been made clear in this subsection, that a focus on empirically observable social practice does not intrinsically exclude the usage of materialist and political economic theory for analysis. And in fact, Wright (2006), who is one of the theoretical inspirations for this thesis, uses a broad mixture of theory, drawing on Butler's notions of embodied subjectivity and political-economic notions of exploitation in global production, to analyze the interaction of actors, ideological constructions and the global circuitry of capital based on extensive empirical work.

3.9 Conclusions

This thesis seeks to combine materialist and intersectionality theory using mainly Winker and Degele's (2009) multi-level intersectional framework as a starting point. This should allow a holistic analysis of CTM and the social power relations and socio-economic processes in which it is embedded. I start with the premise the current practice of commodified transnational marriage migration out of Vietnam is shaped on the structural level by world-market negotiated power relations within a global capitalist political economy partially consisting of a system of

nation states. These relations draw on historical power relations but represent a new conflagration that is embedded in regional and global socio-economic transformations that have occurred in what is often referred in critical political economy literature as post-Fordism and more broadly as the neoliberal era. Global capitalism leads to abstract and impersonal power relations with their origins in specific economic forms that in turn interact with other structure-level power relations like heteronormative gendered and racialized power relations. I furthermore use materialist-feminist theory regarding reproductive labor and the household as well as their ties to the “productive labor” of capitalism. Furthermore, I explicitly theorize complex structure-agent interaction as a dialectic and non-deterministic dynamic with agents structural capacities being conditioned by the social power relations around them, while simultaneously opening up possibilities for action that affect the selfsame power relations.

I argue that this is more than just an *a priori* set of conclusions based on my previous work (Hass, 2022; Hass et al., 2019) but a logical way to theoretically embed CTM based on thorough literature work. As chapter 2 should make clear, CTM is embedded in post-socialist transformations and the rise of new international hierarchies of wealth related to global and local changes in the political economy, while the following points to the ways that such an intersectional, multi-levelled and materialist framework complements both recent migration studies research (see chapter 4), theory regarding the global care economy, and allow analysis that can encompass the multi-directional, multi-positional and transnational effects of migration. These base assumptions of my theory are not claims to absolute truth or authority. More on epistemic reflexivity and my approach to it can be found in chapter 5, methodology.

Chapter 4: State of the Art of Relevant Research

4.1 Introduction

Topics such as care work and feminized migration have increasingly entered the mainstream academic debate. Transnational (or cross-border) marriage migration represents a subsection of this trend (Cheng & Choo 2015), as it is intimately related to care work and other forms of (feminized) migration. Marriage migration has become a popular field of research in its own right as well as the center of academic, policy and popular debates worldwide, as mentioned in chapter 1 (Beck-Gernsheim, 2011; Cheng & Choo, 2015; Lee, 2012; Williams, 2012; Yang & Lu, 2010).

Transnational marriage networks in eastern Asia are one of the regional foci in this body of literature, along with marriage migration to North America and the European Union (Beck-

Gernsheim, 2011; Williams, 2012). In both cases the destination countries are generally known as “developed” countries, that is they hold a higher position in multifaceted interstate hierarchies of wealth and power (compare Bair, 2005; Lutz, 2018) This section will give a brief overview of the state of research on the feminization of migration and more specifically transnational marriage migration, especially involving commercial matchmaking, with a focus on eastern Asia, and more specifically, marriage migration from Vietnam to South Korea and Taiwan, especially as they relate to key concepts discussed in the theory chapter like the neoliberal state, global production and accumulation, reproductive or care labor, the household, and actor structural capacities. This corresponds to my empirical research which will be explored more in chapter six.

4.2 Labor Migration the Neoliberal State

Migration within (and between) Eastern and Southeast Asia has been shaped by multiple and overlapping socio-economic transformations in the greater region. CTM is thus embedded in regional and global economic transformations and related to migration processes. These can be partially described using Harvey’s (2001) term of the “spatial fix”. In the case of eastern Asia these “fixes” involve the movement of capital to areas with low labor costs or the movement of low-wage labor to the sites of production in the form of labor migration (ibid.). This can be observed in mass labor migration towards the economic centers of eastern Asia (including South Korea and Taiwan), the simultaneous outsourcing of labor-intensive production to the region’s relative peripheries. Rigg (2016) describes multiple migration circuits of within and out of Southeast Asia including circuits running along inner-regional wealth hierarchies, such as labor migration from neighboring countries into Thailand, as well as interregional such as labor migration from southeast to northeast Asia (ibid.)

As the NICs³⁷ became some of the wealthier countries in the world, they also became desirable destinations for migrants. Both the post-socialist transformations in China (PRC) and Vietnam, neoliberal reforms in the face of debt and inflation in states like Indonesia and the Philippines created situations of precarity that contributed to a large pool of migrants willing to move abroad to earn higher wages (Cheng & Choo, 2015; Piper & Lee, 2016). Furthermore, huge flows of capital from Japan and the NICs towards Southeast Asia and the PRC starting in the late 1980s (H. Wang & Chang, 2002; H.-Z. Wang & Chang, 2009; H.-Z. Wang & Hsiao, 2009) are indicative of the massive relocation of industrial production to this region because of lower average wages. These transformations have fostered inequalities of wealth and economic hierarchies

³⁷ Acronym Newly Industrialized Countries, referring to Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea.

within the region and within states and communities, and interconnectedness between states, regions and communities (compare H.-Z. Wang & Chang, 2009). Scholars identify these inequalities as a primary condition of labor migration and a major factor in transnational marriage migration (compare Cheng & Choo, 2015; Rigg, 2016), including commodified transnational marriage migration out of Vietnam. Such transformations have also involved concomitant and often contradictory shifts, alterations, and renewals of social power structures.

That the conditions in which such marriage migration takes place are at least partially the product of rapid transformation in the post-socialist states of Vietnam and China (People's Republic), is broadly confirmed in the literature on marriage migration, underling to the importance of social transformations (Wang & Hsiao, 2009; Cheng & Choo, 2015). Furthermore, Choo and Cheng (2015) argue that Vietnam's (& China's) state-led transition to a market-oriented and world-market integrated economy led to both an erosion of the state's provision of social services and to inequality between those living in urban centers and those living in rural ones (refer back to Chapter 2 for more details). This mirrors scholarly descriptions of neoliberal state policy discussed in the previous chapter.

In the Vietnamese case this means as the state continues its policy of rapid industrialization and integration into global production networks it undertakes what are seen as necessary reforms to be competitive and further these goals. This includes the reduction of social services that structurally pushes reproductive labor back towards the household, and a new discursive portrayal of proper womanhood coming from the state. This reprivatization of care (and its concomitant refeminization) seems to be part of Vietnamese state strategy since Doi Moi (Hoang, 2020; Werner, 2009; thesis chapters 2 & 3). Many authors have connected the erosion of social services to urban to rural migration and state strategies to reestablish/maintain the household a site of care and cooperation in the face of increasing precarity as byproducts of post-socialist and neoliberal transformations in eastern Asia (Haemmerli et al., 2021; M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014; Ramamurthy, 2020).

Relatedly, Cheng & Choo (2015) in their extensive literature review of research on domestic and marriage migration in Southeast and East Asia, invite future researchers to investigate questions such as "How has the marketization of post-socialist economies such as China and Vietnam transformed their positions within the global political order and shaped migration flows?" (ibid., p. 663) and more broadly they ask what factors shape state policy towards migration, e.g. why country-specific patterns like almost no marriage migration to Hong Kong but still domestic la-

bor migration. Specifically, the state-led integration of Vietnam into the world market and its effects on transnational marriage migration are taken up in chapters 2 and 6.

4.3 Feminization of migration

“A common element in all care work migration is an initial situation in which wo/men from countries that are relatively poor, and lacking in social infrastructure (social protection, free access to health care and education), move as part of a global labour market of commodified domestic and care work into the households of more prosperous countries. This movement can be temporary or permanent, legal or illegal. As a rule, many of these wo/men are well educated, but not exactly trained for the job they are doing; their wages are lower than those of autochthonous care workers. Thanks to asymmetrical socioeconomic conditions, these migrants prefer care work abroad to unemployment – or at best low-paid work – in the country of origin.” (Lutz, 2018, p. 579)

The feminization of migration has become a key area research in the field of migration studies (Piper, 2005). Some of the central insights of this burgeoning field of research on feminized migration and migration for care work include the following: A large portion of labor migrants and migrants world-wide are female although feminized migration has received comparatively little scholarly attention. While migrant women often come from countries poorer than the ones that they migrate to, they usually do not come from the poorest countries. This is mirrored in domestic migration, as it is usually not the poorest who migrate because migration requires means (financial, social, cultural capital). However, recruitment agencies and the institutionalization of migration have opened up migration to groups who would on their own have difficulty accessing migration including poorer women, although exploitative practices are prevalent (debt-based schemes that can be so extreme as to likening indentured servitude) (Parreñas, 2008; Lutz 2018, regarding debt-based migration schemes see Bélanger & Wang, 2013).

Furthermore, women often migrate for jobs in domestic or care labor, and this regime of migration is sometimes referred to as the global care economy (compare Lutz, 2018). Parreñas (2008) argues that the globalization of care is fostered by wealthier countries often facing deficits of care workers creating migration policies to attract foreign workers. This relates to the dynamics of increasing relative price of care work combined with neoliberal state policy that reduces state investment in publicly provided care work discussed in section 3.6.

More structuralist approaches connect the global care economy to the feminization of labor as an exploitation strategy within global capitalism (compare chapter 3). Lutz (2018) also argues that the burgeoning (and feminized) worldwide care work sector is partially caused by neoliberal (chapter 3.6 for a more detailed discussion of neoliberalism) withdrawal from the provisioning of care in Western social democracies (A.K.A. austerity) and a continuing non-involvement of the

state in institutional care giving in richer countries without a pronounced welfare state, like the USA and South Korea, in combination with demographic changes (compare *ibid.*).

In terms of global divisions of labor and migration, aging populations, changing to societies and pressure to reduce the cost of care have generated a massive demand for care workers in the global North and relevant economic centers (compare Lutz 2018). In the eastern Asian context, this demand that is often met by female migrants from the relative economic peripheries including Southeast Asia (Lan, 2008; Lee, 2012). Care deficits are also argued to be a byproduct of neoliberal state policy involving the restructuring, dismantlement and privatization of public and social services (Lee, 2012; Haemmerli et al. 2022), which pushes the responsibility for reproductive/care labor back to individuals and the household and leaves them little choice but organize reproductive labor themselves, which involves usually involve its feminization (Dunaway 2014, Nguyen & Locke 2014). States, firms and households with the economic means have found different strategies of provisioning care through migrant women (compare Choo & Cheng 2015; Lee 2012) in many kinds of care migration including but not limited to domestic labor migration and marriage migration. See subsection 4.6 below for more on demographics.

However, migration studies has been characterized by approaches critical of economic reductionism. Migrant reality often defies simple differentiation and categorizations as different modes of migration are often interwoven (e.g. multiple migration attempts, see Bélanger and Wang 2013). An a more abstract level, feminist migration research has shown that “migratory processes have both reinforced and challenged hierarchical gender relations” (Kim 2010: 719) as well as criticizing androcentric and heteronormative assumptions in migration and development research, for example, the reduction of female migrants to the “trailing wife” who follows her labor migrant husband (Bastia 2014). Postcolonial feminist critics have pointed out that women’s agency has often been ignored by previous research (Kim 2010).

For example, in the case of marriage migrants, even though female marriage migrants report a wide variety of motivations for engaging in the process of transnational marriage, scholars gravitate towards economic and objectifying explanations (Kim, 2010). Part of this lack of focus on agency can be attributed to more structuralist takes on trends in migration. It is not just economic interests but the aspirations of migrants that drive commodified transnational marriage migration (compare Cheng & Choo 2015, Hass et al., 2019). Marriage migrants have complex motivations that are most often difficult to reduce to something as straightforward as the desire to provide remittances to their families, and these motivations interact with economic, political and ideological structures (Cheng & Choo, 2015; H.-Z. Wang & Hsiao, 2009).

Furthermore, there are other types of migration besides care labor migration that relate to reproductive labor and the commodification of intimacy. Migrants working as entertainers and/or sex workers, and migration networks related to this work, also perform intimate labor (compare Cheng & Choo, 2015). Marriage migrants, who straddle the categories of labor and family migration, are even more difficult to fit into pre-existing categories of care labor migration, although both care and labor play central role in the practice of especially commodified transnational marriage. Cheng & Choo (2015) argue that the boundaries between different kinds of migration broadly related to care are often fluid. They (ibid.) furthermore point out a paucity of studies that “turn their attention to marriage migrants’ engagement in diverse fields of paid work and to how this engagement is organized by the local labor market and legal systems as well as by women’s unpaid carework.” (ibid., p. 663), i.e. to the interaction of the multiple roles that shape marriage migrant reality often including both that of wife and of worker.

4.4 What characterizes transnational marriage migration?

In the introduction (chapter 1), I have already briefly laid out my definition of commodified transnational marriage migration, and pointed out that the study of marriage migration in eastern Asia is a popular subtopic of research. In this section, I will briefly describe some of the key characteristics of marriage with a specific focus on eastern Asia.

Lutz (2018) argues that care migration generally moves up the gradient of global wealth, i.e. migrants generally move to wealthier locales for work as described in the previous sections. Concerning marriage migration, the concept of hypergamy describes a similar function. Hypergamy refers to the direction of (marriage) migration up global hierarchies of wealth, from poorer to richer locales, as a form of attempted upward social mobility (Constable, 2004; Lutz, 2018; H.-Z. Wang & Hsiao, 2009). However, Constable (2004) for instance, seeks to complicate our definition of hypergamy pointing out that such mobility can also be lateral or downward, when one considers factors like “class, lifestyle, education, social status or geographical mobility (...)” (ibid., p. 3), e.g. marriage migrants can also lose class privileges and cultural/social capital through migration, or as Lutz (2018) points out, their education / job training may not match their employment in the destination country. Class and CTM will be discussed more in section 6.3.2.

However, the concept of hypergamy is ostensibly gender neutral. However, as with feminized care migration, (commodified) transnational marriage migration usually involves specifically

women from less wealthy states moving to their husbands' locations of residence in more wealthy states. The term patrilocality describes this gendered structure of marriage migration in which it is women who move to their husband's locale of residence (compare Yang & Lu 2010).

Concerning transnational marriage migration in eastern Asia number of common characteristics can be identified that go beyond the general trends of hypergamy and patrilocality and are also applicable in the case of CTM out of Vietnam. Lu & Yang (2010) identify them as mediated marriages, i.e. migration for the purpose of marriage, and point to the commodification of this mediation (see next section for more details). Further, they (ibid.) claim that commodified transnational marriage migration is more tolerated in destination countries than for example "*mail-order brides*" in the West (although government bans in Taiwan & Vietnam may contradict this claim (compare H.-H. Tseng 2015)). The authors (Lu & Yang, 2010) also identify extremely restrictive migration policies in destination countries, in which marriage migration is one of the few possibilities for permanent settlement, although Beck-Gernsheim (2011) points to a similar trend in North-South marriage migration across the globe.

Although the globality vs. locality of this trend is contentious, Wang & Hsiao (2009) point out social pressure to marry as a major characteristic of marriages in eastern Asia, e.g. it is often the negative social consequences of non-marriage that push people to marry. This is especially true for the men in northeast Asian countries seeking wives abroad (H.-Z. Wang & Tien, 2009). This topic will be explored in more detail in chapter 6.

Furthermore, they (Wang & Hsiao, 2009) point out cohabitation with other adult family members as another common features of eastern Asian transnational marriage and connect this to the importance of the family for providing care for the young, the elderly, and the disabled in destination-country societies. The authors (ibid.) connect this to Confucian traditions of family life and "proper" womanhood, care deficits, and the reliance of the relevant states on familial and often feminized labor, once again at least partially mirroring more general theory around feminized care migration and the neoliberal state.

Wang & Hsiao (2009) also refer to co-ethnic marriages, i.e. transnational marriage migration between (perceived) similar ethnic groups in different locales, e.g. ethnic Hakka Chinese marriage migration to Taiwan from Indonesia (Wang & Hsiao, 2009). Co-ethnic marriages are often simultaneously hypergamous, i.e. in the previous example usually Hakka Chinese women migrate from less-wealthy Indonesia to marry men in more-wealthy Taiwan (Lu, 2005). Although

this is an important topic in overall marriage migration research, it is unclear to what extent co-ethnic marriage is applicable to CTM out of Vietnam (see chapter 6 for more details).

Some scholars have accurately pointed out that “South-South” marriage migration, that is marriage migration within the global South, has received relatively little academic attention (Bastia & Piper, 2019). Depending on the definition of global South used, this could also include the CTM migration that is the topic of this thesis. However, because of the relative “developed” status of the destination countries and the relative “developing” status of the origin country, I argue that while marriage migration out of Vietnam to South Korea and Taiwan may occur in a geographical sense outside what is often considered the global North (i.e. Europe and North America), the economic hierarchies that undergird it are indicative of the category of South-North migration. Furthermore, a wide range of scholars researching migration in eastern Asia treat the NICs, or at least South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, as part of the global North (e.g. Constable, 2009; Tseng, 2015). However, this conclusion requires additional research and contextualization. I do not address the complex academic debates about the definition, usefulness and scope of the concept “global South” in this thesis.

Of all of the (arguably) context-specific trends in eastern Asian marriage migration, it is the commodification of matchmaking that is most contentious in popular and academic discourse and raises questions about local-global interconnections on the scholarly level.

4.5 Commodification

Scholars like Constable (2009) and Wang & Chang (2009) have investigated the relationships between migration, capitalist processes and social relations, and the myriad of other institutions, practices and social power relations involved, especially gendered power-relations. This includes an increasing interest in the ways that “social relations have become evermore geographically dispersed, impersonal, mediated by and implicated in broader political-economic or capitalist processes.” (Constable 2009, p.49). Wang & Hsiao (2009) argue that “commercialized” transnational marriages as well as domestic labor migration and sex work migration connect “intimate and personal relations to global political and economic processes” (Wang & Hsiao, 2009, p. 11)

One such process is often referred to as commodification. The commodification of intimacy also relates feminist materialist theory, care labor deficits and neoliberal state policy as described in chapter 3 that shows contradictory dynamics. While neoliberal state policy often results in the

outsourcing of reproductive labor back to the household, reproductive labor also increasingly becomes a commodified product that can be bought on the market (compare Chorus, 2013; Aulenbacher et al., 2018).

Commodified transnational marriage migration is characterized by both sides of this contradictory dynamic. Concerning integration into the market most of these eastern Asian transnational marriages are mediated by various kinds of commercialized brokers and brokerage networks and involve a very short period of courtship (Lu & Yang 2010). This leads to the argument that marriage migration has become monetized or *commodified* (Constable, 2009; H. Wang & Chang, 2002; H.-Z. Wang & Chang, 2009). Wang & Chang (2009) argue that “international marriage and related activities are gradually being transformed to enhance profits to the various intermediaries” which they call the “process of commodification” (Wang & Chang, 2009, p. 213), although payment for matchmaking is not a new practice in the region (Lu, 2005; Sandel, 2015). They also argue on the binational scale that global capital investment in Vietnam through Taiwan has indirectly contributed to the emergence of the commodified transnational marriage market (Wang & Chang, 2009), i.e. that these capital flows and business relationships were a precondition or enabling factor for the creation of matchmaking networks.

Constable (2009) connects these trends to the commodification of “intimate and personal relations”, which has become a key topic in transnational marriage migration literature and the broader field of feminized migration. Different social practices, services, and roles which existed hitherto outside of capitalist logics become “bought or sold; packaged and advertised; fetishized, commercialized, or objectified; consumed; assigned values and prices) and linked in many cases to transnational mobility and migration (...)” (ibid., p. 49). Piper & Lee (2016) in reference to Constable (2009) go on to say that:

“Women providing reproductive labor of this nature engage in global processes of exchanging, buying, selling, objectifying, and consuming commodified forms of intimacy. Constable borrows the latter notion [commodification] from Marx, defining commodification as a ‘process of assigning market value to goods or services that previously existed outside of the market.’” (Piper & Lee, 2016, p. 482; Constable 2009, p. 50 quoted in Piper & Lee, 2016, p. 482)

The complexity of the commodification in this case reflects the diverse and complex nature of CTM. The practice involves the interaction of many different actors under a wide variety of ever-changing circumstances. These actors range from for-profit brokerage agencies who function as formal firms (Wang & Chang, 2002; ibid. 2009) to informal brokerage agents, networks of agents, and service providers. Even marriage migrants themselves take part in processes of

commodification. For example, Beck-Gernsheim (2011) describes a marriage migrant with the pseudonym Lily who after a transnational marriage settled in Taiwan and took on the role of broker connecting men from her husband's social networks to an Indonesian matchmaker in her hometown. As compensation her travel expenses to Indonesia were paid and she sometimes received the distinct red thank-you envelope of cash³⁸ for successful matches (Beck-Gernsheim, 2011, p. 64).

H.-H. Tseng (2015) has also shown in their analysis of the brokerage ban in Taiwan, the complicated and fluid positionality of marriage migrants that goes far beyond simple binaries of victim and exploiter and untenable universalization's (e.g. of womanhood). Brokers both exploit surplus value and act as important partners in many women's search for a "successful" transnational marriage, while the interests and worldviews of marriage migrants may not align with those of workers women's right's oriented NGO's (ibid.).

4.6 (De)Constructing Demographics

Demographics have been a key point of interest for researchers (as well as the media and policy makers) in relation to transnational marriage migration, as part of a larger discourse around crises of care labor. Wang & Hsiao (2009) and & Lu & Yang (2010) point to low birth rates, falling marriage rates/high divorces rates and aging societies in destination countries, i.e. demographic pressures, as a key factor engendering cross-border marriage. Wang & Hsiao (2009) identify the so-called marriage squeeze as a key form of demographic pressure.

Marriage squeezes are defined as situations in which individuals find it difficult to find a marriage partner although they would like one. A marriage squeeze can be caused e.g., by overall gender imbalance in a certain area or because of other social factors (Wang & Hsiao, 2009), e.g., a lack of desirable partners. Rapidly aging populations are attributed to low fertility rates (ibid.), i.e., birth rates below the replacement rate, especially in the four "Asian Tigers" and Japan. This, as Wang and Hsiao (2009) also point out, can be attributed to existing marriage squeeze, although starting a family and childbirth can of course occur without marriage. However, social expectations concerning marriage and childbirth remain rigid and presumably having children outside of marriage remains stigmatized.

Along similar lines, Yang and Lu (2010) list "delayed or no marriages, extremely low fertility rates, high divorce rates, and skewed sex ratios (...) in some countries" (p. 16) as well as rural to

³⁸ This recalls payment in "traditional" regional matchmaking practices. See chapter 6 for more details.

urban migration as the causes of the “male squeeze and a chronic shortage of care labor in these aging societies” (ibid., p. 17). The *squeeze* really seems to consist of a plethora of men being unable to find a wife that they view as marriageable and/or who wants to marry them.

However, falling birth rates regardless of their cause are real and can be the source of serious social problems. For instance, at the time of writing South Korea continued to break the world record of lowest fertility rate reaching 0.78 expected births per woman in 2022 which is far below the replacement rate meaning that without immigration the population will significantly shrink and become older on average. This puts pressure on financing of the pension system, as it is currently organized, as more seniors draw a pension and fewer wage-laborers pay into the pension system³⁹. The way that these demographic transformations and solutions to them are portrayed often reproduces specific ideological imaginaries and social inequalities and power relations.

In the South Korean context, scholars like Lee (2012) problematize overly demographic explanations of falling birth and marriage rates instead pointing to structural/socio-economic changes, such as the fact that many women have chosen not to marry because the traditional family model that puts wives into the role of care-giver for the old and young has become less popular and less tenable for women engaged in wage labor (ibid.).

“In other words, the pressures of trying to reconcile care responsibilities and participation in the labor market underlie the declining rates of marriage and fertility in Korea and have given rise to a crisis of social reproduction.” (Lee, 2012, p. 185)

And in fact, many scholars underline that women in destination countries are becoming more educated, entering the job market at greater rates, becoming more independent, and raising their expectations in regard to potential partners, thus moving the focus away from a discourse focused on victimhood of men who cannot find a willing wife (Bélanger & Flynn, 2018; Lee, 2012; Sandel, 2015; H.-Z. Wang & Tien, 2009). Increasing numbers of women pushing out marriage or not marrying altogether also leads to an increasingly “tight” marriage market (Piper & Lee, 2016).

Wang & Tien (2009) also find demographic explanations suspect and argue that there is an ideological construction of this lack of brides, namely what is supposedly lacking are controllable, “traditional” women willing to marry men who desire a “traditonal role” and/or who, using Sandel’s case study of transnational marriage in Taiwan as an example, “believe they are unattrac-

³⁹ See e.g. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/22/s-korea-breaks-record-for-worlds-lowest-fertility-rate-again>
Accessed on 22.02.2023

tive to Taiwan's educated 'city' women" (Sandel, 2015, p. 68). Here we see the roles that discursive imaginaries concerning gender play in the construction of demographic crisis.

Another contributing factor to these care deficits and new forms of care migration are the massive changes to the economies of the NICs and Japan and the concomitant social transformations they have brought forth. The "development" of these states has led to increased female education and labor force participation. Scholarly work such as Cheng and Choo (2015) or Sandel (2015) have connected the ascendance of the dual earner nuclear family as a middle-class norm to the emergence of a reproductive labor, or care, deficit because duties that would "traditionally" be borne by a non-working wife must be otherwise dealt with by the couple who both engage in wage labor (compare the "adult worker model" as a characteristic of neoliberalism described in chapter 3).

Many men in destination countries also confront social expectation to care for their parents, at least in economic sense (Piper & Lee, 2016). Traditionally, at least in terms of Confucian tradition, general responsibility of care for parents in law would be taken over by the daughter in law (compare Werner, 2009; chapter 2). As this is for some increasingly unfeasible, also men with care responsibilities often turn to foreign domestic workers and foreign wives to fill the care deficit (compare Lee, 2012). Furthermore, Bélanger (2016b) shows that also in marriage migrant sending communities, the increasing untenability of non-working daughter's in law to complete care work has led to unmarried men, who are no longer seen as marriageable, taking over the responsibility of caring for their parents. These examples point to gender-mediated provisioning of reproductive labor that does not always fit into more abstract theoretical models.

4.7 Precarity and Household strategies

For these mostly female migrants, marriage migration comes with both opportunities and risks. Piper & Lee (2016) criticize that marriage migration has been often left out of any conversation on the migration-development nexus (theory on the linkages between migration and development) especially because it does not fit into neoliberal economic models that portray temporary labor migration as beneficial for "migrants", sending, and receiving countries. They (ibid. 2016) go on to say that "while migrating for work has been presented as a panacea for the material insecurity pervading the Global South, Southeast Asian women who seek to escape economic and social insecurity confront an entirely different set of insecurities [in destination countries]" (ibid. p. 486, my brackets). While marriage migration is often the result precarity, it also can result in distinct forms precarity (e.g. social & legal precarity) (Piper & Lee, 2016). The authors criticize

that most research has focused on precarity in the labor market, despite the fact that precarity is multilayered and multifaceted (ibid.) and migrants in general often experience a “precarious state of being and living” (ibid., 480).

Piper and Lee (2016) invite researchers to see crisis and precarity as multi-sited and multidirectional. Various actors (e.g. migrants, sending and receiving states) have radically different perspectives on crisis, and especially states attempts to solve crisis co-construct the conditions that create multi-sited migrant precarity: precarity as both a contributing factor to decisions to migrate and the result of specific migration policies in receiving countries. Precarity is transnational and multi-layered, cannot be reduced to employment opportunities in one place, and it is embedded in dynamics of capitalist development (ibid.). However, there are key differences between the precarity of potential marriage migrants in their origin countries, and the precarity of marriage migrants in destination countries (more on this in chapter 5).

Related to precarity, householding has become a popular concept in migration research. Transnational migration is often connected to different forms of householding⁴⁰ as familial networks in which households are reproduced and productive and reproductive labor as well as resources are shared even over great distances (Lee, 2022; M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014; Ramamurthy, 2020). In fact, these distances between household members are often the result of labor migration and exist for the purpose of householding/social reproduction, as in the case of what Ramamurthy (2020) refers to as “rural-to-urban distress migration” (ibid., p. 86) in which migration to urban areas occurs in order to earn income to support the rural household. The term global householding was coined by Douglass (2006) to describe such householding across borders, and has since become popular in migration research (Ramamurthy, 2020). For instance, Lee (2022) found strong evidence of global householding strategies in their research, for instance, grandparent migration for the purpose of unpaid childcare. The topic of (global) householding will be taken up in more detail in chapter 6.

4.8 Conclusions

There are many different and often-interwoven portrayals of the female marriage migrant in academic research, policy, and the news media: as a victim of insecurity, as a seeker of security, as an opportunity-taker, as a potential source of disruption, as “lewd” women etc. So many that these portrayals can become difficult to deconstruct, despite the relatively large qualitative empirical research done in this field, e.g. Lee (2022), Sandel (2015), H.-H. Tseng (2015), H.-Z-

Wang & Hsiao (2009) etc., as well as the large body of theoretical work on relevant topics (see chapter 3). Chapter 6 will also delve into the self-perception of marriage migrants, as well as other actors involved, taking a more in depth look at the published empirical work of others as part of the analysis of my empirical research.

Much current research on migration and reproductive labor, as well as research specifically focused on marriage migration, grapples with the analysis and theorization of complex structure – agent interaction. These call for dynamic theoretical perspectives that can incorporate the multi-directionality, multiple positionalities, and intersecting power structures involved with marriage migration (out of Vietnam).

New perspectives focusing on precarity, security/insecurity and householding do a lot to analyze the nexus of individual, household and group behavior related to migration, as they relate to and negotiate macro-economic and macro-social change. These concepts could help to articulate collective needs and livelihood strategies, for example on the household level. However, social relations in a broader sense, such as those related to dynamics of capitalist “development”, remain relevant as explanatory frameworks, and offer a starting point for analysis that can be interrogated based on the empirical material.

As this summary shows, the political economic and feminist materialist theory discussed in chapter 3 is very much part of the academic discourse concerning feminized migration, care migration and transnational marriage migration. Concepts such as the adult worker model and neoliberal dynamics, like the withdrawal of the state from the provisioning of social services, are present in the literature on (commodified) transnational marriage migration, and can be a useful starting point for context specific analysis. The following chapter addresses the methodology of this thesis, before the analysis of the empirical material is portrayed in chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In the following chapter I will address the methodology of this thesis. This includes describing the empirical data set, its limitations, and related issues of research ethics. The second section

addresses my epistemological background and approach as it relates to this thesis. The third section describes in greater detail Winker & Degele's (2009) multi-level intersectional analysis as a methodological framework for the analysis of the empirical material and my adjustments to it.

5.2 Empirical data set, limitations and research ethics

The majority of my empirical data set was gathered by a research group during the KNOTS Summer School/Field Trip 2019 (Hass et al., 2019) in the province of Cần Thơ City in Southern Vietnam. The KNOTS Project was a cooperation between 6 South East Asian and European universities for the purpose of exploring transdisciplinary research methodologies, as well as teaching and learning methods with a focus on “development” in South East Asia (KNOTS, 2019). Within the framework of the KNOTS project, I participated a summer school in Ho Chi Minh City involving a research trip organized by colleagues from the Ho Chi Minh City⁴¹ Open University.

The members of my research group (both MA & PhD students and faculty) investigated transnational marriage migration, partially in order to try out and reflect on transdisciplinarity in research that we had addressed in the summer school. The empirical material includes eleven individual & group interviews, two participatory observation protocols, and two translated primary-source texts, a number of photographs, as well as my research journal from the field trip and current research journal. We also wrote a report on the research that was then published on the KNOTS website (see Hass et al., 2019).

After beginning initial work with the first round of empirical material (literature review & coding), an additional five anonymized Vietnamese-language interviews were provided to me by a colleague, Tuan Huynh Quoc, who had previously done research on the topic in Taiwan and who was also part of the KNOTS research group. Due to financial constraints, I selected one interview for translation and to serve as a comparison to my group's empirical data. The participants in the KNOTS research were determined in by different actors involved in the planning of the field trip (e.g. colleagues at the Ho Chi Minh Open University and The Vietnamese Women's Union of Cần Thơ Province) while Tuan Huynh Quoc found his participants through Vietnamese emigrant networks in Taiwan.

The origin and development of the research brings with it a few caveats in terms of its reliability. Although we were supervised by a university professor and multiple experienced researchers, the

⁴¹ Also abbreviated as HCMC in this text.

empirical research was largely completed by students with varying levels of experience. In addition to this inexperience, we were not able to record any of our interviews and had to rely on handwritten notes. Furthermore, the language skills of the researchers varied creating language barriers. Due to the Vietnamese language barrier between the majority of the research group and the interview partners, most information gathered came through two translators who had little research experience, although there were two experienced Vietnamese advisors accompanying use as well as a few Vietnamese speakers of varying levels of proficiency in the research group. Therefore, the notes of each interview do not contain a complete, word-for-word record of each conversation, and translation problems as well as misunderstandings cannot be ruled out.

Language and institutional context continued as a limitation for me throughout the research and writing process. -For instance, the literature review was shaped by my embeddedness in specific institutional contexts. I am only able to read German and English language sources. Furthermore, my embeddedness in a German-speaking university has also significantly shaped my approach (e.g. Winker & Degele's (2009) book is in German and reflects German-language academic discourses concerning intersectionality). Most unfortunately, I was unable to directly read Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese language sources, which also has certainly influenced the knowledge and viewpoints that I have been exposed to and limited possible insights.

Regarding political influence, the research field trip was partly organized and highly influenced by the Vietnamese Women's Union in Cần Thơ Province. The Women's Union is considered one of the mass organizations Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), although they certainly have their own interests and agendas (Hoang, 2020). During our research we were often accompanied by officials of the Women's Union or sometimes conducted interviews in their facilities or local government, that is local CPV facilities. This certainly had an influence on the selection and the openness of our interview partners. However, it is doubtful that we would have gained the same level of access without their facilitation, and the help of colleagues from HCMC Open University. The situation makes it difficult to determine to what extent our research was influenced by the agendas of political organizations (See CT1 & 2 for statements by leaders of the Women's Union).

Another limitation is brevity. The research was gathered over the course of five days and finalized over a few weeks. This brevity puts limits on the depths of our research and did not allow for significant preparation or the development of relationships of trust with the interviewees. This affected the scope of information shared with the research group. Furthermore, most of the

interviews were group interviews which probably affected the scope of topics that interview partners were willing to discuss due to the proximity of their peers.

Furthermore, because of the location of the research (Southern Vietnam) and accessibility, most of our interviews are with marriage migrants who left their husbands (whether officially or unofficially) and returned to Vietnam and the parents of marriage migrants. We interviewed only two prospective marriage migrants and one current marriage migrant. On the positive side, the qualitative research thus allows us specific insight into the lived-realities of separated marriage migrants and marriage migrant's families, however, it also limits and shapes the viewpoints present.

In terms of research ethics, the interviewees were paid for their participation. This is not in itself problematic; however, I was not involved in the process and unable to assure that the payment was equitable and that all participants were clearly informed about their rights as participants and what would later happen to their data, i.e. that the research was conducted ethically. The same applies to the five anonymized interviews provided to me by a colleague.

I seek through anonymization of participants using randomly assigned letters and largely the removal of specific location data from descriptions of and quotes from the interviews to ensure privacy and lack of traceability for interview partners. Furthermore, the original interview materials are securely stored, password protected, and will remain unpublished. Concerning political officials their official job titles might leave them partially traceable. I justify this different treatment because the political officials were acting in an official capacity as part of their employment and at least presumably engaging in publicity work, unlike the other interviewees.

Although the original empirical research gathered during the KNOTS Summer School and field trip offers a valuable basis for my master's thesis, the case-study-specific empirical data set and its breadth are limited in addition to the already listed factors affecting the reliability of the data. Because of these reliability issues, I sought out additional empirical material from a colleague (see above) and rely heavily on secondary sources.

5.3 Epistemology and critical reflexivity

The concrete starting point of analysis in this research is observable social practice and context-specific data which can be best found in qualitative empirical field research such as interviews, observations, and text analysis. The interviews and other empirical materials offer a window into

the social practice, lived-reality and ideological imaginaries through the experiences and portrayals of the actors. This implies a focus on actor agency, real lived experience, and viewpoints from the margins as an epistemological necessity that postcolonial and feminist research demands (KNOTS, 2020). This also contributed to my decision to Winker & Degele's "intersectional multi-level analysis" (Winker & Degele, 2009) as framework especially for analysis. However, as the theory chapter made clear, the theoretical framework of this thesis is strongly influenced by political-economic and feminist materialist theory supported by relevant context-specific research. However, I argue an empirically focused analysis serves to interrogate and complicate the theoretical framework, and that this also allows for the production of valuable results.

Due to my specific academic background, ground-theory has also inspired my framework. However, I will not be following a specific set of grounded theory methods, rather my previous qualitative research experience has been influenced by exposure to grounded theory and this has brought with it certain methodological principles, such as the theoretical sample and an "all is data" approach (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010). This fits well to my situation because the research and writing process has, due to previous usage of the materials for other projects (such as the research seminar of my master's program) and multiple phases of the MA thesis writing process, involved a natural process of coding, analysis, and recoding. The circular process of abstraction and concretization accompanied this long and multi-phase writing and analysis process mirrors critical realist approaches to gaining knowledge. This likens the critical-realist process of concretization and abstraction (compare Jäger & Springler, 2015). Furthermore, as the description of the empirical research made clear, my thinking has been shaped by exposure to transdisciplinarity theory.

My methodological approach similarly involves a number of different elements that I have gathered over the course of my academic career that I find essential and/or beneficial to this research enterprise. A large part of my academic career has been spent in exposure to feminist and post/decolonial theory. This has impressed on me the importance of reflecting on my positionality and more broadly engaging in a process of critical reflexivity throughout my work and especially in the methods section, although self-reflection in itself does not change power relations, positionality, nor produce neutral objectivity (KNOTS, 2020). In the terms of Haraway (1988), my knowledge and place in knowledge production are both situated and partial, i.e. subjective, and this will be reflected on further. I find it an epistemological imperative to seriously interrogate my own base assumptions using the empirical material. Researchers also have specific so-

cial positions that limit the knowledge they can produce, despite the fact that they hold such a powerful position in the process of knowledge production. Epistemic reflexivity is not only an ethical necessity within the unequal power relations of knowledge production, but also a means to work out questions and contradictions in the empirical material and analysis.

Furthermore, as the SOA chapter has made clear, post-colonial and feminist scholars have strongly criticized often androcentric and Eurocentric trends in migration studies arguing the women are often ignored or placed into pre-determined roles by researchers and that the agency of individuals is often ignored. It is clear that my research also should be critically examined and reflected, especially concerning the distance (geographic, linguistic, lived-reality) between me as an academic at a global North university and both the interview partners, and transnational marriage migrants out of Vietnam in general.

On the other hand, during the empirical research our research group consisted of a multi-national group coming from six different universities in Europe and Southeast Asia and included colleagues from Vietnam with research experience concerning transnational marriage migration. Furthermore, we consistently reflected our research process including research ethics and positionality before, during and after the research (compare Hass et al., 2019).

This reflective process was shaped by the KNOTS program, which was focused on mutual learning and transdisciplinary methods. Although there are multiple approaches using the same label, the KNOTS program and my master's program were shaped by an emancipatory transdisciplinarity that seeks to overcome inequalities and hierarchies in the production of knowledge by attempting to flatten these hierarchies. An emancipatory transdisciplinary research project should put the hitherto "research subjects" at the center of the knowledge production process with the research participants actively shaping the development of the research interest, question and goals (compare e.g. Dannecker & Heis, 2020). Due to time and structural constraints, my research group was unable to implement such a project, but we were heavily engaged with transdisciplinary concepts during the research project. I hope that the reflective process of this diverse group as well as my own reflexivity helps to deepen the knowledge produced and increase its social relevance.

One concrete result of my group's reflective process was our interview strategy. We divided the group into two with one group implementing structured interviews with the questions determined beforehand and the other group implementing semi-structured interviews in which the interests of the interview partners guided the conversation. When possible both groups interviewed differ-

ent interview partners from the same group (i.e. parents of marriage migrants in one location) in order to allow comparison of the results during the structured and semi-structured interviews. This allows for the comparison of which topics were of interests to the researchers and which topics were focused on by the interview partners. In this we sought to mimic some of the aspirations of participant-focused transdisciplinary research by at least providing for comparability and the space for interview partners to guide the interviews themselves.

Still, it should be clear to the reader that the base assumptions of my theory are not claims to absolute truth or authority, and furthermore, based on the limitations of my research I do not make the claim that conclusions produced are socially relevant for involved actors. If anything, I can only hope that the conclusions can help to stimulate academic debate that has the potential to identify and shape emancipatory policy. To this end, upon completion of the thesis I will share it and my materials (excluding Tuan Huynh Quoc's interviews) with all members of the KNOTS 2019 fieldtrip 7 research group and seek to publish key conclusions in an open access format.

5.4 Multilevel intersectional analysis

The following section will give a brief overview of Winker & Degele's (2009) multi-level intersectional analysis, which this thesis uses as a methodological framework. In order to analyze social inequality, the authors (*ibid.*) propose a three-level model for quantitative empirical analysis. Following Pierre Bourdieu, Winker & Degele (*ibid.*) consider social action and speech (social practice) as central to the (re)production of social (power) relations. Following this "praxiological approach" (Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 27), the authors identify the empirical basis of their analysis as observable social practice (Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 27). Even though I do not draw heavily on Bourdieu's theory, the praxeological focus of Winker & Degele (*ibid.*) largely fits into my epistemological framework that also allows for the interrogation of ontological presumptions found in my theoretical framework.

As has already been mentioned, praxeological approaches with their focus on empirically observable social practice are based on a different set of theoretical assumptions than those put forward in this thesis. I argue in chapter 3 that a focus on empirically observable social practice (in this case empirical interviews, observations, primary source documents) does not exclude political economic frameworks that look more at the mechanisms of structural power than their specific effects on real world actors, and furthermore allows for the interrogation of abstract theoretical knowledge on a context specific basis.

Here two points should be made clear, while the empirical work in this thesis is largely based on Winker & Degele's (2009) framework, it is not based on direct usage of a praxeological framework based on Bourdieu. This is due to lack of knowledge on my part and the limited scope of this thesis. Still, I find that the analysis focused on empirically observable social practice using Winker & Degele's framework is both an interrogation of political-economic, materialist concepts using the empirical material, and an inductive exploration of the empirical material. The relatively natural process of abstraction and concretization found in the framework allows for both theoretical interpretation and knowledge generation.

Winker and Degele (2009) do not attempt to describe society as it is but rather use their model as a means to analyze hyper-complex social reality with a particular concentration on social inequality and structural relations of domination. The three levels, modeling the incognizable complexity of human social relations, are mutually co-constructing and stand in dialectical relation to one another. Starting with the individual level, the author's (ibid.) framework conceives of individuals, who in the process of construction identities also reproduce hegemonic symbolic representations and the structures which reproduce material hierarchies. On the representation level, hegemonic symbolic representations bolster the structure level power relations and are simultaneously shaped by structures of domination. Furthermore, hegemonic symbolic representations make identity construction possible, while vice-versa, the performative repetition of these representations by individuals in the process of creating identity stabilize hegemonic symbolic representations (ibid.). Thus, the very reproduction of power relations and social inequality through social practice also affects them opening up space for resistance, maneuver and change (ibid., compare also H. Wang, 2007).

The central methodological question of Winker & Degele (2009) is "when are which categories, and in what form, of importance?" (ibid., p. 16, translation by the author). Here importance is measured by the empirical material, e.g. observable practice of actors. Furthermore, the authors focus on the interconnections between categories of difference on each respective level. The author's follow a relational approach looking for relationality/reciprocity between the categories on all three levels and the power relations between them (ibid.).

Winker & Degele (2009) also propose using a specific multi-step approach for the multi-level intersectional analysis in research practice, first looking at the individual interviews (empirical materials) from the perspective of each level trying to identify (interrelated) categories. Secondly, the authors (ibid) propose a comparative process which will be described in detail below. Because of the multiple phases of my research and time constraints, I will not be following their

methodology exactly as proposed. For instance, I use previously identified codes as a basis for further analysis using the multi-level intersectional analysis.

I will now move on to a more concrete description of Winker & Degele's (ibid.) conceptual levels simultaneously describing the specific methods that the authors propose. The three levels are: the level of structural power relations, the level of symbolic representations, and the actor/identity level.

5.4.1 Structural power relations

Because of the under-theorization concerning holistic analysis of interdependence between structure categories, the authors see the need for broad approaches like the multi-level intersection analysis in order to move forward even without a widely accepted and definitive ontological and epistemological consensus in the social sciences (Winker & Degele, 2009). They argue there is an analytical necessity of limiting the number of structure categories because of the difficulty of adequately defining one, let alone multiple, structure categories and the difficulty of embedding social practices in structural power relations (Winker & Degele, 2009).

Out of analytical necessity the authors see a need to set/limit the number of these categories deductively (Winer & Degele 2009), thus during the structure level analysis the relevant categories are determined a priori based on common conclusions from the social sciences. Furthermore, the authors argue that "within capitalist accumulation the differentiated access to the labor market, wage differences and outsourcing of reproductive labor are realized along the four structure categories class, sex, race and body" (Winker & Degele 2009, p. 38). Thus, during structural analysis specific connections to the capitalist mode of production are made.

I start with the assumption, based on the authors and my own theoretical framework, that reproduction of labor power and the reproduction of the relations of production throughout society are shaped and differentiated through the four structure categories and their power relations leading to unequal allocation of resources and capital (political, economic, social etc.) and an unequal division of labor in both the sphere of production and reproduction (Winker & Degele, 2009), and analyze the empirical material during the structural analysis on this basis. However, it should be clear that this is a specific model of complex social relationships that may not be adequate to every inquiry. Therefore, the analysis also involves reflection on the adequacy of the pre-determined structure categories.

Winker & Degele (ibid.) suggest in the first phase of research analyzing individual interviews for direct and indirect references to structural frameworks and institutions that shape actors' lives and seeking connections to the four structure categories.

5.4.2 The level of symbolic representation

On the representation level, Winker and Degele (2009) contend that the maintenance of social hierarchies requires a range of hegemonic symbolic representations (norms, ideologies, narratives etc.) as the basis and justification for categories of difference/inequality (ibid.). This however assumes a unidirectional explanation for the existence of such symbolic representation when in fact the causative relationship is not always clear (e.g., do the norms exist to justify the inequality or does the inequality exist because of the norms?).

Concerning the levels of symbolic representation and actor/identity, they (ibid.) refer to Judith Butler's conclusions about the potency of "constantly repeated and cited linguistic practice" (Butler, 1990, 1995; cited in Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 54) as an addition to Bourdieu-related theory of practice. Thus, on both levels I look for patterns in the statements of interview partners, written materials, and the literature. This approach is also compatible with qualitative content analysis, my method of analysis of choice.

On the level of symbolic representation, the authors see no need for complexity reduction in the finding of categories (i.e. no limit on the number of categories) and no need to assign each representation level category to one or more corresponding structure level categories (Winker & Degele 2009, 54). Rather an inductive approach should be at the representation level based on the specific analysis (Winker & Degele 2009, 28), i.e. the number and importance of symbolic categories should be determined by the (empirical) research of social practice. The analysis of empirical material on the representation level should focus on explicating values, norms and ideologies (ibid.).

5.4.3 Agents & (in)security

On the identity level the number of categories should also not be limited because of the difficulty in grasping the complex nature of identity construction (Winker & Degele 2009, 59). Therefore, the authors also suggest an inductive approach of the identity level based on specific analysis of the empirical material (Winker & Degele 2009, 28).

According to the authors, the need to maintain one's livelihood in the capitalist social formation leads to insecurity. Individuals combat this insecurity through the creation of social belonging; a social "us" and "others" (ibid., 26-27). Securing, maintaining, or resisting one's own social position in the face of insecurity through building boundaries goes hand in hand with increasing the security of one's position through association; both reproduce a multi-faceted system of differentiation (compare ibid.). Thus, there is a strong focus on the construction of identity as a means to investigate social power relations (i.e., the categories that actors place themselves into explicitly and implicitly).

Despite its conjunction with other important concepts in this thesis, Winker & Degele's concept of identity building, and insecurity must certainly be criticized for flattening complex social reality. While socio-economic (in)security clearly plays a central role in our lives, Winker & Degele leave out the possibility that individuals, actions and characteristics might be unrelated or only partially related to their identity, social capital, and material (in)security, and the relative weight and importance of the subjective factors that drive actor decision making, identity building, and strategies can only be made clear through empirical research.

On the identity level, there is some overlap with analysis on the level of symbolic representation. However, as the interdependence of social categories is central to the theory and methodology of this thesis, overlap and interrelation between categories of analysis is a productive part of the process. Here the authors (Winker & Degele 2009) suggest focusing on self-identifications and difference making as a means to identify and categorize identity constructions. Here because of time constraints and previously existing codes, I will engage in a simultaneous process of pinpointing identity constructions and clustering them along with the older codes into categories.

5.4.4 Methodology in Practice

Winker & Degele's (2009) methodological framework, while providing inspiration for the analysis, has not been followed down to the letter. This is because of both situational and resource constraints. Concerning the former, the empirical material has already been coded in a previous phase of the research project. While they have been re-analyzed and partially recoded using Winker & Degele's (ibid.) three-level framework, the previous codes have been integrated into the analysis and influenced the final coding process. This also has to do with resource constraints, specifically time constraints, as their (ibid.) analysis process is extremely time intensive.

Before moving on to the second phase of analysis, Winker & Degele (2009) suggest turning codes into categories and identifying their interconnections both in terms of strengthening and weakening effects on each of the three levels discreetly. Because of time constraints, this step was not done separately but rather simultaneous to the recoding process in which empirical materials are analyzed from the perspective of each level.

In the second phase of analysis based on Winker & Degele's (2009) proposed methodology, I compare the already analyzed interviews looking for commonalities and clusters in identity construction, norms and ideologies, and structural effects, while also looking for interactions between categories on the different levels. Concerning the levels of representation and structure especially, I draw on secondary literature as the authors (*ibid.*) suggest. The usage of secondary literature allows for the identification and comparison of expected categories as well as categories that are expected based on secondary literature but do not appear in the empirical material.

Furthermore, the analysis is shaped by my specific research interests. Look to identify the structural capacities of individual and collection actors as well as the objective coercions that shape their potentials for action. Drawing on current research, I also specifically use the lenses of precarity (economic, social, legal, etc.) and householding strategies especially those that occur transnationally. My research questions and key points of interest that were developed based on this methodology can be found in the following chapter.

The analysis phase has been completed using computer supported qualitative data analysis using the program Atlas.ti for coding and analysis.

Chapter 6: Empirical Analysis

Chapter six is based on qualitative content analysis of the empirical research based on the multi-level intersectional analysis described in the previous chapter. I have developed the following points and research questions based on my theoretical framework and methodology:

- How should Winker & Degele's four structure categories be conceptualized as they relate to CTM out of Vietnam and in their interaction with capitalist processes? How is CTM embedded in the global political economy?
- Interpreting key categories on the structural level in the empirical material.

- Identifying key individuals and collective actors and identifying key categories on the actor and representation levels.
- Analysis the interaction between structure and agency on the level of symbolic representation. Identifying key discursive/ideological structures involved in CTM.
- Analysis of the interaction between these discursive/ideological structures and individual / group identity building.
- What structural capacities do the identified individual and collective actors have as it relates to CTM (from individual marriage migrants on up to the various national-states, and institutions in between)? What objective coercion are these actors confronted with?
- Identifying actor potentials for action - What makes up the frame that conditions Vietnamese marriage migrants (and other actors) and their scope of action? Can generalizations be made?
- Interrogating key concepts of the theoretical framework and current state of research (chapters 3 and 4). This includes the following questions:
 - How does precarity on different levels affect actor potentials for action?
 - Where can we identify householding strategies and how do they shape structural capacities and objective coercion?
- Identifying key trends – possibilities for change and conversely emergent properties that seem less likely to change.

Chapter six is organized around Winker & Degeles three levels with topical subsections related to the specific empirical research. It begins with separate sections concerning general information on commodified transnational marriage migration out of Vietnam and the political economic “background” to this migration process. A circular process and grounded-theory inspiration of analysis allows for the development of new research questions during the process of analysis as new connections are identified.

6.1 Commodified Marriage Migration by the numbers

Commodified transnational marriage migration has already been defined in the introduction and the current state of research has been described in the SOA. In this section, I will briefly outline statistical information expanded with interpretations from the literature to describe the scale and shape of pre-COVID marriage migration out of Vietnam.

Modern Vietnam has been characterized by continuing out migration, including labor migration, marriage migration (including CTM), and significant domestic rural to urban migration (see Chapter 2). The IOM (International Organization for Migration) confirms that the most popular form of migration from Vietnam is migration “for livelihood purposes” including Vietnamese who “work abroad under fixed term contracts and self-funded migration of workers to neighboring countries through land borders (Loi & International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017, p. xi). However, marriage migration does not fall into the category of “for livelihood purposes” nor does migration for the purpose of studying at a foreign university, despite the relevance of livelihood and aspirations related to quality of life to these types of migration.

The out migration of women from Vietnam specifically contrasts with regional neighbors like the Philippines concerning the importance of domestic work migration. “Out-migration of Vietnamese women as labour migrants, for instance, is numerically quite low because of the government's ban on allowing women to migrate to work as domestic and care workers. However, this partially explains the greater use of another channel for migration: international marriage.” (Piper, 2008, p. 1293). Although I have not found more recent data to confirm this trend, it is clear that feminized migration out of Vietnam is not characterized by high rates of feminized migration for domestic work, which is more common on the global level (compare chapter 4).

According to the most recently available IOM statistics, between 2008-2016 the vast majority of Vietnamese marrying foreign nationals were women⁴², however the ratio of women sunk from 92.6 to 85% as did the number of officially recorded marriages of this category (from 21,805 to 16,223) (Loi & International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017). Furthermore, this gender dynamic runs clearly through the empirical material and relevant literature (compare Cheng & Choo, 2015). For this reason, one can clearly identify marriage migration and specifically CTM as feminized migration.

The two primary destination countries of CTM marriage migrants from Vietnam were (pre-COVID) South Korea and Taiwan (Bélanger, 2016b; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017; own research 2019). This dynamic corresponds to inter-Asian economic relationships described in chapter 2, and mirrors labor migration trends described in chapter 4, in which South Korea and Taiwan amongst others have become economic centers in eastern Asia and also the common migration destinations. Apparently, the Peoples Republic of China has become a

⁴² Although there is almost gender parity among migrants globally that has remained relatively constant, with the percentage of female migrants around 50% in the year 2000 and around 48% in 2022 (Mcauliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 10)

more popular destination for marriage in recent years (interview CT2) although there is comparatively little literature and data on this subject (Bélanger, 2016a offers some information).

Similarly, the main countries of origin of the foreign spouses between 2013 and 2016 were Taiwan (14,342), South Korea (16,090) and the United States (19, 526) (Loi & International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017). I focus on Taiwan and South Korea because they are most often mentioned in the empirical material and there is a large body of literature on these cases. However, interview CT1 does mention Canada and the U.S. in the context of male marriage migration.

A large portion of Vietnamese & U.S. American national marriages can at least partially be attributed to the large diaspora population in the U.S., e.g. marriage of Vietnamese women with Vietnamese-American men in the United States (compare H.-Z. Wang & Hsiao, 2009). As the authors (ibid.) point out, co-ethnic transnational marriages are common, and also concerning Southeast and northeast Asia, co-ethnic marriages have often made up the first wave of transnational marriages migrants to a destination country, e.g. ethnic Korean Chinese migrating through marriage to South Korea (Constable, 2004; Lee, 2022). However, co-ethnic marriage does not seem to play a significant role in CTM based on my empirical research. Co-ethnicity is never mentioned in the empirical materials and seldom mentioned in relevant literature regarding Vietnamese marriage migration to Taiwan and South Korea. Furthermore, I have not found evidence commodified transnational marriage migration networks with the United States, nor Vietnamese men migrating to Korea or Taiwan through CTM.

Concerning South Korea, the total number of Vietnamese marriage migrants in Korea has increased from 14,831 in 2006 to 44,058 in 2020 making Vietnamese the second large group of marriage migrants after ethnic-Korean Chinese (Korea Immigration Service, 2007, 2021; cited in Lee, 2022, p. 59). Furthermore, a KOCUN center report (CT15) puts the number of total marriage registrations between Koreans and Vietnamese at around 87,000 making up roughly 1/4th of all marriage registrations with foreigners in Korea. This discrepancy between the numbers might be due to separation without official divorce in Korea (CT15) inflating number of registrations, or simply a drop in the number of Vietnamese marriage migrants in Korea, although as of 2019 Korea still seemed to be a popular destination. Without Korean language skills, I have to rely on secondary sources that at times contradict one another. I was unable to find more detailed and recent statistics concerning Vietnamese marriage migrants in Taiwan.

Regardless, the statistical data makes clear the large numerical scale and thus social impact of marriage migration in both origin and destination, especially when one considers that both the families of marriage migrants and the families of their spouses are affected. Furthermore, in the case of Taiwan and South Korea, Vietnamese marriage migrants make up only a fraction of all marriage migrants, and on the Vietnamese side the 44,000 to 87,000 Vietnamese national marriage migrants in South Korea are only a fraction of the total number of Vietnamese married to foreigners. Of course, one cannot determine from the statistical data how many of these marriages were commodified, however there is a large body of literature backing up the claim that CTM is common (see chapter 4 for more details).

Moving away from methodological nationalism, CTM marriage migrants often come from particular regions, areas and ethnic groups. Concerning Taiwanese nationals, between 2013 and 2016 their Vietnamese spouses most commonly came from the Mekong River Delta⁴³ as well HCMC and the surrounding provinces. During the same period the Vietnamese spouses of Korean nationals most often came from Cần Thơ Province in the Mekong River Delta, however, multiple provinces both in the North and South of Vietnam were also some of the most common provinces of spousal origin (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017). Bélanger's (2016b) research points to Cần Thơ and Hai Phong, both in the Mekong region, as having a concentration of women marrying men from South Korea and Taiwan. Cần Thơ is also the area in which most of the interviews were conducted, while one interview conducted in Taiwan was also with a marriage migrant from the Mekong region (Dong Thap).

This points to the previously mentioned importance of migration networks also for transnational marriage migration as matchmaking networks become rooted in communities, and to the fact that local communities can be significantly impacted by commodified transnational marriage migration. One area of Cần Thơ is referred to colloquially as “Taiwan island” because of the number of marriage migrants to Taiwan, although an interviewee points out that now more women from the area marry South Koreans than Taiwanese (interview CT3).

6.2 Political economy of CTM

It has been argued that precarity is embedded in dynamics of capitalist development, and furthermore, the migration studies must also look at the political economy of crisis management

⁴³ Loi & IOM 2017, however, notes that these provinces of origin may be misleading because marriage migrants may register in their province of temporary residence for the procedure, i.e. they may have first internally migrated to their “province of origin”.

from the perspective of social reproduction and care (Piper & Lee, 2016). Along similar lines, I have previously argued that the current practice of commodified transnational marriage migration in eastern Asia is shaped on the structural level by world-market negotiated intersectional power relations (compare Hass, 2022). The practice draws strongly on historical gendered power relations and related practices (e.g. historical practices of matchmaking and bride-wealth/dowry giving) but represents a fundamentally new mode of migration and marriage organization with new geographic dimensions and organizational principles. CTM is embedded in regional and global socio-economic transformations that have occurred in what is often referred to political-economic literature as post-Fordism and more broadly as the neoliberal era. These transformations include the increasing globalization of manufacturing, an overall deepening and often fragmentation of global production networks, and the post-colonial (re)emergence of nodes or centers of the capitalist world market outside of the former colonial powers despite continuing post-colonial hierarchies of wealth (Hass, 2022; see also chapter 3).

Relatedly, a key premise of my master's thesis is that the post-socialist transformations in Vietnam, that is a rapidly changing regime of accumulation along with world market integration and concomitant social transformations, have brought about the conditions in which commodified transnational marriage migration becomes a relevant social practice (see Chapter 2). Relevant in the sense that actors, institutions and nation-states see it as relevant to their strategies, ideologies and worldviews, be that through the condemnation of the practice or through active participation.

One effect of the “development” of South Korea and Taiwan has been major outflows of capital and technology to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Southeast Asia as well as increasing mobility of their citizens. Moreover, labor shortages in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, or more aptly shortages of cheap labor for labor intensive industries, caused all three nation-states to allow and implement large-scale, short-term labor migration from less wealthy countries in the broader region (Rigg, 2016; H.-Z. Wang & Hsiao, 2009). This has brought about the migration of many millions of migrants from Southeast Asia since the 1990's.

This included a growing number of women who increasingly gained access to migration through specific, feminized forms of migration such as marriage migration (Bélanger & Wang, 2013). Marriage migration is often the only form of migration that leads to permanent residency status in destination countries (Yang & Lu, 2010). Furthermore, Bélanger & Wang (2013) found that in some cases migrants take multiple different routes of migration, including temporary labor and marriage migration, although there was no evidence of migrants having previously attempted

other forms of migration before marriage migration in my empirical material. However, some marriage migrants who have separated from their spouses stayed in their destination countries for short-term wage labor (e.g. interview CT6), or simply because they had established lives (interview TT1; Huynh & Huynh, 2022).

In any case, the political economy of labor migration and production networks in the region often overlaps with the practice of CTM and shapes the lives of marriage migrants. These abstract and often impersonal relations form a background to their lives affecting their decisions and range of possibilities. There are deep-seated economic networks between Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan. For example, Kneebone writes “Today, there is substantial Korean investment in Vietnam by large companies and industries, such as Samsung Electronics and Hyundai, which creates considerable employment in Vietnam.” (Kneebone, 2023, p. 76). Furthermore, H.-Z. Wang and Chang (2009) specifically argue that such networks formed the basis for commodified transnational marriage migration networks, and suggest that some of the first marriage migrants came from among the first waves of labor migrants in Taiwan. I cannot confirm this claim but it is plausible.

These networks between Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan are characterized by economic inequality. Despite the transition in Vietnam to a “market-oriented socialist economy under state guidance” (Beresford, 2008, p. 221), i.e. state-led industrialization and world-market integration and the maintenance of Marxist-Leninist technologies of rule (see Chapter 2), there are large differences in wealth between Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan. For example regarding average income based on commonly available macro-economic data the median income in South Korea and Taiwan is 3 to 4 times greater than that in Vietnam, i.e. making the median wage in Vietnam, the wage that 50% of wage earners make less than, one is significantly south of the median wage in South Korea or Taiwan⁴⁴. Purchasing power parity, i.e. how much one can buy with ones wages, makes wage comparisons difficult, but the size of the income differences makes it unlikely that differing purchasing power could equalize them. Furthermore, based on empirical material interviewees were aware that they can earn significantly higher wages in Korea and Taiwan, and that this money is even more valuable when brought back to Vietnam (e.g. interview CT3). This difference in wages, as well as differing levels of wealth and “comfort” come up again and again in the empirical materials, as will be made clear throughout this chapter. Furthermore, this knowledge is central on the levels of symbolic representation and on the

⁴⁴ Source: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/median-income-by-country> accessed on 13.12.22

individual level. These international hierarchies of wealth interact with (aspirations of) economic opportunity and class position.

In CT1 a Women's Union representative relates that the economic situation in Cần Thơ province has been diversified and improved since the crash implying that the province's farmers are no longer vulnerable to price shocks on a large-scale and that the source of instability that originally led young women to seek marriages with (assumed) wealthier foreigners has disappeared. The idea that socio-economic conditions have improved ending the practice of commodified transnational marriage migration is contradicted by the empirical material and the literature (as also argued in Chapter 2).

A survey conducted by KOCUN using 2016 data points to significant regional out-migration (often to the Ho Chi Minh City metropolitan area) of return marriage migrants because of difficulty finding jobs in Cần Thơ. Furthermore, the survey shows high unemployment rate of former marriage migrants who stayed in the area, even those who had migrated to other nearby locales for work, and a concentration of employment in low-income sectors. 44.13% of former marriage migrants according to the survey (CT15) earn less than two million Dong monthly, which was about 81 euros on January 1st, 2016 without adjusting for purchasing power parity⁴⁵, with an even higher percentage earning less than two million dong monthly for women living in the Cần Thơ area.

Furthermore, the survey points out that these low earnings and high unemployment rate mean that a large portion of women who have returned rely on their "parents, siblings and relatives" for support. This data, although it offers an incomplete picture, certainly contradicts the idea that economic conditions in Cần Thơ are ideal for women, or that they are no longer a factor in the decision to migrate through CTM. I see no evidence in the empirical material or the literature that the economic conditions in the area have significantly improved between 2016 and 2019 when the empirical research took place (compare also chapter 2).

Commodification

Wang & Chang (2009) argue that "international marriage and related activities are gradually being transformed to enhance profits to the various intermediaries" which they call the "process of commodification" (ibid., p. 213), while Constable (2009) argues regarding feminized migration that "social relations have become evermore geographically dispersed, impersonal, mediated

⁴⁵ Source: [Historical currency converter with official exchange rates from 1953 \(fxtop.com\)](https://fxtop.com/) accessed on 16.05.2023

by and implicated in broader political-economic or capitalist processes.” (ibid., p.49). It is the very abstract and impersonal nature of these processes that makes them hard to distinguish within complex social reality. Commodification can be identified by various social practices, services, and roles which existed hitherto outside of capitalist logics become “bought or sold; packaged and advertised; fetishized, commercialized, or objectified; consumed; assigned values and prices) and linked in many cases to transnational mobility and migration (...)” (Constable, 2009, p. 49).

Using this definition, CTM is commodified in multiple respects. While I argue against oversimplified and agency-denying discourses about trade in women, in the process of CTM women are certainly advertised, fetishized and objectified and indirectly assigned values through the brokerage price (Tseng, 2016). Paid matchmaking, which has a long history outside of capitalist logics of accumulation (Lu, 2005), becomes a consumable object that can be bought for the right price. However, it is this commodification of matchmaking that is part of structural exploitation of marriage migrants engendering interpersonal exploitation.

For informal matchmaking networks, the relationship to commodification is less clear, as they often walk the line between interpersonal and business relations. For example, a woman well-established in a destination country who helps friends and family members find marriage partners through local matchmakers in her home country and receives remuneration for this (see Beck-Gernsheim, 2011) is performing something more similar to the practice of traditional matchmaking, at least in the Confucian tradition, in which payment is more gratuity than price (compare Lu 2005). See subsection 6.3.2 for more details on brokerage and matchmaking. But even in this case, livelihoods depend on the process as CTM is embedded in livelihoods of origin communities (compare Bélanger, 2016a).

One interesting facet of this embeddedness in origin or sending communities is the role that auxiliary services like hotels, interpreters and wedding photography catered to transnational marriages play in this commodification process (compare Bélanger, 2016a). These auxiliary services entail the more intense integration of capitalist logics of profit-making and exchange into previously otherwise organized practices surrounding marriage. Scholars have argued that this leads to an embedding of the practice of CTM into the livelihoods of communities, as a much broader network of actors comes to profit from and rely on CTM economically (ibid. ; Bélanger & Flynn, 2018). This also involves preparation services for soon-to-be marriage migrants such as language courses (Bélanger, 2016a).

The latter can also be observed in the empirical material. K. in interview CT12 explains that she received Chinese lessons in Vietnam before moving to Taiwan. While T. (interview TT1) implies that her husband paid her language courses in Vietnam and her stay in the hotel in the city during these language courses. The hotel was also in charge of helping her with official paperwork and ensuring that it was completed. I see here an indication that this kind of arrangement was common, and additional empirical verification that there are many businesses including hotels that specifically cater to commodified transnational marriage migrants (compare also Bélanger, 2016a; Tseng, 2015).

However, Bélanger (2016a) argues that the embeddedness of CTM in communities goes beyond economic motives, although it is also entangled with “materialistic rationalities of profit making” (ibid., p. 73). Actors are multiply positioned, and their involvement may encompass multiple roles (e.g. both a business person and family member) (ibid.). This can also be seen in the empirical material. In interview CT9, when asked how she met her husband, I. tells us: “My parents have friends and their daughter helped me out. (...) She lives in K[orea] for more than 10 years. She’s [a] citizen. She’s the marriage broker.” I. goes on to explain that this family friend in Korea had been working as a broker for a long time, and that she makes sure that her clients are not abused in Korea. This evokes Tseng’s (2015) conclusion that brokers are often seen as vital partners and guarantees of “successful” marriage by marriage migrants.

As will be discussed in section 6.3.2 actors in the empirical research were often troubled by commercial brokers taking too large a share of bride wealth (money paid by the husbands / their family to the bride’s family⁴⁶) but most did not condemn the practice as a whole (e.g. interview CT3). And in fact, in interviews CT2 and CT3 it is implied that the (supposed) transition to more familiar and interpersonal forms of matchmaking since the ban of commercial brokerage in Vietnam has improved the practice, a sentiment that I. in CT9 seems to share concerning the supposed trustworthiness and care shown by her family friend / matchmaker.

In any case, it is clear that commodification is interwoven with actor interest and can represent both opportunity and include forms of coercion and unequal power hierarchies. Tseng (2015) argues that researchers need to come to terms with the “double character of the market mechanism” that both brings about the conditions of women’s “vulnerability and exploitation” and simultaneously opens opportunities and strategies of action to them (p. 117). The empirical research largely confirms the usefulness of this framing.

⁴⁶ See e.g. (Graeber, 2009) regarding this terminology and the differences between dowry and bride wealth.

However, the practice of CTM would not be possible without the web of abstract capitalist social relations that are also a product of political-economic transformation in the region (Cheng & Choo, 2015; Constable, 2009; H.-Z. Wang & Chang, 2009), and more direct economic interconnections involved in the process. For instance, the KOCUN center, a Korean NGO working with marriage migrants, is funded by Hyundai and the Korean state, calling in two question the interests of the latter two in the activities of the former. Hyundai is substantially invested in Vietnam (compare Kneebone 2023), while scholars argue that the Korean state engages with marriage migration as a means to combat falling birthrates and care deficits, i.e. through a reproductive lens (Lee, 2012). From the perspective racialization and nationality, this involves the treatment of female marriage migrants as reproducers of “Korean” citizens that can maintain and strengthen the state (Kneebone, 2023; Lee, 2012).

I draw heavily on Kneebone’s (2023) concept of “structural exploitation” as a means to navigate the often abstract and impersonal power relations surrounding CTM. Kneebone (ibid.) argues that South Korea state policy and a specific legal framework of migration fosters interpersonal exploitation of Vietnamese marriage migrants. I apply this conclusion more broadly to the practice of CTM arguing the structural exploitation and structural coercion based on more than just the policies of the involved states are the best concepts to conceptualize the rather indirect structural coercions surrounding CTM. This also includes individuals and firms who economically profit from enabling the interpersonal exploitation of marriage migrants. Motives of profit maximization and the livelihood of different actors are interconnected with the practice, also creating economic pressure to continue the practice, even after brokerage bans in various countries.

The nature of commodification of matchmaking/marriage migration and what it means for transnational marriage migrants, their families, and their origin and destination communities is not simply positive or negative, but complex and multidirectional. In some contexts, Constable (2009) argues that the commodification of intimacy can also be seen as a welcomed or acceptable “modernization”. Similarly, Tseng (2015) argues based on empirical research that “For many young rural women, foreign marriage offered a chance to become a “modern subject”; they wanted to cultivate not just monetary wealth but cultural tastes as well.” (ibid., p. 120).

6.3 Structure Level

During the analysis phase it became quickly apparent that Winker & Degele’s (2009) structure categories were not all context relevant in their original form. While the categories of gender and

class proved applicable, and the category of the body brought some insights, the category of race required adjustment to be analytically useful in the context of CTM. I argue that nationality is the central category of racialization/ethnicization in the empirical material. This is connected to hierarchical inter-state relations and migration regimes that structure which nationalities in which context are desirable and allowed. I see the categories, in general, as lenses with which important phenomena can be identified, although they interact with different categories on multiple levels.

Structural level power relations are generally associated with the macro and meso level, states and state policies and other institutions, and inequality (compare Winker & Degele, 2009). The four structure categories represent a complex set of context-specific power relations along which resources, exploitation, different forms of capital and access (social, economic, political, etc.) and privilege are divided (compare Winker & Degele, 2009). I specify based on the empirical material that the structure level looks at what creates objective coercion that shapes unequal division of access (e.g. to the labor market), rights, wealth, material resources, as well as unequal divisions of labor (waged or unwaged). Furthermore, it is intimately related to the structural capacities of individuals and groups to shape their own lives, thus connected to domination and exploitation.

6.3.1 Gender/Heteronormativity

While coding for gender, I focused on the following aspects: access to gendered forms of migration like CTM, division of labor especially reproductive labor tied to gender, and responsibilities and roles associated with gender that shape the structural capacities of actors.

The family

The family as a social structure is interconnected with constructions and power structures surrounding gender. Furthermore, the topic of family plays a central role in most of the empirical interviews. In interview CT1 women's union representatives claim that it is mostly families with multiple daughters that engage in CTM so that the others can stay behind to take care of the family (also argued in interview CT5). It is difficult to verify the veracity of these claims, and for instance some parents of marriage migrants point out negative social, emotional and economic affects of their daughters leaving (interview CT8). In any case, the literature makes clear that the family and family relations are a central structure for the unequal organization of reproductive labor, and the family as a category is mentioned in every empirical interview. Furthermore, scholars have argued that cohabitation with other adult family members as another common features of eastern Asian transnational marriage reflecting the importance of the family for provid-

ing care for the young, the elderly, and the disabled in destination-country societies (compare Wang & Hsiao 2009).

We can also see in interview TT1 the way that marriage migration is embedded in heteronormative family structures in destination countries that reflect gendered structural power relations. In T.'s case, after marrying she moved in with her husband and his parents. Her husband also has three younger sisters but they all live with their spouses. T. implies in her explanation of the situation that her parents in-law live with her husband because he is the oldest sibling and only son, and furthermore that his younger sisters primary responsibility is to their husbands and "new families".

This certainly recalls scholarly explanations of Confucian-based gender orders (Nghia-M.-Vo et al., 2008; Sandel, 2015; Werner, 2009). Wang & Hsiao (2009) also prominently argue for the connection between marriage migration and Confucian traditions of family life and "proper" womanhood, care deficits, and the reliance of the relevant states on familial and often feminized labor. However, the empirical material also demonstrates that despite hegemonic norms, family relations are always situation dependent and negotiated. This also reflects, e.g., H. Wang's (2007) conclusions about the ways that marriage migrants negotiate their position despite unequal power hierarchies.

One of the key pre-assumptions that my research group travelled into the field with was the idea that family pressure based on patriarchal family structures might contribute to female marriage migrants engaging in the practice. This proved largely unfounded, and in fact parents of marriage migrants often described being surprised and saddened that their daughters had chosen marriage migration (interviews CT3 and CT8). For instance, in CT3 the mother of a marriage migrant explains "the idea was that her daughter would got to HCMC [to work]. Then one day she got a call from her daughter telling her that [she] would go abroad. It was a big surprise". She goes on to say that she was very upset at the time.

This went against our assumptions, often also present in the literature, that because Vietnam also has been influenced by Confucian traditions, including submissive daughterhood, (Brazier, 1992; Nghia-M.-Vo et al., 2008; Werner, 2009), this must contribute to CTM. However, one implicit reference to family pressure (CT8) was made in which the parent of a marriage migrant implied that nowadays families could not force their daughters to marry a foreigner. However, the context of the quote makes the exact meaning of the speaker difficult to decipher. In the same interview (CT8), one speaker talks about how her 27-year-old daughter does not wish to marry, de-

spite the fact that her sister has been introducing her to men for years. It is clear that our assumptions about family pressure to marry foreign men were overblown, however, social pressure to marry is still common. These conclusions are also confirmed in the literature as a common characteristic of society in eastern Asia (e.g. Wang & Hsiao 2009).

Furthermore, pressure to marry can also take more abstract forms and be related to a general desire, or a feeling of duty, to economically support one's family. For instance, the former marriage migrant H. in interview in CT5 explains that "Economic reason[s] [are] the most important in international marriage. Only poor families have daughters get married to foreigners. Almost [always] oldest sister" as an explanation for her decision to leave. While, in CT6 the marriage migrants explain that they wanted to marry Korean men because their families were poor and there was no other option. Furthermore, both explained that their families had met their soon-to-be husbands and agreed to the marriage because they were poor and there was no other option. Here I identify a connection between economic precarity and gendered (self) expectations concerning the family.

The empirical research also confirms the basic precepts in the literature regarding patrilocality. This simply means that within the practice of CTM it is always women who move to their husbands' home, in this case transnationally. Thus, unequal power relations in favor of the male partner begin in the brokerage process and continue simply based on the husband being on their home turf and already economically and socially established, in addition to heteronormative gendered power relations that favor male dominance.

Changing forms of coercion

I argued in Hass (2022) that one can observe a historical shift from patriarchal-familial power relations to world-market negotiated power relations in CTM. i.e. from organized around decisions of the familial patriarch to strategic use of transnational and gendered hierarchies. This, I argue, is also related to abstract (as opposed to interpersonal) self-expectations to help one's family economically, often in relation in the context of CTM to norms regarding daughterhood. I connect this indirect pressure/coercion to Kneebone's (2023) concept of structural exploitation. That is, social power structures foster conditions conducive to interpersonal exploitation. I also connect this to abstract and often impersonal coercion which is tied into capitalist practices related to profit making (see theory for more details).

The question of what difference it makes if pressure comes directly from family members, or if diffuse economic pressure and (gendered) feelings of responsibility toward family drives CTM

animated initial analysis of the empirical material. Kneebone's (2023) concept of structural exploitation helps to conceptualize this difference as between interpersonal coercion (direct actor to actor) and coercion related to structural power relations that make coercive frames that restrict individual agency.

Despite this shift in forms of coercion, the topic of patriarchal coercion and violence based on heteronormative gender hierarchies is common in the empirical material. Rather than the origin countries' families of marriage migrants, such instances of coercion and violence usually come from the husbands of Vietnamese marriage migrants in destination countries. This is the key instance of interpersonal exploitation enabled by structural exploitation that Kneebone (2023) identifies.

Jealousy and hetero-masculine or familial control over marriage migrants' lives is a common theme in the interviews, even though it is not often described as such. For instance, the returned marriage migrants in CT13 describe various forms of coercion and control over their lives by both their husbands and families-in-law including not being allowed to work or go to classes and restrictions on their movements (being kept at home). In interview TT1, the migrant T. describes how her husband restricted her movements even before she moved to Taiwan putting her up in an urban hotel because he was afraid if she went back to her hometown she would "go out and play". This presumably references emotional or sexual interactions with other men. Jealousy and masculine control are often topics in the literature (compare H.-Z. Wang & Tien, 2009) and empirical material, and will be discussed more in section 6.5.1.

Gender based violence against marriage migrants is not uncommon, representing the most extreme form of interpersonal coercion. T. in TT1 was emotionally abused and threatened with violence by her husband, and K. in CT12 mentions being thankful because she had not experienced abuse although she has heard of so many cases of abuse and divorce. Around 21% of those who had divorced in a KOCUN-led survey in 2016 (CT15) listed domestic violence as the reason for their divorce. Also clear in the literature (e.g. Huynh & Huynh, 2022; Kneebone, 2023) that partner violence against (Vietnamese) marriage migrants in Taiwan and South Korea is widespread.

However, the interviews (e.g. CT1) and the literature also make clear that partner violence is not limited to marriage migrants in destination countries but is part of the broader trend of gender based violence that is one aspect of hetero-patriarchal power relations. One marriage migrant E. (interview CT13) explained to us that she had been told that foreign men were less likely to be

abusive than Vietnamese men and that this had contributed to her decision to enter into a CTM marriage indicating that there is also partner violence in Vietnam. Clear that male violence and discourses surrounding such violence are part of Vietnamese marriage migrant decision making (compare also Tseng, 2015). This topic will be discussed more in section 6.6. regarding perceived risk.

Although it is not often explicitly mentioned in the literature or the empirical material, it is clear that gender in combination with body-related characteristics (age young, healthy, norm-fitting) is the precondition for access to long-term migration as a marriage migrant. This is connected to expectations of femininity, expected roles, and expected characteristics, and recalls Parreñas' (2008) concept of the “force of domesticity” in which the very conditions that make migration possible, its feminized structure, also end up restricting migrants’ agency and reproducing gendered power relations. It is also taking on certain gendered roles like wife and daughter in-law that is an essential part of CTM (compare Lee 2022). Thus, while marriage migration may open up new opportunities for migrants, these roles are often restrictive and connected to specific expectations and responsibilities concerning care work and different forms of hetero-patriarchal interpersonal coercion.

Reproductive labor responsibilities are also expressed in norms of proper daughterhood, like the expectation and aspiration that daughters will take care of their parents/families by sending remittances home (Piper & Lee, 2016; Tseng, 2015). For example in interviews CT1 and CT2 VWU representatives indicate that often daughters move abroad to help their natal families, while interviewed marriage migrants often indicate that a desire to help their families was part of their motivation to marry abroad (e.g. interview CT6). However, no interview partner explicitly said that they entered into CTM to send their family remittances as a proper daughter should. It is difficult based on the empirical material to separate personal aspirations (of social mobility) and feeling or duty or responsibility to the natal family. The division of reproductive labor and reproductive labor responsibilities involve multidirectional and multi-sited effects, and have large impacts on marriage migrants possibilities for action.

Householding

Families are not only “care-providing” but also “care needing” units according to Haemmerli et al. (2021). In this context the concept of the “household” becomes useful. Dunaway (2014) defines the household as a group that unequally shares (reproductive) labor and resources, often but not always organized around heteronormative family relations. It is clear that in the empirical

social practices and power relations related to the family play a central role in household organization. Feminized roles and reproductive labor expectations are often defining features around which resources and labor are divided within the household (compare *ibid.*).

Relating to these different strategies of care provisioning, Haemmerli et al. (2021) find evidence that internal migration in the Vietnamese context as a care-providing strategy depends on the care that is needed at home. For instance, migration is a more likely strategy when the need is to pay for children's school fees than when a household member needs health-related care at home (*ibid.*). The case of transnational migration might show different results. However, the empirical research makes clear that care and reproductive labor responsibilities often shape migrant decision making.

For instance, in CT8 the father of a marriage migrant explains that his daughter stayed in Taiwan, although her husband had died, to take care of her mother-in-law. Although it is presumable that other factors also contributed to her decision to stay, this example shows that reproductive labor responsibilities connected to unequal gendered power relations can also affect movement and choice of residence. Also, feelings of responsibility to care for family were cited as a reason to return. B. explained to us in interview CT7 that she returned to Vietnam to care for her sick mother. Furthermore, the former marriage migrant K. in CT12 mentions lack of support with reproductive labor as her motivation for returning to Vietnam. As she explains it, her mother-in-law died, who had previously supported her with childcare, and her husband could not stop working. She thus returned to Vietnam with her children, while her husband is still involved in their lives by coming to visit and supporting them financially. Based on these examples, the literature and my theoretical framework, I argue that reproductive labor (tied to gendered power relations) frames and constrain possibilities (Vietnamese) marriage migrants' possibilities for action.

Furthermore, there is a broader context of "householding strategies" (M. T. N. Nguyen & Locke, 2014) and interconnected migrations processes, such as the migration of grandparents from origin countries to the destination countries of marriage migrants to help with childcare or engage in wage labor themselves (compare Lee, 2022, Chapter 4).

Lee (2022) and other scholars refer to "global householding" when householding strategies cross borders. Transnational householding is probably the better term for this paper because it supports the definitional argument of why I call it commodified *transnational* marriage migration (see e.g. chapter 1). It seems that Lee (2022) also found strong evidence for these kinds of sup-

port networks in their research, including grandparent migration for the purpose of unpaid childcare. The Korean state has set up a migration regime in which Vietnamese marriage migrant's citizenship is defined by their role as mothers (what Lee (2022) calls “reproductive citizenship”) which then extends to their parents (i.e. grandparents of Korean children) through the F-1 visa for family immigration for the purpose of unwaged childcare support (Lee, 2022). One can also observe subversion of this migration regime with undocumented work by grandparents of Korean children (e.g. in CT3, also mentioned in Lee (2022)), although this also could represent a form of householding.

Lee (2022), however, argues that while *transnational* householding is practiced by (Vietnamese) marriage migrants, the problems that working mother's face in the informal sector of the Korean labor market are quite universal, i.e. problems of childcare. Simultaneous pressure to work waged labor and gendered expectations of who is responsible for provisioning childcare make it difficult for lower class and migrant women in Korea to juggle these responsibilities. This mirrors materialist arguments concerning the provisioning of reproductive labor when the “adult worker” model becomes dominant in society (see chapter 3). Lee (2022) statistics and the empirical material show that Vietnamese marriage migrants are overwhelmingly employed in the informal sector, which excludes them from many if not most state forms of support. The specificity of their situation lies in the interaction between classed, gendered and nationality-based power relations (even though many of them have since become Korean citizens). Householding, or more specifically relying on grandparents and female family members for childcare support is a widespread householding strategy among the informal working class (women) to overcome childcare provisioning difficulties.

One specificity of (Vietnamese) marriage migrants seems to be also using “grandparent migration” to provision care for their elderly parents, e.g. by allowing them access to the Korean healthcare system. Thus, as Lee (2022) points out, transnational “householding (...) serves as mechanism for meeting the needs for child and elder care in both Korea and Vietnam (2022, p. 65). Furthermore, the KOCUN survey (CT15) mentions the practice of child return migration, in which children of marriage migrants are sent back to Vietnam to be cared for, mirroring the above-mentioned practice. No explanation of the motivation behind this is given, none of the interview partners mentioned it, and based on my review the topic is not present in current academic discourse on the subject.

A gendered unequal division of reproductive labor, although tied with heteropatriarchal family structures, often continues even after divorce (Huynh & Huynh 2022), and as women who stayed

in destination communities in Taiwan post-divorce oftentimes still complete reproductive labor like cooking for their ex-husbands (interview TT1). Furthermore, the responsibility of caring for children always seems to stay with the mother post-divorce (CT5, CT6, CT7, CT12, CT13). This responsibility also often extends beyond childcare including the responsibility of keeping roof over head and food on the table making wage labor necessary. Often without economic support from their ex-husbands. Thus, divorce or separation whether it is followed by return to Vietnam or not can lead to precarity.

There are different forms of precarity and insecurity related to gendered structural power relations. As above example shows, a precarious economic situation can stem from gendered reproductive labor responsibilities such as when marriage migrants have to change their employment status or migrate to secure care for their children or family. Furthermore, precarity can be interpersonal, as when marriage migrants are coerced by their new husbands into restricting their movements or not working, as shown at the beginning of the chapter. Piper & Lee (2016) point to the multidirectional nature of precarity, as when also deeply gendered feelings of familial responsibility motivate young women to exchange economic precarity in their home regions for social and legal precarity in destination countries, although of course marriage migration does not preclude economic precarity also in the destination country.

6.3.2 Class

I define class in the context of my empirical research as a spectrum of power connected to economic practice that influences access to education, desirable jobs, wealth, desirable lifestyle / quality of life etc. within capitalist social formations (compare Winker & Degele, 2009). Class-based aspirations can be expressed through desire for higher paying jobs, education, more wealth and a better quality of life (i.e. access to social mobility, ability to improve class position). My empirical research and the literature indicate that such class-based aspirations play a prominent role in CTM. As already mentioned, almost all interview participants mentioned that they or marriage migrants in general were motivated by a desire to escape poverty or economic precarity for themselves and/or their family. I connect this to the idea of class position as an expression of positional power and access on a spectrum of hierarchical relations, that Winker & Degele (2009) refer to as classisms.

Using an example from the empirical research, the marriage migrant *C.* in CT3 and the soon-to-leave marriage migrant *I.* in CT9 share educational and work related aspirations. In the case of the former (according to her parents), she managed to found her own IT company in South Korea. In the case of the latter, the soon-to-leave *I.* had a clear strategy for obtaining an education and a job in a specific field and her Korean husband had already agreed to pay for a degree in Korea. In both cases, gendered power relations open up both the avenue to achieve desires of upward (class) mobility as well as restraints (both legal and cultural) and expectations concerning women, reproductive labor, and reproduction tied to marriage (compare also Parreñas' (2008) "force of domesticity").

Here one can already see intersections and co-constructions of structural power relations. It is only through gender (being considered female) and the body (young and desirable) that the, in this case barrier, of nationality can be overcome in order to potentially improve class position through transnational migration. Literature often refers to this gradient of migration towards more wealthy locales as *hypergamy* (see chapter 4).

Constable (2004), however, complicates the idea of hypergamy arguing that mobility can also be lateral or downward, when one considers factors like "class, lifestyle, education, social status or geographical mobility (...)" (p. 3), e.g. marriage migrants can also lose class privileges and cultural/social capital through migration, or simply move from one lower class position to another. Furthermore, Lutz (2018) points out that their education / job training may not match their employment in the destination country, which is caused by an inability to engage in the job(s) for which they were trained and often a loss in class status. Lee (2022) shows that despite increasing labor market participation of Vietnamese marriage migrants in Korea (the longer they are there) that they remain concentrated in informalized, low-wage areas. This will be discussed in more detail in the following subsection on wage labor.

In any case, I argue that class plays an important role in the practice of CTM as shown in the empirical material. The next section will address a key topic in transnational class-mobility, remittances.

Remittances:

Remittances describe money sent from destination to origin country usually between household or family members. According to the World Migration Report (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou,

2021) Vietnam was in the top twenty remittance receiving countries worldwide, while e.g. South Korea was in the top twenty sending countries (in terms of total dollar amounts 2019-2020). However, as a share of GDP, remittance sending/receiving does not seem to play a structurally significant role in either economy.

Although I do not have the exact numbers, CTM remittances presumably make up a very small share of these totals, as there is significantly more labor migration out of Vietnam than transnational marriage migration. Thus, I draw the conclusion that while remittances of CTM can be of importance for involved actors, families and households, as well as communities, their significance for the national economy and state policy should not be overstated. Still, as already argued in the section on political economy, CTM has become important for the livelihoods of various actors, from formal brokerage firms, informal brokers and matchmakers, to those working in auxiliary industries that make a portion of their profits by providing services for marriage migrants, as well as marriage migrants themselves, their spouses and their families.

Representatives of the VWU also talk positively of remittances, pointing out how they economically help the community (CT1 & CT2). This will be discussed more in the section 6.4 regarding state and VWU narratives of CTM.

It is readily apparent in the empirical materials that remittances and other economic benefits made possible through marriage migration also can have a significant effect on livelihood, class position and quality of life. In CT3, we conducted an interview with the family of a marriage migrant in their new house that they explained had been bought with money they had earned working informally in Korea. While in CT8 one parent of a marriage migrant explains how their daughter was able to send them money to help with rebuilding after a damaging typhoon. Also, in interview TT1, T. explains that she sends her mother money on yearly/bi-yearly basis, sometimes for new year's (Tet), and also that she helps her family back home with specific expenses like driving school expenses.

Remittances, or other economic benefits made possible through marriage migration, like “grandparent” labor migration can have significant effects on sending communities. The mother of a marriage migrant describing how their life has changed since their daughter married abroad say “We used to farm, now we garden”, and also explains that the new house in which the interview took place was built with money that she and her husband earned working in Korea (CT3). I label this as the “ideal” situation, in which CTM led to improved material position of the family.

However, not every marriage migrant can or does send remittances or help their families work abroad (interview CT8). Furthermore, the research also showed there are not always economic benefits for the families of marriage migrants in Vietnam. In CT8 one parent of a marriage migrant explains that “life and business” for the family became more difficult after their daughter left and they were struggling, without giving exact details. Also, many parents and families of marriage migrants mention the emotional toll of having their daughters leave (interviews CT3 and CT8). Thus, I identify a trade-off between possible economic security, or being able to financially help family, and negative (emotional) effects of migration on the family.

Even if remittances are a primary motivation for marriage migrants, which cannot be clearly ascertained in the empirical material (compare section 6.3.1), the desire to provide remittances to one’s family does not exclude other desires. These can include, for example, the aspiration to achieve a wealthier lifestyle or gain access to new opportunities, or simply a desire for adventure and travel (more on aspirations and motivations in actor/identity section). Furthermore, class-centered “economic motivations” interact with structural and symbolic power structures such as ideologies of “proper” daughterhood or womanhood or deeply structural economic currents (Piper & Lee, 2016). The motivations of marriage migrant are complex, and not reducible to economic explanations (Kim, 2010). The next subsection seeks to complicate often economically framed notions of marriage migrant husband class position.

Class position of husbands and their families:

A common argument in the literature on commodified transnational marriage migration is that it is mostly lower-class men in the “developed” northeast seeking wives abroad because they do not have the social or economic capital to marry at home (Bélanger & Flynn, 2018; Sandel, 2015; H.-Z. Wang & Chang, 2009), although some scholars point to growing diversity of class-background among men seeking wives through CTM (Tseng, 2016; H.-Z. Wang & Tien, 2009).

My empirical material largely confirms at least the trend that most of the men marrying women through CTM are engaged in generally lower-pay, labor intensive lower prestige jobs like taxi driving and factory work (see below for more details). Cheng & Choo refer to “class specific solutions to reproductive labor deficit” (ibid. 256), regarding the class of prospective husbands and their families. Furthermore, the men who seek out wives through CTM often have “qualities deemed undesirable by local women in the destination countries” (Piper & Lee 2016, p.482), e.g. related to class-status, disability, or psychological disorders. This has the potential to increase insecurity for marriage migrants in their new homes (ibid.).

Similarly, Wang and Chang (2009) describe the Taiwanese grooms in the late 90's early 2000's as follows:

“The average age of the groom is 36 years old, and their educational attainment is not high, with an average of less than the nine-years of compulsory education [in Taiwan]. The occupational distribution of the grooms is centered in manual work, cab driving, self-employment, and farming. Further, most of the respondents are from low-income areas” (ibid., p. 219).

Based on my empirical research typical husbands of marriage migrants have generally labor intensive, lower-pay, and/or low prestige jobs. These include taxi driving (CT9, CT12), bus driving (CT12), electrician (CT13), construction work (TT1). Also, one interviewee (CT11) explains simply that her “husband’s economic status is not that good”. However, there are exceptions, as in CT6 in which the previous husband of a returned marriage migrant was an engineer. Their relative educational levels can only be deducted from the jobs that they hold, but it seems plausible that many do not have a tertiary education. As to the areas that they come from, there is little information in my empirical material that speaks to this.

Returning to the concept of low social and economic capital of husbands, some authors argue that increased labor force participation of women (in Taiwan) has reduced the relative economic power of men in the labor market (Sandel, 2015; H.-Z. Wang & Chang, 2009). This essentially means that the increased economic power of women along with a decrease in relative economic power of men leads to problems for men with the lowest economic and social capital in finding willing marriage partners (compare *ibid.*) This makes foreign marriage a more desirable/achievable option. My empirical data does not confirm this reasoning in its entirety, but it does point to the generally lower class status of marriage migrant husbands in South Korea and Taiwan. However, socio-economic and demographic factors do not act separately from the rest of society.

It is also specific constructions of heterosexual marriage and masculinity that also create this deficit in marriageable women for certain men, and that influence the desire for foreign brides (Cheng & Choo 2015; compare chapter 4). Lee (2012) also problematizes overly demographic explanations of marriage rates instead pointing to structural/socio-economic changes, such as the fact that many women have chosen not to marry, perhaps because the “traditional” family model has become less popular among women (*ibid.*).

Wang & Tien (2009) argue against an oversimplified class-based argument pointing out that in Taiwan most empirical work has pointed to the fact that “most Taiwanese men marrying overseas spouses have stable jobs” (*ibid.*, p. 14) and that recent studies have pointed to more “white-

collar” workers marrying foreign spouses going against the lower-class/low-education argument (compare H.-H. Tseng, 2016). The first argument I find unconvincing as having a stable job does not foreclose economic precarity and poverty. And, as already stated, my empirical research shows lower-class status husbands, however, it is possible that due to the large time differences involved my data does not capture this newer trend (T. in TT1 married her husband in probably the early 2000’s, while interview partners like I. in CT9 was still waiting to leave for Korea in 2019 to move in with her husband). The existence of class-specific solutions and the ideological construction of lacking “traditional” brides are not mutually exclusive, and this paper presumes that both exist and interact in the field of unequal structural power relations.

Marriage migrant wage labor:

Marriage migrants often engage in both paid and unpaid work although much more focus has been put on the latter in research and policy (Piper & Lee 2016, own research). Marriage migrants for example are often expected to simultaneously earn money for their new families, financially support their birth families, and continuing responsibilities of care in their birth families, while always facing expectations concerning reproductive or care labor in their “new families” (compare H.-H. Tseng 2016, Piper & Lee 2016). Reproductive labor has already been discussed in the previous section on gendered power structures. Typical marriage migrants in their destination countries also have lower-pay, low prestige, and often informalized jobs like informal food vending, home-based sewing work, factory work, restaurant work (waiting) or ownership. While restaurant ownership may under some circumstances be a higher paying, higher prestige enterprise, T. in interview TT1 makes clear that with her restaurant she manages to make just enough to get by. This fits into pattern in the literature of the relegation of marriage migrants, including those already living in their destination country for a substantial amount of time, to informalized or low wage sectors of the labor market (Lee 2022). In my empirical research, although one marriage migrants was (according to her parents) an IT company owner, this was the exception.

Furthermore, temporary “grandparent” migrants to Korea (parents of marriage migrant, grandparents to the children of marriage migrants), matching Lee’s (2022) conclusions, find informalized or illegalized jobs in labor intensive sectors like agriculture (e.g. in CT3 specifically harvesting). Grandparent migration for economic reasons can be defined as class opportunity/aspiration (CT3). Parents of marriage migrant in CT3 were “successful” in that they were able to buy a house in Vietnam with the money they urged working in agriculture in Korea and were planning to return to Korea to earn more money.

Here we can see how also nationality (and citizenship) shapes class status as immigration status, access to immigration language skills, gendered expectations and state regulation shape the kind of jobs marriage migrants and their relatives can access. Using a political economic lens, the various kinds of often informal work that marriage migrants and their families engage in indicate structural exploitation (Kneebone, 2023) in the labor market, as differences based on nationality allow for the exploitation of foreign nationals, while conversely, immigration status can limit the kinds of work available. We also see that householding strategies can also involve waged labor, e.g. helping one's parents earn money abroad. This strategy can be successful in class terms (i.e. the new house bought with money from "grandparent" work in Korea in interview CT3).

This complexity illustrates that the nexus of labor market access based on location, nationality, language skills, job training, education, and personal professional connections, and its effects on the structural capacities and potentials for action of marriage migrant. However, class position goes beyond structural capacities (like labor market access) also involving self-identification, familial relations, expected behavior, and reproductive labor responsibilities. This will be discussed more in section 6.6.

Brokerage

Commercial and non-commercial marriage matchmaking is prevalent across the globe in different forms (Beck-Gernsheim 2011), and are often historically and socially embedded. Even seemingly modern phenomena like so-called "mail order brides" have historical equivalents, e.g. the organization of Japanese "picture brides" migrating to the U.S. in the early 20th century (Boomer, n.d.). While commodified transnational marriage migration in this context is specifically embedded in the modern political economy of neoliberal globalization (see chapters 3 and 4), it is not without precedent and I would argue narratives, scholarly and otherwise, surrounding CTM often ignore its historical embeddedness.

However, there are significant differences to historical matchmaking practices. Matchmaking practices do not involve the negotiation of two families through a matchmaker. Traditional brokers were primarily responsible for negotiating bride-price or dowry (of which the broker would then receive a portion) between families and not the couple to be married (Lu, 2005). CTM, however, involves the negotiation of a prospective husband, a matchmaking firm/agent/network of agents, and prospective brides, with or without their family's knowledge and approval. Furthermore, in the case of formal brokerage firms, the prospective husband is the paying client creating inequality in the negotiation from the outset (Tseng, 2015), whereas both families involved

were the clients of “traditional matchmakers”. Furthermore, matchmaking in its historical form was seen as a good deed and part of maintaining harmony in society rather than as a business model (compare Lu 2005).

Modern scholarship places the genesis of the global marriage brokerage industry in the 1980’s/90’s (Beck-Gernsheim 2011, Cheng and Choo 2015). This occurred relatively simultaneous to the post-socialist transitions in China (PCR) and Vietnam and after/during the rise of the NICs⁴⁷ and Japan. Cheng & Choo (2015) argue that (post-socialist) transformations and neoliberal reforms drove many towards new migration opportunities, and I have argued previously that in the case of Vietnam transnational marriage migration was made possible by these new flows of migrants, technology and capital (compare Chapters 2 and 4, Wang & Chang 2009).

Marriage migration has taken on a wide range of forms globally from newspaper advertisements (Beck-Gernsheim 2011) to informal matchmaking networks and most infamously the intensively debated and researched legal brokerage firms who organize each step of the marriage process serving as matchmakers to men of “developed” northeast Asian countries (compare Cheng & Choo 2015). There has also been state involvement, e.g., in the case of South Korea subsidized marriage tours to help wife-seeking bachelors find a partner in Southeast Asia fueled by fears of depopulation and rural decline (Beck-Gernsheim 2011; Lee 2012) which is at least partially the product of South Korea’s “development” into a regional and global economic center.

However, informal networks of matchmaking, not brokerage firms, are increasingly common concerning Vietnam-northeast Asian marriages (Hass et al., 2019; own research), as the Vietnamese and Taiwanese states have cracked down on formalized⁴⁸, for-profit marriage brokerage (Ching & Choo 2015). Even after commercial marriage brokerage agencies were made illegal in Taiwan and Vietnam, they continue to operate (Cheng & Choo 2015, own research). Furthermore, the KNOTS research showed a trend towards informalization of brokerage through networks & individuals, often marriage migrants themselves. For example, in one interview (CT3) the mother of a marriage migrant explained that there have not been brokerages since 2014 and now marriages occur through more direct and familial connections.

I argue that one key characteristic of CTM that formal brokerage has increased the scope of CTM. The empirical interviews show that many young women had gone to HCMC for other reasons, such as work, when they were actively recruited by brokers/brokerage firms, and in the

⁴⁷ South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong & Taiwan

⁴⁸ Although it seems marriage brokerage had always been a legal gray area in Vietnam (compare Wang & Chang 2009).

process decided that CTM was a good option for them (e.g. in interview CT3). This points to an increase in number of participants in marriage migration because of for-profit brokerage networks. Also, on structural level it is possible that without profit-seeking firms building the networks that make the practice possible (even after they are gone), CTM would never have reached this scale and such transnational networks would never have been built, on which also informal or “not-for-profit” variants build off.

KOCUN claims in a report (CT15) that for-profit brokerage led to a reduction in the amount of time that couples entering in a transnational marriage spent getting to know each other, and furthermore, that this is the source of increasing problems within these marriages. Unpacking that question would require another master thesis in itself, but it is at least intuitively plausible notion. Women’s Union representatives also imply the same thing by suggesting that since brokerage firms in Vietnam have been banned, couples get to know each other through their families which reduces problems (implying this is the “natural” way, whereas for profit brokerage was the problem) (interviews CT1 and 2).

Interview partners especially marriage migrants and their families often imply in the interviews that the brokerage firms or brokers take an unfair share of the bride wealth (money paid by the husbands / their family) that should go to the MM and their family. However, for brokerage firms operating on principles of profit-maximization and service delivery obviously see the situation differently. I see here signs of discomfort and confusion at the commodification of a traditionally non-commodified practice. On the other hand, interview partners claim that informal marriage networks, especially interpersonal ones, are seen as less exploitative and less risky (e.g. CT9). This recalls historical matchmaking practices in the greater region, e.g. payment in a red envelope (interview TT1, Beck-Gernsheim 2011) as a monetary “thank-you” and form of gratuity to the matchmaker without a fixed price.

As Bélanger (2016a) makes clear, the brokerage business along with many complementary enterprises remain deeply embedded in local communities and local governments, despite the CPV driven discourse that equates marriage migration with human trafficking. In other words, the commodification of matchmaking and associated businesses such as hotels, event spaces, or wedding photographers has become embedded in local political-economies in Vietnam, i.e. into the livelihoods of communities. This means that commodified transnational marriage migration is also tied into the class positions of a wide range of actors.

My initial work has shown a fragmentation and informalization of the recruitment process as various state authorities have sought to crack down on brokerage firms. The brokerage process is becoming more complex with unofficial actors becoming more prominent although it seems that brokerage firms have not ceased to exist (Hass et al., 2019). Informal networks described by one Women's Union representative (CT2) as "after a while women started to help each other out to set up international marriages - [this is] less risky". The empirical research indicates brokerage through family (CT1) and informal networks (CT9), with family members and friends of family often mentioned as brokers (e.g. TT1 and CT9). The research and literature also show that formal brokerage firms still operating (Bélanger, 2016a), presumably legally in South Korea (Kneebone, 2023), and various interviewees mentioned meeting brokers in HCMC (CT3, CT8, CT11) with C. in CT11 explaining that "someone introduced her to the Korean agency in HCMC" through which she then met her husband.

CTM, Precarity and Class Position

Class position of actors in Vietnam also shapes marriage migration. The marriage migrant C. in CT11 description of who and under what circumstances can go abroad says a lot about interacting structural power relations involving gender, class and nationality. C. explains that wealthy families (i.e. those with a higher class position) can afford to travel abroad or send their children to study abroad (class position overcomes nationality barrier). While families with relatives abroad can use these networks to get jobs for their children abroad (gendered family structures allow for social mobility – gender & class). Furthermore, she explains that parents of marriage migrants who have grandchildren abroad can also hope to travel abroad. And as Lee (2022) and the empirical research (e.g. interview CT3) shows, can thus also gain access to foreign labor markets, although often only under informalized/illegalized circumstances. Thus, I argue that marriage migration is shaped by class position in Vietnam, and that it can open up new possibilities for action in the fact of precarity.

While marriage migration is often the result precarity, it also can result in precarity (Piper & Lee, 2016). The authors (ibid.) criticize that most research has focused on precarity in the labor market, despite the fact that precarity is multilayered and multifaceted (ibid.) and migrants in general often experience a "precarious state of being and living" (ibid., 480). Piper & Lee (2016) urge researchers to consider crisis and precarity as multi-sited and multidirectional. However, there are key differences between the precarity of potential marriage migrants in their origin countries, and the precarity of marriage migrants in destination countries.

As already mentioned, interpersonal or social precarity can result from the gendered hierarchy inherent in the practice of CTM. And marriage migrants in destination countries also face legal precarity that comes with their status as migrants. Furthermore, as Lee (2022) mentions, the relegation of marriage migrants to low wage and informal sectors in the South Korean labor market also leads to economic precarity. On the other hand, while I assume a certain amount of social and legal stability in Vietnam, prospective marriage migrants often face economic precarity related to unemployment, low pay and lack of opportunities (compare section 6.2; Chapter 2). Furthermore, precarity can also result from language barriers as well unfamiliarity with state bureaucracy. E.g. the returned marriage migrant R. mentions the difficulties of filling out official paperwork in a foreign language (in Korea), and, the fact that some migrants also do not have knowledge about administrative procedures in Vietnam like extending one's passport (CT5).

6.3.3 The Body

Two structural categories that according to Winker & Degele's (2009) model should be analyzed deductively were conspicuously absent in the empirical material: the body and race. This absence can be considered an empirical result of its own, and in the case of the latter it implies the need for more flexible analytical categories on the structural level. I conclude that the absence of these two categories in the perception of actors speaks to their ideological importance. This recalls Bourdieu's theory of practice in which ideology is that which 'goes without saying', implying that power relations (often) lie in their naturalized and unquestioned reproduction in social practice (compare Eagleton, 1991).

In this section I will discuss the body and bodyisms, i.e. those structural power relations having to do with age, health and hegemonic norms about the appearance and function of human bodies (compare Winker & Degele, 2009). In the empirical material, age stands out as an organizing principle of CTM. The average age of women entering CTM is 22 in the region (Cần Thơ) and their husbands are around 18 years older than them (Hass et al., 2019). This age average age difference in relation to gender (younger women and older men) is also present in the KOCUN survey (CT15).

Especially the importance of bodyisms is never explicitly mentioned in the empirical material in terms of power, domination, and unequal access. The importance of young, female and norm-fitting body to the practice of CTM is usually implicit and unquestioned. However, it can be inferred from the consistent reference in the interviews to the large age-gap between Vietnamese

marriage migrants and their husbands at the time of marriage (although it is often not problematized with the exception of CT5).

Furthermore, the narrative of a women's union representative in interview CT1 about beauty of Vietnamese women attracting foreign men, and portrayal in advertisements of foreign brides as sex-providing and reproductively-able bodies (Tseng, 2016) speak to hegemonic norms regarding the body. That desirable Vietnamese bodies to marry are young, female, presumably healthy and able to carry children, and fitting certain norms seems to be a given for the interviewed actors. In my literature review, few authors set to out to analyze the role of the body and bodyisms in transnational marriage migration.

Tseng (2015), however, concludes in her analysis of social mobility and aspirations for the modern of marriage migrants from southern Vietnam that "it is easier for women than men to find a way out, because women carry the value of reproductive labor that patriarchal transnational marriage markets are looking for. Women's reproductive ability becomes their ticket to enter the dreamed of, cosmopolitan world." (ibid., p. 120). This will be taken up once again in the conclusion.

6.3.4 Racialization and nationalism

As already mentioned in regard to the category of race, it is conspicuously absent in the empirical material. Nationality and ethnicity, however, play a central role in the perception of interviewed actors. This indicates that nationality is the central operative category of racialization on the structural level, although as I will show below, ethnicity also does play a role.

In contrast to the body and the nation and nationality are mentioned frequently in the empirical material and take on functions similar to racialization. However, these are never problematized as having to do with inequality. It is taken as a given that "life is more comfortable in Korea. Life in Vietnam is a struggle" in interview CT3. Furthermore, unequal treatment on the basis of nationality is hardly thematized as such.

That "life in Korea is better" and "Korea is already developed" is represented as a natural part of reality in CT8, with the implication that Koreans have it better because that is the natural way of things. Nationality as an unquestioned determinant of access to wealth is naturalized. The category of nationality also intersects with class and gender, for instance in CT11 the soon-to-be marriage migrant C. explains she wants to bring her parents to Korea if her husband and his fam-

ily will allow it. This framing does not question her husband and his family's right to decide over the economic access of her family, nor does C. question the right of her husband and his family to decide if she will be allowed to work in Korea. Furthermore, it is taken as a given by T. in TT1 that only those foreigners with an ID card (residency permit) would dare to divorce their husbands, i.e. that state recognition decides who has the power to divorce. T. also explains that she chose to marry the first Taiwanese man who asked based on the assumption that her chances of "ending up miserable" with a Vietnamese man were greater, whereas if she married a Taiwanese man her "family's life can be easier".

Another topic indicating structural inequality based on nationality is when marriage migrants return to Vietnam with children. Former marriage migrants with children born abroad often face difficulties accessing state services (compare CT15). Without clear Vietnamese citizenship (especially those with Korean citizenship as Vietnam does not allow double citizenship), children of marriage migrants must engage in cumbersome visa applications and cannot access the public school system forcing them to go to often expensive or non-local private schools (document CT4).

Structural inequality based on nationality more broadly in terms of socio-cultural origin was also present in the empirical material in the form of language. Migrants often mentioned linguistic precarity and language barriers as key difficulties (e.g. in interviews CT5 and CT7), both on an interpersonal and structural level. In interview CT7 one former marriage migrant explains that she only stayed at home for the first six months because she could not speak Korean and her husband did not speak Vietnamese. Furthermore, conflict and the interpersonal exploitation already discussed are certainly exacerbated by language barriers that limit both communication and independent action by marriage migrants. On a more abstract level, this is a reified and rarely questioned axis of unequal access. On the structural level, linguistic ability shapes labor market access, as well as structural capacities of individual actors, and arguably is part of a mode of differentiation (and racialization) of subjects belonging to the nation, and othered foreign subjects.

There are more direct practices of racialization involved with the practice of CTM. Drawing on the literature, H.-H. Tseng (2016) for example explores the racialization of foreigners in the Taiwanese marriage market. Diverse actors, as Cheng & Choo argue, but especially commercial marriage brokerage agencies "appropriate gender, ethnic, and national stereotypical images of women to facilitate women's migration" (2015, 658). For instance, Lee (2012) and Kneebone (2023) show racialized narratives of the Korean state portraying female marriage migrants as

reproducers of “Korean” citizens that can maintain and strengthen the “nation”. H.-H. Tseng (ibid.) describes how potential Ukrainian brides were marketed by such agencies in the mid-2000’s as the embodiment of white, Westernness in comparison to Southeast Asian women who are often portrayed as subservient and good housewives; a difference that was reflected in the structure of the matchmaking process and the higher prices that agencies charged for even the possibility of being matched with a Ukrainian bride. These explicitly racializing narratives, however, are not present in the empirical material.

Besides language, ethnicity also seems to structure the process of CTM on a structural level. By all official measures, poverty in Vietnam is concentrated among the country’s ethnic minorities who often live in rural, remote border regions (compare Chapter 2). The fact that there only seems to be Kinh and ethnic-Chinese Hoa marriage migrants implies that only the relative better off majority ethnic groups have access to CTM. Without any further data and additional research it is difficult to draw conclusions. Available data indicates that most Vietnamese who married foreign spouses were from the majority ethnic group of Vietnam (Kinh). (Loi & International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017, p. 39). However, “previous research using the Vietnam Living Standards Surveys (VLSSs) (...) the Kinh are usually grouped together with the Hoa (Chinese)” (ibid., p. 273). This makes it unclear whether, for instance, more ethnic Chinese Hoa engage in marriage migration to Taiwan or the PRC. Lu (2005) claims that at the time (mid 2000s) around one fourth of Vietnamese women marrying Taiwanese were ethnic Chinese, although I cannot verify this or find more up to date information. From a socio-cultural perspective, also the fact that a perceived shared Confucian tradition is often cited as one of the reasons that Vietnamese marriage migrants are popular in Korea (compare Kneebone, 2023),

Furthermore, as Bélanger (2016a) describes, ethnicity can also be advantageous for those running businesses that cater to marriage migration / marriage migrants, e.g. in Bélanger’s (2016a) interviews there is a woman with a Viet Hoa background (Chinese Vietnamese) in southern Vietnam running a business teaching Chinese to soon-to-be marriage migrants to Taiwan⁴⁹.

Agency, Structural Capacities and Coercion

Differing social positions thus shape the structural capacities of actors: being young, and female with a body that fits into hegemonic norms are the positions that open up the path to marriage

⁴⁹ While simultaneously holding a relatively high-up position in the Vietnamese Women’s Union and being actively involved in a campaign that seeks to highlight the dangers of marriage migration (Bélanger, 2016a).

migration. Conversely, actors possibilities for action are also limited by these very categories, as well as new limitations and possibilities that come with roles like wife or daughter in-law. However, also a lower-class position and partially subjective desires and aspirations (e.g. wanting to see foreign countries), shape the desirability of this path. Those who choose marriage migration must show their worthiness to the destination state as expressed through immigration policy, like reports that language or orientation courses KOCUN as a condition of receiving one's visa (interviews CT9 & CT11) and by taking on a certain social role and legal status that Lee (2022) calls reproductive citizenship.

Both the empirical material and the literature make clear that CTM usually involves the active choice of participants (compare Bélanger 2016, H.-H. Tseng 2015), despite Vietnamese state narratives that suggest that marriage migration is akin to trafficking in women (Bélanger 2016, Cheng & Choo 2015). However, structural coercion shapes these choices and they often lead to situations of interpersonal coercion. During the literature review, I found suggestions of family pressure/social on “husbands” in destination to get married (Bélanger, 2016b; H.-Z. Wang & Tien, 2009; Yang & Lu, 2010) but little evidence of family pressure on young women in Vietnam to marry abroad. However, Bélanger's (2016b) does indicate indirect family pressure on (prospective) marriage migrants in their home communities as marriage migration becomes an increasingly available option to potentially improve economic/class position.

However, forced marriage, does occur in the Vietnamese context involving deception, threats, and/or violence to coerce women to marry. According to KOCUN this kind of forced marriage and trafficking much less common than CTM (CT15). Within CTM it is important to differentiate between structural coercion and direct interpersonal coercion (although this is of course also shaped by structural power relations) as individual actors to make decisions within the scope of possibility that they have available to them. The former includes not just legal frameworks that foster interpersonal coercion (Kneebone 2023) but also the state of dependency that marriage migrants from Vietnam, and in many other contexts, find themselves in as their legal status is so closely intertwined with heteronormative expectations and the role of the “wife” (compare Lee 2022). In the case of CTM this also involves economic dependence and barriers to independent action such as lack of social capital or language skills.

6.4 Institutions

I define institutions as powerful collective actors often tied to the state, like immigration authorities, but also KOCUN center and Vietnamese women's union. Also, nation-states themselves can be considered institutions although in both cases it is important to differentiate between different levels of organization with institutions. For instance, while the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) is a mass organization of the Communist Party of Vietnam, which leads the state in Vietnam, it and the other mass organizations of the party straddle the line between civil society organization, party organ, and part of the state apparatus (compare Hoang, 2020). Furthermore, the VWU is organized into units on the province and local level, as well as the national level. My research group was allowed to interview and spoke with province and local level representatives, whose interests and world views may differ from both the national level organization and VMU chapters in other localities.

I look at institutions in this thesis on both a structural and discursive level. In the case of KOCUN (The KOCUN Center) and the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU), this is also a function of the empirical material available, including both information about them (presentation and translations of some written materials) and interviews with organization members. I also draw on my experiences talking and dealing with both organizations during the research. I analyze both their narratives and the structural effects of their policies and practices. Furthermore, because it is a mass organization of the CPV, I theorize a connection between official state narratives, and Vietnamese women's union narratives as the VWU at least partially reproduces state narratives.

In our interviews with them, VWU representatives' narrative of success of both their programs and state policy directly contrasts with a KOCUN survey (CT15) concerning the economic condition of the regions.

There is little English or German language information on the Korea Centre for United Nations Human Rights Policy (KOCUN). It seems to be an independent Korean NGO with a broad range of activities also focused on the promotion of human rights with a focus on women's rights⁵⁰. KOCUN is active in Korea⁵¹ and has multiple centers in Vietnam (Kneebone 2023). According to Vietnamese media, the KOCUN center in Cần Thơ province is part of the "Viet Nam–Korea Joint Care" project in partnership with the Vietnamese Women's Union (VietNamNet News, 2019) and is financed by the South Korean State and Hyundai (compare Kneebone 2023). VietNamNet News (2019) lists the initial funding of the center as 22 billion Vietnamese Dong (roughly 950,000 USD at the time) provided by Hyundai Motor Company and the Korean Social

⁵⁰ See kocun.org

⁵¹ Ibid.

Welfare Relief Fund. This reinforces e.g. Wang & Chang's (2009) argument about the interconnection between marriage migration networks and economic integration in the region more broadly.

The KOCUN center in Cần Thơ Province, provides free language courses and orientation for marriage migrants leaving for Korea and those returning from Korea with counseling, legal support, job training, and small business loans. They also provide survivors of domestic abuse with financial support in addition to the abovementioned services (CT1, CT2, CT4, CT11, VietNam-Net 2019). The center in Cần Thơ like the larger NGO seems to follow a rights-based narrative concerning their mission – supporting women in their choices and providing information for good choices (CT4, CT15). Kneebone (2023) also notes that the cooperation between KOCUN and the VWU is certainly not typical for Vietnam because independent foreign NGOs are not often to operate on Vietnamese territory.

This is perhaps because the KOCUN center in Cần Thơ, and perhaps KOCUN more broadly, seem to have become part of the regulation of marriage migration to South Korea. According to soon-to-be marriage migrants in 2019 (interviews CT9 & CT11), Korean and Vietnamese authorities have at least in Southern Vietnam placed KOCUN in a gatekeeping role saying that language and orientation courses at the KOCUN center have become a precondition for receiving a visa from the Korean immigration authorities. While language skills certainly improve marriage migrants' structural capacities in Korea and allow more room for maneuver, in having become become part the migration regime, KOCUN is part of the framework that makes the structural exploitation of marriage migrants (compare Kneebone 2023) possible.

Concerning the problems children of marriage migrants face already discussed in the subsection on racialized nationality, according to the KOCUN center (CT4, CT15) they have managed to help improve the situation by paying for school fees, and by successfully lobbying local/regional officials to allow children of marriage migrants to attend public school and to make the visa application process easier. I cannot verify these specific claims about changes in government policy based on KOCUN's advocacy. However, VMU representatives made similar claims about KOCUN's activities and successes in interview CT2. On structural level KOCUN does seem to help secure/improve women's class position through direct/indirect support, like job training, paying for school fees, and direct transfers to survivors of domestic abuse. Regarding their ongoing operations, Kneebone (2023) also mentions without specific citation that KOCUN has faced difficulties funding their projects in Vietnam since 2017 due to a lack of government funding,

although this was not mentioned in the empirical research. Still, it is possible that their operations have been scaled down since the research was completed in 2019.

Turning to the state, in Vietnam, as already discussed in chapter two, there are two dominant sometimes overlapping state discourses around marriage migrants that roughly correspond to the infantilizing/demonizing binary: marriage migrants are portrayed as ignorant/without-agency thus needing protection, or they are portrayed as materialistic, lazy and corrupted by the West, i.e. as no longer “dutiful” women (Bélanger, 2016b; Werner, 2009; own research, see e.g. chapter 2), while Bélanger et al. (2013) show similarly narratives in Vietnamese online media. The VWU representations in interview CT1 reproduce this binary almost exactly in their description of marriage migrants⁵² I interpret this also as anxiety concerning the (supposed) threat marriage migration poses to Doi Moi womanhood and Vietnamese nationalism (compare Werner 2009).

However, other empirical work has made clear that such narratives of proper womanhood are contested and negotiated by women in Vietnam (Hoang, 2020). Further complicating this analysis of state narrative, VWU representatives in CT1 talk positively about remittances (that they help the community economically), while at the same time reproducing the above mentioned victim or corrupted binary (also regarding the latter they describe them as women who do not want to work). They also reify a neoliberal discourse of entrepreneurship indicating that the purpose of VWU entrepreneurship loans is supposedly to offer alternatives to marriage migration.

Despite brokerage bans and narratives of trafficking, VWU representatives had positive view of remittances, and thus indirectly marriage migration, despite contrary state narratives. They describe how remittances help communities and the country economically. Especially in C2, a VWU representative praises the families of marriage migrants for sharing their newfound wealth with communities and through charitable giving. These contradictory narratives evoke the ambivalence of local officials regarding CTM in Bélanger’s (2016a) study, in which the interests and viewpoints of local officials differ from nationally set narratives. Bélanger (ibid.) finds that local officials are often directly or indirectly invested in the practice of CTM. This also points to the fact that there are differing interests and worldviews in any organization, include the VWU, the CPV and the Vietnamese state.

In both CT1 and CT2 VWU representatives portray a narrative of state control (compare chapter 2). They claim that the problems of marriage migration and economic problems in the region

⁵² Responding to the question of what they think of people marrying foreigners: “There are two cases in which this happens: 1) low income and low education. family relies on them [the marriage migrant] for remittances. 2) people getting married internationally because it is the trend [and] they are too lazy to work on their own.”

have been largely resolved through poverty reduction and a diversification of the economy thanks to state, VWU and KOCUN action. This contrasts with KOCUN's 2016 survey (CT15) and the literature (e.g. Kneebone, 2023), which show that the economic situation in Cần Thơ has remained difficult for many.

The state also directly affects marriage migration through its policies. The Vietnamese and Taiwanese states both banned for-profit marriage brokerage after the turn of the century. These crack-downs are often portrayed as anti-trafficking measures (H.-H. Tseng, 2015). However, even after commercial marriage brokerage agencies were banned in Taiwan and Vietnam, they continued to operate (Cheng & Choo, 2015; H.-H. Tseng, 2015; own research), as non-profits in Taiwan (H.-H. Tseng, 2015), or otherwise. There seems to be little and incomplete enforcement of the ban in Vietnam, as officials confused about what exactly is banned and legal grey areas remain (Bélanger, 2016a; Kneebone, 2023). Furthermore, their livelihoods or the livelihoods of important community members are interwoven with the process making enforcement difficult (Bélanger, 2016a). As of 2019 there seemed to still be brokerage firms operating. For instance, a newly married marriage migrant waiting to go to Korea explained in interview CT11 that she had met her husband through an agency in HCMC. Furthermore, informal brokerage networks were certainly still active as of 2019, and it seems unlikely based on current research (e.g. Kneebone, 2023) that either for-profit brokerage firms or informal brokerage networks have ceased to operate.

H.-H. Tseng (2015) argues that the 2008 ban of transnational marriage brokerage in Taiwan in reality has done little to support transnational marriage migrants. Arguing instead that it serves to reinforce and assuage public liberal morality and improve the international reputation of Taiwan. I would make a similar argument concerning Vietnamese state policy, as enforcement of the ban is often not a top priority (Bélanger, 2016a; Kneebone, 2023) indicating that its importance is perhaps of a discursive/ideological nature. In the case of Taiwan also human rights and feminist oriented NGOs are supportive of a ban on for-profit brokerage of transnational marriages based on the idea that this brokerage is little more than trafficking, rather than another form of match-making, in contrasts to the views of many marriage migrants (ibid.).

Also, destination states seek to stabilize systems of family care sometimes through migration policy, as touched on in chapters 3 and 4. Scholars like Lee (2012, 2022) and Kneebone (2023) show the ways in which (racialized) reproductive politics in South Korea aimed at reproducing the nation affect the legal framework of marriage migration. Connecting to social reproduction, Lee (2012) explored how state policy responded to perceived issues surrounding birth rates, mar-

riage rates, and care work by promoting transnational marriages between Southeast Asian women and “rural bachelors”/lower-class men, who were looking for but could not find a (“suitable”) wife. Lee (ibid.) argues that the promotion of such marriages serves as one means to staunch a crisis of social reproduction in lower-income households by providing unpaid care work, and that this crisis of social reproduction is the result of a reorganized system of welfare in South Korea that relies on unpaid family labor (see also 4.3).

Thus, the state’s promotion of “multicultural families” represents an attempt to (re)traditionalize the family as the natural site of unpaid, female care-work (ibid.), or in Lee’s (2012) words: “the reproduction of institutional arrangement of provisioning and caring needs” using marriage migration as a “strategy for maintaining the reproductive function of the family in a changing socio-economic environment” (ibid pp. 180, 181). Lee (2012) thus connects feminists/materialist social reproduction theory to transnational marriage migration. Werner (2009), regarding the Vietnamese context, similarly argues that the shift of carework away from the state and to the household, and a readoption of “traditional” gender roles in Vietnam post Doi Moi represents a state strategy to maintain care provisioning in the face of massive social transformations.

Of the above-named institutions, I have the least empirical material related to the immigration authorities in Vietnam and destination countries. Immigration policy shapes who, how and under what circumstances migration can occur and thus is the source of structural coercion limiting actor possibilities for action. However, the implementation and enforcement of these policies comes down to the specific organ of the state, immigration authority, and the individuals within this institution who interact with one another, the institution and the state. The closest direct evidence I have of immigration policy is indications of cooperation between KOCUN, the Vietnamese, and Korean immigration authorities, i.e. KOCUN classes as a precondition for receiving a visa (interview CT11). It is, however, unclear if this is a specific-regional policy or nationwide.

6.5 Symbolic Representation Level

According to Winker & Degele, hegemonic symbolic representations (norms, ideologies, narratives etc.) function as the basis and justification for categories of difference/inequality (2009). The repetition of these norms in speech and practice both ensures their reproduction and opens up space to resist them. In this section, based on Winker & Degele’s (2009) methodology, I use categories that were inductively developed through analysis of the empirical interviews based on

the current state of the art and my research interests, and when possible, set in relation to the structural power categories described above.

Diverse actors, as Cheng & Choo argue, but especially commercial marriage brokerage agencies “appropriate gender, ethnic, and national stereotypical images of women to facilitate women’s migration” (2015, 658). Moreover, outside of its facilitation symbolic norms are reproduced in different contexts. E.g., party officials (Vietnamese Women’s Union) in one interview suggested that foreigners want to marry Vietnamese women so much because they are “beautiful, talented, and obedient in serving husbands. And they know how to work and run a business” (Interview CT1).

The quote from CT1, the argument that “lazy women” decided for CTM seems similar to the disparagement of “loose (Westernized) women” as the antithesis of *Đôi Mối* womanhood so central to the modern political economy of Vietnam. It is unclear from the statement itself if such women are considered lazy because they are assumed to be choosing “quick” wealth or because they are assumed to be shirking their role as guardians of the household and reproductive labor in Vietnam (Bélanger, 2016b; Werner, 2009) (among many possible explanations).

On the other side, the ideological construction of lacking “traditional” brides discussed in chapter 4, and a discourse of Southeast Asian women as more “traditional” women (compare Wang & Tien 2009), shape the views and motivations of men seeking wives through marriage migration and their families. For example, in interview CT13 the spouse of a marriage migrant apparently had sought out CTM because they heard that Vietnamese women were “nice” and obedient. Furthermore, Wang & Tien (2009) conducted extensive empirical research confirming that men in Taiwan seeking foreign brides, and their families, often connected hetero-sexist constructions of traditional womanhood with women from Southeast Asia, as opposed to supposedly “overly modern” and independent Taiwanese women.

This exemplifies a broader discursive framework on the level of hegemonic symbolic representation outside of one set of actors with specific interests. Unlike Wright’s (2006) detailed analysis concerning the “disposable third world woman” in global production networks, whether and how these “myths” of the Southeast Asian marriage migrant fit into global circuits of capital accumulation remains difficult to pin down but its embeddedness in capitalist relations is clear. This is shown by brokerage agencies and networks’ usage of existing ideologies and power structures in order to improve their business (Bélanger, 2016a, p. 20; Tseng, 2016) and, on a more abstract level, the role that nationality plays in the division of power, labor and resources. My theoretical

model, and those of authors like H.-H. Tseng (2015, 2016) or Parreñas (2008), underline the importance of hegemonic norms, discourses and symbolic representation to the maintenance of nationality-based structural power relations.

As already noted in structure level subsection a certain kind of racialization occurs through the category nationality. These can be found regarding in discourses and narratives on language and nationality, especially in terms of legal status. The importance of nationality as a category of differentiation sometimes expresses itself through prejudice and stereotypes regarding Koreans, Taiwanese and Vietnamese people and Southeast Asian marriage migrants in general. For instance, the aforementioned case in CT13 of stereotypes of Vietnamese women as “nice” and obedient, reflecting stereotypes of Southeast Asian women that are commonly identified in the literature (compare H.-H. Tseng, 2016).

Actors in the empirical material express national stereotypes and in different ways. T. in TT1 explains that some Taiwanese just do not like Vietnamese people, suggesting that such views and presumably experiences of discrimination are common. However, T. does not focus on this discrimination in the interview, suggesting instead that although people may judge based on nationality, divorce status, or infidelity, that this “just” part of society. This self-portrayal will be discussed in the section 6.6. concerning emotional independence.

Also, in CT13 a returned MM tells of anti-Vietnamese prejudice of husband’s family, saying that members of his family hated Vietnamese people, the same family that apparently internalized stereotypes about obedient Vietnamese women. This indicates the co-construction of normative stereotypes regarding nationality. In terms of anti-Korean prejudice, one former marriage migrant describes that only one of ten Korean people is “actually nice” (CT13) reflecting generally negative interpersonal experiences. Language barriers and an inability to communicate are also frequently mentioned in the empirical material and may contribute to these negative experiences.

Also, language connects to narratives of national identity, as in CT8 when parent of marriage migrant praises that her grandchildren can speak Vietnamese, or CT5, when a former marriage migrant explains that she felt sad when her child did not learn Vietnamese because she had to work so much that she did not have the time to teach him. Also expressed as a narrative of affinity to Vietnam of Vietnamese culture. For example, the above-mentioned grandparent also emphasizes how much her grandchildren enjoy the food and life in Vietnam and that they do not want to leave at the end of their visits, while returned marriage migrant in CT12 underlines how her daughter, although still not mastering the language, feels a strong affinity for “Vietnamese

life” and is having a good time there. These valuations of speaking Vietnamese and “Vietnamese-ness” point to both identity constructions around nationality, which will be discussed in the following section, and the importance of nationality as an organizing principle in the social reality of actors involved with CTM.

Sometimes discursive constructions around nationality are expressed in combination with other social power categories, for example, in terms the characteristics of men with Korean nationality. One returned marriage migrant states that men in Korea are “dictators” (CT6). Furthermore, the parents of a marriage migrant in CT3 complain about a ‘workholic’ culture in Korea (CT3), connecting this to the narrative that Korean men are more hard working but less emotionally caring, which also comes up more indirectly in other interviews. While this prejudice is presumably also based in interpersonal experience, it interacts with broader social discourse that can ending up shaping actors’ decisions. E.g. E. (CT13) explained to us that she had been told that foreign men were less likely to be abusive than Vietnamese men and that this had contributed to her decision to enter into a CTM.

Perhaps more prominently, discursive constructions of development and underdevelopment in relation to the value and desirability of nations. There are reoccurring implicit and explicit references specifically to development and lack of development in the empirical material. In interview CT8 parents of marriage migrants (WB & MG) referred to Korea being “already developed” whereas Vietnam is “just developing”. MG describes live in Vietnam as “very unstable” while WB connects Vietnams lack of development to poverty and daughters leaving. The mother/family of a marriage migrant in CT3 also makes this connection attributing the outmigration of her daughter to life being “comfortable” in Korea whereas in Vietnam it is a “struggle”.

Piper & Lee (2016) criticize that marriage migration has been often left out of any conversation on the migration-development nexus (theory on the linkages between migration and development). This thesis offers at least a brief exploration of the effects of the paradigm of development on transnational marriage migration.

From a critical materialist perspective, I identify a hegemonic norm that justifies differences in wealth and status as well and that naturalizes nation states as the natural containers of economy and wealth. However, even without this kind of interpretation, the interview participants clearly identify the vastly different levels of wealth between the involved nation states and interact with ideals of development as life in comfort and stability. I suspect based on the narratives of inter-

viewed marriage migrants that refer in various ways to finding a better, wealthier or more comfortable life abroad that they also are influenced by this narrative.

Critical development studies sees underdevelopment and development as discursive constructs that justify hierarchical power relations and uneven divisions of labor, resources and wealth (compare Peet & Hartwick, 2015). However, for actors on the ground the narrative of development can offer hope and also a roadmap for taking action to achieve this state of wealth and comfort. One soon-to-be marriage migrant (interview CT9), for example, expressed the desire to become a Korean citizen as part of broader aspirations of social mobility. In the case of this research, commodified transnational marriage migration is one path on this roadmap available to specific actors, although the outcome as well as specific expectations vary.

From the perspective of nationality, not all interview partners reproduced discourses of differentiation regarding nationality. Some even suggested that life in Korea in Vietnam are not all that different (CT7). While in CT5, a former marriage migrant argues in terms of getting along as a couple that "Culture gap is not the same with age gap. We can change our life to integrate with the culture, but cannot change the mind if age gap is very big.". This indicates nationalism is not seen as the primary category of difference in every situation.

The empirical material also revealed certain norms of what are desirable and undesirable class positions. VMU representatives in CT1 describe that they have never considered migration because they have stable jobs and lives in Vietnam. The representatives also show certain class position, as they both have leadership positions in a mass organization of the CPV and at least one has a university education. Their statements in the interview about marriage migrants imply that migration is for poor people, i.e. those without "stable jobs and lives". Furthermore, in CT2, another VMU representative gives a similarly classed narrative. She explains that her daughter will not get married yet because she has to finish her studies first.

I identify a certain, what I would describe as "middle class", norm of proper behavior for daughters implying that "good" daughters get married after they finish university, also implying that "bad" daughters do something else. When compared to the way that VMU representatives characterize marriage migrants in CT1, as either poor and desperate or lazy, there is a certain continuity in the portrayal of migrants and marriage migrants as either economic victims or non-virtuous people. And the implication that migrating abroad for marriage is not something that proper middle-class people do. However, as C. explains in CT11 those with a higher-class posi-

tion in Vietnam can afford to travel abroad or send their children to study abroad (class position overcomes nationality barrier) and this is not a stigmatized practice.

In contrast, narratives of virtue as hard work and success recurring in the interviews. Interview partners often portrayed themselves or their goals in terms of jobs or career plans. Here I identify indications of certain neoliberal discourses of self-optimization and self-responsibility connected to the “adult worker model” and class (see chapters 3 and 4). This can be exemplified by the neoliberal discourse of entrepreneurship in the explanations of CT1 & CT2 women’s union entrepreneurship programs. They were presented as a means to counteract the poverty that leads to marriage migration, essentially as an alternative to marriage migration. Especially the portrayal of the VWU representatives reflect certain development discourses that, reflecting the above-mentioned neoliberal ethos, portray women’s empowerment in economic and entrepreneurial terms.

6.5.1 Gendered Norms

The role that gender in interaction with other power structures plays in the lives of the interview partners were explored in 6.3.1, however, symbolic representations related to these structures play an important role in the research. Gendered norms and specific gender roles like mother, wife, daughter, and husband, are also present in the explicit and implicit norms and value judgments in the empirical material.

In CT2 a VMU representation explains that “according to the tradition Vietnamese women take care of family. If something bad happens, they have to take care of it themselves. Only speak up in really bad situations” (slight punctuation spelling adjustments by author). This indicates an overlap between gendered norms of Vietnamese womanhood in relation to the family and narratives of self-reliance that are often expressed in terms of class, and manifest on the identity level too. The mother of a marriage migrant in CT3 also says that women have to “sacrifice”, reifying the norm of women as daughters and mothers needing to sacrifice for their families. The roles of daughter and wife also become enmeshed with class when considering e.g. value judgments related to remittances and support of family. For instance, one parent of a marriage migrant (CT8) mourns that their daughter was unable to send enough support to the family because she has to raise her children alone. This also once again underlines the centrality of gendered care duties, especially regarding child rearing, the realities of marriage migrants. Norms around proper motherhood and the responsibility of caring for children often shaped the possibilities for and choice of action (i.e. functioned as a structural frame) for interviewed Vietnamese marriage mi-

grants and their families, as well as motherhood as functioning as a central pillar or identity construction central to all marriage migrants interviewed. Furthermore, single motherhood was an important intersecting category on the representation level. I identify, for example in the above-mentioned situation, the implicit assumption that the mother's primary responsibility is to her children (as mother) and secondary responsibility to family (as daughter). On the other hand, it is often the case that after return to Vietnam former marriage migrants have to rely on family ("parents, siblings or relatives" CT15), and that this is associated with shame (ibid.), presumably because norms of "proper" daughterhood are not being fulfilled.

Gendered norms also shape the division of reproductive labor and wage labor within the family, as already been discussed in the structure section (subsection gender). For instance, K. in CT12 explained that she moved back to Vietnam and divorced after her mother-in-law died, because there was no one else to help her to take care of her children, because her husband has to work. Here we can identify the interaction of multiple prominent discourses of an ideological nature. On the one hand, her husband's inability or unwillingness to take over reproductive labor represents male breadwinner norm, especially considering the fact that in this case he continues to economically support his wife and children despite their return to Vietnam. On the other hand, norms around motherhood and feminized responsibility for care labor profoundly shape the life decisions of the involved marriage migrant determining her country of residence. The marriage migrant T. in TT1 also explained the ways that care responsibilities shaped her work, namely that she stopped doing sewing work (at home contract work for a company) after giving birth to her second child and only started to work outside of the house once she her children reached school age.

Also role of wife plays a prominent discursive role. B. in CT7 explained that wives should care for their husbands, and do housework, and older women should stay at home so that their husbands can work. The latter presumably refers to wives with children. Such sentiments were common in the interviews. This norm also shows itself in the topic of families or husbands in destination countries forbidding their Vietnamese wives from working or regulating the kind of work they could do (e.g in interviews CT7, CT13 and TT1).

The empirical material also indicates certain gender norms and behaviors related to parent-daughter relationships. Out of all the parent's interviewed, the three mothers of marriage migrants showed physical and verbal signs of distress that their children left / were so far away, while the two marriage migrant fathers interviewed implied that the situation was good or at least bearable, not problematized (interview CT3). Of course, there can be a difference between how

these parents feel emotionally and what norms they feel they are supposed to fit in to. Here, masculine norms of expression (lack of emotional expression, admission of vulnerability) might also play a role.

Moreover, fragile masculine norms could be observed in fears of “uncontrolled” women. In CT13 a former marriage migrant explains how her husband was afraid of her meeting new people who could be a bad influence by telling her to live more independently, and T. (TT1) explains first how her husband was afraid of infidelity on her part before she left for Taiwan, and secondly how he saw her (Vietnamese) friends in Taiwan as a bad influence. In T.’s case, her husband was also afraid of her economic independence, forbidding her from opening her own restaurant and fighting with her about it after she opened one contributing to their divorce. On the other hand, this situation and T.’s narrative of it also points to the importance of economic independence for her.

Discursive constructions of the marriage migrant as: a young woman who is economically desperate (class), or who is a lazy thrill seeker (norm hard-working, negation of right to aspirations) also interacts with negative views of divorce, and partially contradict the narrative of daughters sacrificing for their families. I relate this also to social norms concerning “successful” marriage and proper womanhood. For example in CT5, negative gossip and negative views of neighbors regarding divorced women mentioned and the parent of a marriage migrant in CT8 explains that “When the daughter is happy she wants to tell the neighbors. But her daughter has had a hard life. She doesn’t want to share this” (slight spelling punctuation adjustments by the author). Thus, one can see that social stigma concerning divorce can also be expressed in self-censoring. T. (TT1) also talks in detail about the common stigma that divorced women face in Taiwan. These are different contexts but stigma of divorce remains a commonality.

However, narratives of family relations are not always negative nor do they always clearly reproduce structural power relations. E.g. T. in TT1 seems to have a positive relationship with her husband’s family. She explains that her husband’s parents (and her husband) always helped with household chores like cooking and she describes a positive emotional relationship with his sisters. And other marriage migrants expressed ongoing positive relationships with their former husbands both emotionally and/or in terms of continuing monetary support (CT5, CT12), in contrast to other very negative divorce experiences.

This makes clear that family situations, gendered norms and divisions of reproductive labor, and power relationships in general, are always context dependent and subject to negotiation and dif-

ferent interpretations by the involved actors. My interpretations, based on a specific set of academic theories, do not always reflect the opinions of involved actors, nor could I possibly hope to do justice to the broad range of subjective concerns and deliberations shaping their actions. Still, the analysis of the identity level seeks to analyze broadly identifiable characteristics in their portrayal of their subjective concerns based on the quantitative content analysis.

6.6 Identity Level

Following Winker & Degele 2009 involves inductive process of the examination of categories of difference, identity making and self-positioning on the individual level. Construction of identity allows the investigation of social power relations because the categories used to differentiate actor identity are explicitly and implicitly tied to group identity, symbolic representations and structural power relations. Analyzing the identity level proved more difficult than anticipated because the empirical interviews show a focus on marriage migration as a process but not on the personalities and self-descriptions of marriage migrants. It seems that the questions we asked as research group and the general context of the interviews, and perhaps the fact that we had almost no time to build relationships with the interview partners, led to “matter-of-fact” interviews that were often rather impersonal. In comparison, interview TT1, which was provided by a colleague, involves much more discussion of the personal by the interview partner. Despite these challenges there are significant trends in the entirety of the empirical literature that point towards identification-based categories.

The original KNOTS 2019 group report (Hass et al., 2019) and some of my later research focused on the motivation of women from Vietnam to migrate through CTM. Although factors pointing to economic motivations are common, it seemed that aspirational motivations and a desire for “better life” had become more common (compare also Kim, 2010; H.-H. Tseng 2015), as reflected by e.g. the very specific educational plans and motivation of an outgoing marriage migrant in CT9. However, the research process of this thesis has made clear that almost all the marriage migrants interviewed expressed aspirations for a better or more comfortable life, whether for themselves or for their family, and that the lines between poverty, family duty and personal aspirations as separate motivations is not always clear. Multiple motivations behind migration, like fun and curiosity about new places (CT13), or wanting to study abroad (CT9), can be identified, and the subjective concerns and motivations expressed by interview partners are often multifaceted.

Many interview partners expressed explicit negative associations with economic dependence, while economic independence was a common ideal in the interviews. The importance of economic and financial independence of interviewees is expressed through the fact that jobs, economic ambitions, and characteristics like self-sufficiency and being a hard worker play a central role in self-descriptions and life descriptions of interview partners. This indicates that economic independence and prowess were important points of self-identification for many interview partners. For example, in CT5 H. explains that she does not feel comfortable receiving money from others. Also, T. in TT1 claims that her divorce was largely due to the fact that her husband did not want her to “work outside” running her own restaurant. She makes clear that she would rather have stayed together with her husband but her (economic) independence was extremely important to her. Even after being harassed by her husband before and after the divorce, she did not sway from this course. This example also illustrates the agency of marriage migrants and their ability, despite interpersonal coercion and structural power relations, to negotiate their social position based on their subjective needs and wants.

Similarly, many interviews were characterized by positive portrayals of emotional independence and self-sufficiency. This was especially the case for T. (in interview TT1) Emotional independence seemed central to T.’s self-portrayal. Regarding negative judgements of society concerning foreigners, divorcees and those engaging in marital infidelity she states “Who has all the energy for that? Well I don’t”. Another example is T.’s portrayal of her integration in Taiwan. She says “it was normal. I was a little homesick but it was nothing”. Concerning arguments with her husband she says “I would just ignore him whenever I didn’t feel like talking to him. Basically, coming over here, usually I would talk to him if I felt like so, and I would just give him a cold shoulder if I was not into the mood”.

Concerning returned marriage migrants, H. in CT5 states that “[those] who decide to go back VN [are] strong women” (slight adjustments by the author) also implying that she is a strong woman herself. The prospective marriage migrant I. (CT9), who was at the time waiting to marry her prospective Korean husband, expressed confidence in her ability to handle the situation, whatever may happen, implicitly underlining her belief in her own self-sufficiency emotionally despite leaving her social network. She underlined her confidence that she would achieve her educational or job-related goals, with or without the help of her new husband, stating she thinks life in Korea “will be normal, I also worked and lived in other places in V[ietnam], I don’t expect my husband to take care of me, it’s a gamble, but I am not afraid of it” (CT9).

On the other hand, many interview partners associated themselves and their family with economic hardship and precarity. This includes explicit and implicit references to economic precarity often as an explanation for decisions and life situation. Not only involved with explanations of marriage migrations but in descriptions of life, like in CT6 in a description one person's difficulty with finding a job, their lack of job training, and feelings of guilt related to not being able to help their family financially. I speculate that these kinds of identity constructions are related to class positions and perhaps a reaction to negative associations concerning the class position of marriage migrants (discussed in 6.3.2 and 6.5).

Regarding gender and reproductive labor, interviewed marriage migrants very often identified themselves with motherhood and their responsibility to care with their children. Motherhood was usually portrayed as a naturalized responsibility (e.g. CT5, CT7, CT8, TT1). The category motherhood as expressed being in charge of childcare / child wellbeing overlap with discursive ideological constructions already discussed on the representation and structure levels. In the case of single motherhood, the category was framed in terms of difficulty (e.g. CT7), without however questioning the naturalized responsibility involved. Marriage migrants often framed decisions as the only possibility because of childcare responsibilities or the best possibility concerning well be of children. For instance, R. in CT5 explained that she wanted to "teach [her] son following [her] way" as part of the reason for returning with him to Vietnam. Furthermore, T. in TT1 responding to the question of whether she is satisfied with her life responds: "Well, [I'm] just playing it [by] ear. I don't actually think about things like being satisfied or something like that, I just don't. I just think that now no one could take of me, I couldn't too, because I live for children, and because I don't have the money."

Motherhood not just limited to previous and current marriage migrants but also popped up as self-identification category for mothers of marriage migrants, like in CT3 when the mother of a marriage migrants explains how difficult it was to have her child move away. This focus on motherhood indicates self-identification related to values and norms concerning the family and care-giving responsibilities discussed in 6.3.1 and 6.5.

Women entering these CTM marriages usually meet their husbands only a few times before marriage and the marriages happen quickly (H.-Z. Wang & Hsiao, 2009; Yang & Lu, 2010; CT15). Interview partners seemed generally aware of the risks involved with CTM (CT6, CT9, CT11, TT1). Straddling identity and building an discourse, some seemed to portray themselves against the stereotype of uninformed young woman just hoping to find something better abroad (although T. in TT1 portrays herself this way). Especially I. in CT9 tries to show through their level

of knowledge and planning, rational analysis of risks, that she do not fit into this category (e.g. CT9 for the latter)(also compare H.-H. Tseng, 2015).

Despite the importance of nationality as a structural and discursive category of differentiation, interviewed marriage migrants did not often explicitly associate their identity with Vietnam. At most this was communicated implicitly often through differentiation or problematization of different aspects in life in their destination countries. For instance, in terms of the reality versus their expectations of Korean culture in CT13, or in terms of not liking the lifestyle in Korea (CT6), or CT5 simply underlining that “Korean culture is very different from Vietnamese [culture]”.

Relating back to discussions of lower-class position men seeking out wives through CTM discussed in subsection “structure: class”, Kim (2014) also connects the lower socio-economic status and rural location of men seeking wives through marriage migration and the concept of compensatory masculinity. This empirically grounded concept suggests that subordinated men compensate for their inability to fulfill hetero-patriarchal norms, e.g. to find a wife in their home country, by performing masculine ideals like male breadwinnership and through the discursive construction of their identities, and in the case of CTM, the identities of their wives. This involves in Kim’s (2014) researching different ways of self-association with masculine ideals like virility, sexual prowess, strength and success.

One could also argue that there is a certain kind of compensatory femininity of divorced/returned women that serves to counteract stigma around their return and/or divorce. This involves portrayals of selfless motherhood, selfless daughterhood that reflect discourses of feminine virtue. This can be observed, for example, in T.’s (TT1) quote on page 110 underlining the fact that she cannot think of her own satisfaction because she “lives for her children”. However, in contrast to Kim’s (2014) detailed research, compensatory femininity cannot be clearly identified, and would require additional empirical research to analyze.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

CTM is embedded in post-socialist transformations and the rise of new international hierarchies of wealth related to global and local changes in the political economy (compare chapters 2 and 4). The practice draws strongly on historical gendered power relations and related practices (e.g. historical practices of matchmaking and bride-wealth giving) but represents a fundamentally new

mode of migration and marriage organization with new geographic dimensions and organizational principles. The clearest differences to these historical practices is transnationality along hierarchies of wealth and gendered power relations, and commodification. One could argue CTM represents a commodification of traditional practices, although they have taken on new transnational dimensions.

Commodification, I argue, involves a web of abstract and impersonal power relations related to capitalist commodity production. More concretely, I argue that profit-oriented marriage brokerage by firms have expanded scope of the practice, and, even after government bans of these firms in some countries, informal and often interpersonal matchmaking networks have taken their place, building on the networks established during the heyday of commercial matchmaking. That is, even after firms were no longer able to operate, monetary based matchmaking continued. This represents a partial return to historical practices of matchmaking on a new transnational scope.

Furthermore, it is clear that for-profit brokerages firms continue to operate, both out of Korea where they are not banned, and in Vietnam, where enforcement of the ban there lax spotty (Kneebone, 2023; Bélanger 2016a). Thus, interpersonal/informalized matchmaking networks operate in the same “ecosystems” as for profit firms. Furthermore, as Bélanger (2016a) and this thesis make clear, both for-profit and informal matchmaking networks have become embedded in local political economies as firms provide services for brokerage firms, matchmakers, marriage migrants and their families, and prospective grooms and their families. Given the ongoing nature and scope of the practice, (a VWU representative (CT2) claims 15 to 17 recent marriages “in the area” while based on my interpretation of the Loi & IOM (2017) numbers around ten thousand marriage migrants moved yearly from Vietnam to either South Korea and Taiwan between 2013 and 2016), I contend that the practice is deeply embedded in the economic fabric of sending communities through, especially given the concentration of the practice to specific communities (compare IOM, 2017; Loi & IOM, 2017). This embeddedness includes the reliance of those working or earning income within brokerage networks or in auxiliary services, and those in the community who rely on or benefit from remittances from marriage migrants abroad (compare Bélanger, 2016a). Furthermore, it can encompass more indirect benefits, such as “grandparent” migration in the Korean case, that allowed some interview partners to informally work in Korea because their daughter was a marriage migrant there (CT3). Moreover, this is an interesting addition to Wang & Chang’s (2009) argument that commodified matchmaking was made possible by business and capital networks between Vietnam and the destination countries. This points to a plausible generative relationship between political economic integration as part of

neoliberal globalization, the establishment of commercialized brokerage, and their increasing replacement or at least coexistence with informal matchmaking networks.

However, as H.-H. Tseng (2015) argues, the market mechanism, i.e. commodification of the process, creates both the conditions of women's "vulnerability and exploitation" and simultaneously opens opportunities and strategies of action to them (ibid., p. 117). I connect this to Kneebone's (2023) concept of structural exploitation in which a specific legal framework fosters the interpersonal exploitation of marriage migrants although I apply it beyond the scope of state policy. I argue that structural exploitation and structural coercion can also be rooted in individuals and firms who economically profit from enabling the interpersonal exploitation of marriage migrants. Motives of profit maximization and the livelihood of different actors are interconnected with the practice, also creating economic pressure to continue the practice of CTM. Thus, actor possibilities of action become entangled in ongoing processes have capital accumulation. This also includes entanglement of interests and structural capacities of marriage migrants in capital accumulation related to neoliberal globalization, negotiated through imaginaries of development, and modernity.

On the other hand, the interpersonal exploitation and coercion that structural factors engender is largely rooted in unequal hetero-patriarchal gendered power relations. Marriage migrants often face direct coercive limitations to their freedoms, and more indirectly, unequal divisions of reproductive labor and resources can be traced back to what Parreñas (2008) calls the "force of domesticity": the fact that their femininity both opened up the opportunity to CTM and limits them based on norms, practices and power relations related to male dominance and essentialized feminine traits. This can be connected to Tseng's (2015) conclusion that "women carry the value of reproductive labor that patriarchal transnational marriage markets are looking for" (ibid., 120) and this "reproductive ability" allows them to access an aspired modern and cosmopolitan world through marriage migration, in which however, their stay is dependent on expectations of reproductive labor and motherhood.

The empirical material also showed strong evidence of the centrality of family relations for marriage migration and gendered power relations. Not the least of these is essentialized motherhood as an ideological justification for the allocation of reproductive labor (and sometimes the responsibility to care for their children through earning wages) to women. Marriage migrants in the empirical research describe a variety of ways that their life decisions and possibilities for action were affected by reproductive labor duties. Here we also see the ideological nature of these norms that are related both to structural power relations and the worldviews of involved actors as

they subjectively interpret also themselves based on existing norms, discourses, and power structures. It was also clear on the identity level that many of the interview partners strongly identified themselves with motherhood and often did not (openly) question their responsibility to care for their children.

Empirical research also confirms the common conclusion that many migrate in order to financially help their families, or this contributes to their decision, and to improve their own class position (social mobility). I take into account criticisms of the reduction of migrant women to economic motivations (Kim, 2010). However, the empirical material points strongly in the direction of economic motivations as related to wanting to improve the class status the marriage migrant and their family through aspirations of remittance sending, wage labor, help from their husband('s family) or educational aspirations. This material is, however, perhaps not generalizable and other motivations were also provided. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent the discursive framing by e.g. Vietnamese state organizations of migrants as either economically desperate or as lazy, lewd or "Westernized" women contributed to migrants decisions to share this kind of narrative with us. Belanger's (2016b) research indicates that such narratives are also prevalent in sending communities.

Regardless, the research shows at least an interaction between gendered family norms and the decision to migrate. This can be seen, e.g. through the expectation of marriage migrants and also in some cases of their families, that remittances be sent. On the other hand, the legal status and "reproductive citizenship" (Lee, 2022) of marriage migrants in Korea allows them to sponsor their parents short term migration, ostensibly for the purpose of childcare (compare *ibid.*). As the empirical material shows, at least some parents of marriage migrants use this opportunity to work informally in Korea. And in the case of CT3, these earnings had significant positive effects on the livelihood of the family. However, many parents of marriage migrants mentioned the negative emotional and economic effects of their daughters leaving. Haemmerli et al (2022) ask the question: to what extent does CTM lead to precarity in origin country households? This thesis cannot provide a definitive answer to that question, however, it seems that marriage migration can have positive, negative and neutral effects on origin household, also simultaneously (negative emotional effects, positive economic one's in CT3)(compare also Bélanger, 2016b).

This relates to the concept of global householding. The empirical material also confirms the importance of ongoing transnational householding strategies in the lives of transnational marriage migrants. There were a variety of different situations in the empirical material in which reproductive labor significantly affected (former) marriage migrants' place of residence and liveli-

hood. The empirical material also exemplifies multi-directionality and multisitedness of transnational householding, as exemplified above by the effects on livelihood of migration. Up until now, to the best of my knowledge, there has been little research on child return migration for the purpose of care in the East/Southeast Asian context, although this represents a significant form of transnational householding in which the Vietnamese natal family takes over the care of children of marriage migrants (CT15).

Coming from an academic background in development studies, one of the most relevant results of the empirical analysis for the field is the extent to which actors frame international hierarchies of power and wealth in terms of “development” both directly and indirectly, although of course one must take into account the fact that these interviews were translated/interpreted. The reach of the development discourse in the research speaks to the paradigmatic nature of the concept of development and its ideological importance also in the lived realities of marriage migrants. I identify a hegemonic norm that justifies differences in wealth and status as well and that naturalizes nation states as the natural containers of economy and wealth, as well as the stewards of “development”. In the case of this research, commodified transnational marriage migration is one path on this roadmap available to specific in this case young, female, able bodied actors, although the outcome as well as specific expectations vary (compare also Tseng, 2015). Regarding Piper & Lee (2016) criticism that marriage migration has been often left out of any conversation on the migration-development nexus, this offers an at least a hypothesis for future research: namely, that the more productive line of inquiry is into how the development paradigm shapes (potential) marriage migrants’ worldviews, motivations and strategies rather than an approach focused on how marriage migration affects Vietnam’s “development”.

Concerning men in destination countries who use CTM to find foreign wives, scholars have debated about the relevance of their class position or their marginalized “rural” status to this decision. The empirical research generally confirms that the husbands of (former) marriage migrants worked in generally low-wage, low-prestige jobs associated with a lower class position. However, I surmise that it not the class position of husbands in destination context but rather their comparative international class-position that is important. That is, even when, as Lutz (2018) argues, marriage migrants move laterally or downward in terms of class hierarchies, or lose important social capital, the incomes of their husbands in destination countries and the possible earnings with access to the labor market of destination countries, represent a relative increase in economic power, and perhaps also in prestige. Thus, the structural capacities of marriage migrants trans-

form in sometimes contradictory ways. However, transnational class relations of this sort require significantly more research, theorizing and knowledge on my part to hash out in detail.

Kim (2014) connects compensatory masculinity among South Korean men married to foreign wives to their lower prestige and class position due to macro political-economic transformations. In this case the “neoliberal globalization” of South Korea’s economy, which was preceded by industrialization and urbanization leading to rural economic decline and a decline in the relative status of rural-living men. However, it is unclear if the same interpretation applies to Taiwan, although some literature on men in Taiwan seeking foreign wives (Wang & Tien, 2009) at least suggests as much. Furthermore, I suggest the exploratory term of “compensatory femininity” in section 6.6. as a reaction to counteract stigma around of marriage migrants regarding their return and/or divorce through the performance of specific forms of feminine virtue, like “proper” motherhood.

Vietnam showed similar trends of rural decline related to urbanization and industrialization also arguably caused by a state-led and neoliberally-focused globalization of Vietnam’s economy (compare Haemmerli et al., 2022). Interview partners mention that it is economic hardship that makes marriage migration so attractive to some young women in Vietnam, especially those from rural / less-metropolitan areas like Cần Thơ. However, only the VWU connects this to specific economic factors (CT1), namely the crash of the sugar cane industry (see Chapter 2), while claiming that the crisis is over. Scholars, however, have argued that economic hardship/precarity in their communities in Vietnam continues to be a motivating factor for marriage migration (Kneebone, 2023; Tseng, 2015), which my empirical material also confirms. This comparison, although imperfect, is interesting because it points to the fact that interconnected polit-economic processes shape CTM on both the origin and destination sides, and points to a relationship between these processes and transformations occurring in Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan, and worldwide.

There has been a relative lack of comparative research on differences and similarities between commodified transnational marriage migration from Vietnam and other countries in Southeast Asia to South Korea and to Taiwan (as well as other destination countries). Also this thesis did not engage in systematic country level comparison. Furthermore, although some trends concerning regional concentration of marriage migrants exist, there is little to no analysis about the relatively frequency of specific regions, provinces and cities for marriage migration in the destination countries of Taiwan and South Korea. Finally, systematic scientific comparison of marriage migrants of different nationalities (for example Indonesian and Vietnamese) in destination coun-

tries or between them is relatively infrequent (e.g. between Vietnamese marriage migrants in South Korea and Taiwan).

Another understudied area of research seems to be the relationship between language and precarity. Interview partners frequently spoke of the different ways that language barriers affected their lives and relationships, and the extent to which national or ethnic identity was connected to language. Going beyond identity and symbolic representation, language barriers also shaped marriage migrant's labor market access in some cases. Furthermore, in terms of precarity they can lead to or contribute to social and legal precarity.

The research showed the limitations of a multilevel intersectional analysis⁵³, and especially of only using pre-determined categories of structural power relations. While the categories that the critical social sciences used in intersectionality have produced can be extremely useful, as deep empirical knowledge on them exists, they can also prove inadequate for specific social realities and may suffer from a certain euro/American-centrism. In the case of CTM out of Vietnam, nationality and ethnicity, sometimes expressed through language, played a much more important role than racist hierarchies with their roots Western in colonialism, although they sometimes show similar characteristics.

It remains to be seen to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing crisis has had on commodified transnational marriage migration out of Vietnam. The latest publications, e.g. Kneebone (2023), still have not addressed this topic. This could be another area of fruitful research.

Outlook

While this analysis does not focus on policy, I feel confident in the following recommendations the negative effects of structural exploitation of marriage migrants from Vietnam in their destination countries and their origin country can only be realistically reduced by strengthening marriage migrants' structural capacities and their possibilities to shape their lives and surrounding. This could be achieved through a more secure legal status for them and their children, open labor market access, job training and support, improved access to social services and education and more legal and social support. Furthermore, and drawing on Lee's (2012, 2022) and Kneebone's (2023) conclusions, implementing policies to better provision care (reproductive labor) for all without exploitative labor and migration regimes would also certainly support marriage

⁵³ Based on Winker & Degele's (2009) methodology design.

migrants. A more equitable international divisions of wealth, labor and resources would certainly reduce the pressure into such structurally exploitative arrangements.

Kneebone (2023) also argues that the best way to support marriage migrants is to reduce the precarity that they face through policy that increases their legal and economic security in destination countries. While H.-H. Tseng (2015) advises in the Taiwanese context that marriage migrants would have been better served by a more transparent system of business operation that would give them clearer entitlement to legal rights as clients. This conclusion also seems plausible for other contexts.

In the empirical study (e.g. interview CT2), the Vietnamese Women's Union attempts to support former marriage migrants with economic support and the KOCUNs efforts to inform, support and import skills on marriage migrants leaving and to support former marriage migrants returning certainly help strengthen at least some marriage migrants' structural capacities. That being said, I do not have enough information to analyze the real scale and effects of these interventions, but I would hazard a guess that they are insufficient to meet the needs of all marriage migrants. For instance, KOCUN has apparently had to scale back its operations because of lack of funding (Kneebone 2023). The KOCUN center can also be criticized for engaging in a one-sided multiculturalism for their focus on Vietnamese marriage migrants and lack of focus on the (former) husbands and their families of marriage migrants in Korea. This reifies existing unequal power relations on the basis of nationality and discourses put Vietnamese marriage migrants in the role of the *other*: those who must adapt. Mandatory orientation and language courses for the husbands/their families of Vietnamese marriage migrants in Korea, as well as regular meetings and check ins with social workers and the support of interpreters could also help Vietnamese marriage migrants better negotiate with their husbands and families in-low and avoid at least some cases of gendered violence and extreme exploitation.

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Appendix A: Empirical Material

CT1: interview with two women's union representatives

CT2: interview with two women's union representatives

CT3: group interview with parent's and family of marriage migrant with focus on the mother.

CT4: notes of presentation by representatives of the NGO "KOCUN"

CT5: interview with the returned marriage migrants R. and H.

CT6: interview with the returned marriage migrants L. & Y.

CT7: interview with returned marriage migrant B.

CT8: group into view with four parents of marriage migrants abroad (two women and two men from separate families) – designated WB, WBL, MP & MG

CT9: interview with soon-to-be marriage migrant I. waiting to leave for South Korea

CT10: observation of KOCUN orientation class for marriage migrants

CT11: interview with soon-to-be marriage migrant C. waiting to leave for South Korea

CT12: interview with returned marriage migrant, K.

CT13: group interview with three returned marriage migrants (E., N. & P.)

CT14: Translated KOCUN material – Part of Orientation Book

CT15: Translated KOCUN material – Summary of the Survey "Overview of Internal Marriage Situation between Vietnamese and Korean People" (2016) Survey conducted in Can Tho City & Hau Giang Province.

TT1: Interview with former marriage migrant T. living in Taiwan.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ This interview was provided by a colleague and not part of the KNOTS 2019, Field Trip 7 research.