FOREIGN DOMESTIC HELPERS IN HONG KONG:

Occupation, Resistance, Autonomy

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Doctor of Philosophy – Design

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This thesis is dedicated to the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong,
and to all those who labour within the global contingent of migrant domestic work.

Certificate of original authorship

I, Evelyn Kwok declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Philosophy in Design in the School of Design in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Record of Interviews with Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong (2013–2015)

Thirty-five Foreign Domestic Helpers were interviewed in Hong Kong between November 2013 and February 2015. My ethnographic research was granted permission by the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee: UTS HREC REF NO. 2013000252. As the majority of Foreign Domestic Helpers are women, all of the participants listed below are female. The interviews took place in public spaces in Central Hong Kong where the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers gathered every Sunday. For this reason, all of the participants are from the Philippines. Their names have been altered into pseudonyms to uphold anonymity, however all participants consented to their age, years of service and their monthly wages (at the time of the interview) being recorded. A standard list of questions was designed to prompt the interviewing process, engaging the participants to tell their stories. A detailed account of the interviewing process is provided in Chapter One. Once again, I extend grateful thanks to the Foreign Domestic Helpers who spent their valuable time participating in the interviews and recounting their stories on their only weekly day off work.

Name	Age	Years of service in Hong Kong	Monthly wage (HKD)	Date of interview
Georgie	41	11	$5200	24/11/2013
Christine	28	4	$3900	24/11/2013
Nila	32	6	$3900	1/12/2013
Yasmine	30	3	$4800	1/12/2013
Rachel	33	6	$4300	1/12/2013
Dorothy	32	4	$3900	8/12/2013
Josephine	38	9	$5200	8/12/2013
Janet	39	11	$5000	25/01/2015
Emma	31	4	$4400	25/01/2015
Diana	35	8	$4800	1/02/2015
Rose	41	11	$5300	1/02/2015
Lina	36	5	$5000	1/02/2015
Susan	29	5	$4700	1/02/2015
Shana	28	2	$4400	1/02/2015
Lila	36	8	$5200	1/02/2015
Belinda	27	2	$4200	1/02/2015
Christina	30	3	$4500	1/02/2015
Kate	28	4	$4300	8/02/2015
Mary	35	7	$4600	8/02/2015
Danielle	31	4	$4600	8/02/2015
Paige	32	7	$4200	8/02/2015
Nina	36	7	$5100	8/02/2015
Melissa	32	6	$4600	8/02/2015
Lily	29	3	$4400	8/02/2015
Belle	37	7	$4800	8/02/2015
Paula	27	2	$4200	8/02/2015
Maria	28	5	$4100	8/02/2015
Jill	30	3	$4200	8/02/2015
Lynne	42	10	$5000	15/02/2015
Rita	34	8	$5100	15/02/2015
Caroline	29	5	$4300	15/02/2015
Vanessa	25	1	$3600	15/02/2015
Sophie	27	2	$3800	15/02/2015
Beth	33	5	$4700	15/02/2015
Matilda	30	4	$5000	15/02/2015
Mariam	33	6	$4800	15/02/2015

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Note:

This thesis uses the term Foreign Domestic Helpers as it is the legal terminology used in Hong Kong. Variations of the term appear as 'migrant domestic workers', 'migrant women workers' and 'migrant women' which all refer to Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong within the context of this thesis, unless otherwise specified.

Abstract

350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers live in Hong Kong. Due to lack of personal space in the homes of the employers – where they live and work – many of them occupy public spaces to gather and socialise on their weekly day off work. This construct organically evolved over time and has become what is known as Little Manila, where thousands of Foreign Domestic Helpers construct temporary 'homes' of their own in the public cityscape of Central, Hong Kong every Sunday.

This spatial phenomenon is not an isolated issue specific to Hong Kong. Currently there are nearly 53 million domestic workers worldwide and nearly 80% are women migrants. As such, what occurs in Hong Kong illustrates the global issue of the socio-spatial inequality of female migrant workers, especially those who participate in domestic labour. In Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers attend to the domestic chores of local households, raising children and caring for the elderly, yet every aspect of their lives are regulated by laws, giving power to the employers at the expense of exploiting the workers, who are restricted to no private space in the homes, disciplined, overworked and underpaid, without citizenship rights in the city-state.

Every Sunday, what appears as a collection of women engaging in domestic activities in makeshift cardboard units on elevated walkways and underpasses is a manifestation of resistance, in the form of nomadic spaces, motivated by the need to have space. Over time, this ritualistic occurrence has evolved into a spatial phenomenon that is created by and accommodates the city-state's disenfranchised residents.

This thesis draws on ethnographic observations, spatial analysis, photographs and interviews conducted in Hong Kong between 2012 and 2016 to understand the spatial phenomenon. The research reveals a contrast between the spatial condition of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' workplace and their temporary constructions in public space. The reduction of space experienced in their employers' homes significantly contributes to the weekly expansion of space. The research analyses the socio-spatial consequences that emerge from global migrant labour by examining the capacity of the disenfranchised to have space and autonomy. By reassessing the migrant women who appear to be voiceless yet consistently reassert themselves in the public cityscape through their disruption to the hegemonic spatial order, this thesis gives voice to a silence that operates across the labour market and reveals the importance of having space, not as a commodity, but as a human condition to live a dignified life.

Preface

Of the approximate 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers currently living and working in Hong Kong, the majority are women from the Philippines and Indonesia, and a minority from Cambodia and Burma (Amnesty International 2013). Many of these women have left behind their families to work as domestic helpers for middle to high-income families in Hong Kong. They enter the city-state under the two-year Foreign Domestic Helper visa, which stipulates their live-in requirement, monthly minimum wage of HKD$4050 (approximately USD$510), one weekly rest day and other working conditions (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016b). They are responsible for all domestic duties within the home, including caring for the children and elderly who reside in the home.

Foreign Domestic Helpers from the Philippines joined the informal economy of Hong Kong in the 1970s. During that time, the Hong Kong government encouraged local women to participate in the formal workforce as the manufacturing sector expanded. This created a gap in the sector of domestic work and the Hong Kong government saw opportunities to source such employment from neighbouring Asian countries. As Hong Kong's economy grows, domestic labour continues to be imported, thus supporting the economy indirectly by fulfilling the domestic roles of local women. Despite the importance of their roles, the nearly 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers are one of the most marginalised workforces in Hong Kong. Their identity, status and occupancy in the domestic and public realm are continuously contested.

Disparity in translation

In the sample *Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract* provided by the Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department (2016b), there are disparities between the Chinese and English versions that subsequently alter the perception and portrayal of the Foreign Domestic Helper and their relationship with the employer. The term "*Foreign Domestic Helper*" in the English contract is represented in the Chinese version as "外籍家庭佣工", which translates to "*Foreign Family Servant*". The disparity between the English and the Chinese representation is problematic, as there are significant implications within "*Helper*" and "*Servant*", "*Domestic*" and "*Family*". A "*helper*" is someone who provides assistance or support, which does not automatically denote the person to a lower status or belonging to the person who he or she is helping (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). In contrast, a "*servant*" is defined as someone who is employed by another, and is at the service of another (Oxford Dictionaries

2016). The "*servant*" obeys the rules and is under the control of an employer who is of higher economic status. Subsequently, the terms "*Foreign Domestic Helper*" and "*Foreign Family Servant*" are inconsistent in their Chinese and English translations, thus falsely representing their meaning. The implication of the role remains ambiguous as the concept of servitude and obedience is lost from the Chinese to the English translation. There are also differences between "*Domestic*" and "*Family*" as "*domestic*" refers to the home or the household, while "*family*" inscribes a close relation between spouses, parents and children (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). The migrant labourer is an individual who is not related to the employer by name or by blood. She is hired on a professional basis to perform *domestic* duties and not *family* duties. In this situation, domestic duties are recognised as paid labour, while family duties can be perceived as a moral obligation. The migrant labourer is not working for the employer due to moral obligation. However, the misuse of terminology can effect how employers perceive their migrant labourers.

The Chinese representation of the "*Foreign Domestic Helper*" as the "*Foreign Family Servant*" is dishonest as the term abstracts the pragmatic differences between a paid assistant and a person who is obliged to obey orders. The Chinese version of the employment contract further suggests a master-servant relationship between the employer and the migrant labourer as the English contract uses the term "*Employer*", while the Chinese version uses the term "雇主", which translates to "*Employer, Hirer or Master*". This term in the Chinese contract openly prompts a power imbalance between the "*Foreign Family Servant*" and the "*Employer/Hirer/Master*". They are not equal in economic, political or social status. Despite the inequality between employers and employees, the English version portrays a more professional employment relationship between the "*Foreign Domestic Helper*" and the "*Employer*". As the majority of employers of Foreign Domestic Helpers are Hong Kong Chinese, they can access and comprehend both the Chinese and English versions of the contract. On the other hand, the Foreign Domestic Helpers are not of Chinese background, which limits them to reading the English version of the employment contract only. Therefore the disparities in translations between the two language versions disadvantage the migrant labourer as the Hong Kong Chinese employer commands the terms of employment that denote the master-servant relationship. As a result, these gaps encourage the identity of the employer as the master and the migrant worker as the servant.

On the other hand, the migrant worker agrees to the professional, upfront employee-employer relationship that is suggested in the English version of the employment contract. The disparities

of the identity of the Foreign Domestic Helper extend beyond the employment contract to their occupancy at their employer's home. For six days a week, they have little freedom or privacy in their place of employment that is also their "home". Instead, freedom is activated outside of the home through the appropriation of public spaces every Sunday.

Process of dislocation

The disparities in representation contribute to the already ambiguous nature of the role and identity of the Foreign Domestic Helper, making them more vulnerable to exploitation by their employers and the recruitment agencies. The employment process of the Foreign Domestic Helper begins in their home country. Applicants pay a fee upfront to a recruitment agency, which includes assistance with visa applications, connection to a recruitment agency in Hong Kong, and a three-week training course in language skills and domestic labour skills. Once the applicant has passed the training course, they travel to Hong Kong where they are received by a Hong Kong recruitment agency. The Foreign Domestic Helper pays another fee to the Hong Kong agency as a "receiving fee" to obtain her employment visa, prior to meeting her assigned employer. She does not have the opportunity to select her employer; instead the employer selects her from the database provided by the recruitment agency. This employment process is considered a legal operation from both the labour-sending and labour-receiving countries. The airfares, training program and agency fees paid in both countries add up to approximately HKD $13,000, equal to more than three months of minimum wage salary. From a series of video interviews published on *South China Morning Post* (2015), fees for the training program are around HKD $4500 and agency fees can add up to HKD $8600.

In some cases, as the recruitment agencies are privatised and remain unregulated by their respective governments, the fees required can be dearer and more disproportionate to the income of the Foreign Domestic Helper. This leads to an accumulated debt prior to the commencement of their employment that can take up to 12 months to repay.

The employment contract requires the Foreign Domestic Helper to live in the employer's home. It states, however, that it is not compulsory for the employer to provide a separate bedroom for her. An excerpt from the sample contract reflects empathy towards the employer and the spatial limitations of Hong Kong housing. It does not express concern for the lack of privacy for the Foreign Domestic Helper that results from this discretion.

By allowing this to be a negotiable term between the employer and the helper, it gives more control to the employer and disregards the importance of the helper's privacy and wellbeing. The English version of the contract states:

> While the average flat size in Hong Kong is relatively small and the availability of a separate servant room is not common, the Employer should provide the Helper suitable accommodation and with reasonable privacy. Examples of unsuitable accommodation are: The Helper having to sleep on made-do beds in the corridor with little privacy and sharing a room with an adult or teenager of the opposite sex.

In this excerpt of the contract, the term "*Helper*" and "*Servant*" were used in the same sentence to refer to the Foreign Domestic Helper. The ambiguity in terminology continues to reflect the perception of the Foreign Domestic Helper as a domestic helper and a family servant (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016b). In many cases, the Foreign Domestic Helper's sleeping arrangement is a mattress on the floor of the child's bedroom (Amnesty International 2013; Wohrer 2008). Outside of the Foreign Domestic Helper's resting hours, this mattress is stored under the child's bed to provide more room. Essentially, the Foreign Domestic Helper has no space of her own inside the employer's home. Her privacy is limited to time spent in the bathroom and she is spatially bound to the mobile mattress she sleeps on. Her belongings are in a suitcase and remain invisible with her mattress, as they are stored under a bed or in a wardrobe for the majority of her stay. For six days each week, the Foreign Domestic Helper lives and works by the continuous list of domestic duties. Her occupancy at home is constant yet transitory. Consequently, on Sunday, her only day off work, she emerges from the interior to meet her friends in public spaces to socialise, eat, rest, protest and send packages back home. These activities are enabled by her and other Foreign Domestic Helpers' appropriation, occupation and transformation of transient public spaces.

This is where I begin.

Chapter 1
Introduction: A Matter of Space and People, in Flux

1.1 Sunday: a public encounter with Foreign Domestic Helpers

I first became aware of the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong in 2012. It was a typical Sunday afternoon and I was walking along the Central Elevated Walkway, towards the International Finance Centre shopping mall. As a Hong Kong-born Chinese Australian living in Sydney, I frequently travel to Hong Kong and negotiate its urban topography with familiar ease. The Central Elevated Walkway is a system of elevated walkways that connect over 25 buildings in the Central Business District. The walkways create an alternative network of paths above the street level for people to access the various transport hubs and corporate and commercial towers without setting foot at ground level.

As a spatial designer, I am interested in the way public space is activated and appropriated by city users. My spatial design honours project focused on the appropriation of public space and the emergence of temporary urban spaces in Sydney, with case studies from other cities internationally. I examined how the appropriation of public space was a global phenomenon of small and large scales of spatial contestations. This work was significantly informed by the Situationists' alternative ways of remapping cities and the project presented a series of two-dimensional and three-dimensional maps and diagrams that suggested alternative routes of traversal and provocations of appropriating public spaces in the areas surrounding the Central Business District of Sydney. With this background, I began to look at Hong Kong's unique urban spaces and the networks of elevated passageways that have created alternative routes of circulation above ground throughout the city. In particular, I began noticing that these spaces were different on Sundays. They were not just a site for office workers, commuters and consumers to access the various shopping malls and office towers, but also a site for the Foreign Domestic Helpers to gather on Sundays. On this particular Sunday, I was motivated to document these spaces of above-ground circulation.

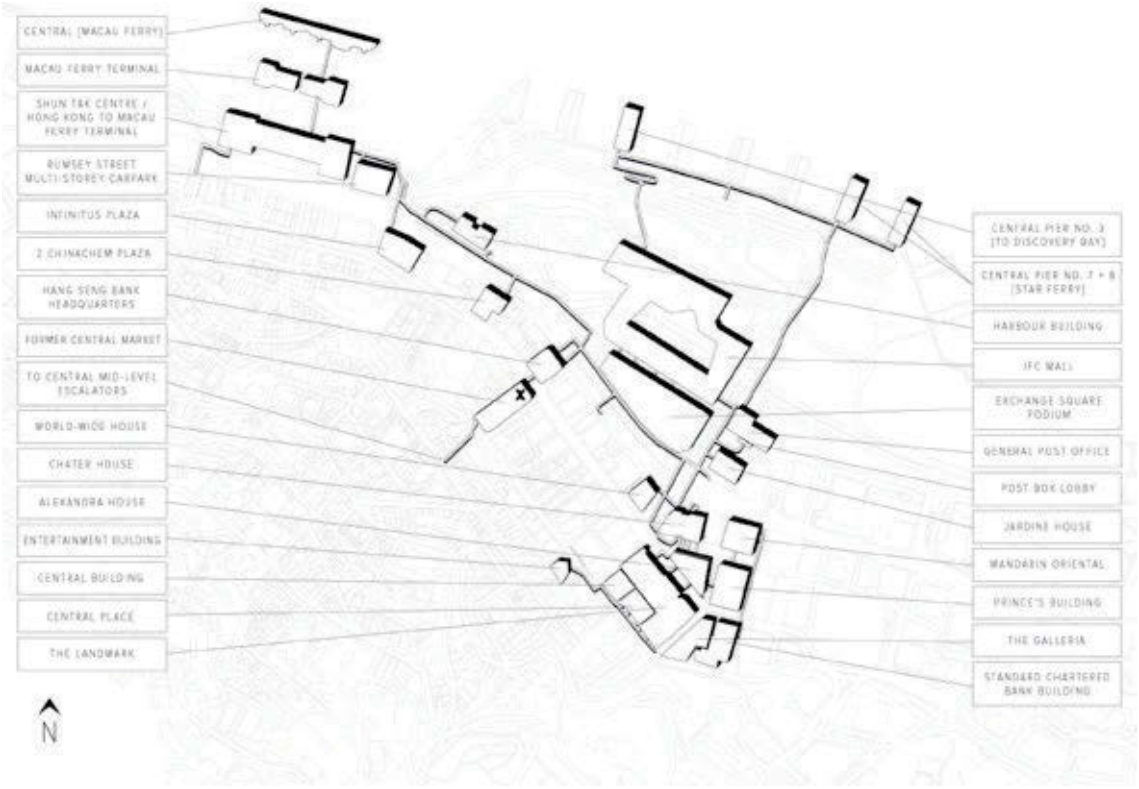

Figure 1 **Map of the Central Elevated Walkway Hong Kong, 2015**, showing the network of buildings connected by the elevated walkways. 'X' marks the location of the Former Central Market shopping arcade. Original digital image by the author and Blake Jurmann.

As I wandered through the Former Central Market arcade, most of the shops were closed with their shutters down. With the row of shutters to my right and an empty exhibition space to my left, the arcade served as a pedestrian corridor for a steady flow of tourists and locals. My focus shifted from closed retail spaces to people sitting on the floor in front of them. Groups of women sat on flat cardboard boxes; eating, chatting, sleeping or applying beauty routines to themselves and others. Small suitcases and various personal items were arranged to form new sets of delineated spaces. Some groups stood their cardboard boxes upright, others opened umbrellas to act as barriers between the pedestrians and themselves. Shoes were placed on the periphery of the cardboard mats, resembling the common Asian practice of removing shoes when entering the home. Some of the women had their backs turned away from the rest of the footpath, denying engagement with pedestrians. Absorbing the details of the scene in front of me, it became evident that I was seeing where Foreign Domestic Helpers gather informally to socialise. While I had regular interactions with Foreign Domestic Helpers during my childhood in Hong Kong through extended family and friends, I was overwhelmed by the intensity of their collective appearance and occupation of public space.

A few moments later I reached the end of the arcade and witnessed more Foreign Domestic Helpers occupying the next section of the Central Elevated Walkway; the U-shaped elevated walkway that connects to the Hang Seng Bank tower. Unlike the enclosed arcade, this particular section has glass balustrades, providing unhindered views of the streets below. Here the groups of Foreign Domestic Helpers were leaning against the glass panels which, when viewed from the street, can offer a sense that the people are floating in an elevated space within the density of the city. In this elevated walkway, the groups were also seated on flattened cardboard boxes, although they did not make vertical dividers between their occupancy and the pedestrians. The width of the walkway was narrower than the arcade and I was following the pedestrians in front of me in single file, moving uncomfortably through and between groups of seated women, who seemed to be intensely focused on each other and their conversations in Tagalog, an Austronesian language native to the Philippines (its standardised form is Filipino, which is the official language of the Philippines alongside English). It was an uncomfortable experience because it felt as though I was entering a private space where women were engaged in domestic activities. Informally speaking to Hong Kong locals (in Cantonese) about this phenomenon on Sunday, many expressed their frustration at how congested, dirty or noisy Central (the district) had become due to the overbearing number of Foreign Domestic Helpers. By contrast, when I heard Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers talk about Sunday, many of them mentioned gathering in Central affectionately dubbed 'Little Manila', which is a commonly used term by other researchers (Law 2001; Tam 2016) to describe the Foreign Domestic Helpers' gathering in Central.

Of the nearly 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers that currently live in Hong Kong, the majority is split almost evenly between the Philippines and Indonesia (Hong Kong SAR Government 2016). On Sunday, Central Hong Kong's overpasses and arcades are dominated by Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers while Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers gather in Victoria Park three kilometres away in Causeway Bay. In Central, different urban interior and exterior spaces – formally and informally – offer a range of goods and services to the Filipino community. World Wide House provides Filipino food and magazines, World Wide Lane sells international phone cards, Chater Road provides open spaces for choreographed dancing and political rallies and Connaught Road Central becomes a packing and loading zone for care packages enroute to the Philippines. On early Sunday mornings, pieces of cardboard boxes can be seen, laid flat, in various parts of Central – on the Central Elevated Walkway, the ground-floor atrium of the HSBC headquarters building, various

underpasses and sheltered footpaths – symbolising the informal demarcation of such public spaces. These pieces of cardboard are eventually used by the Foreign Domestic Helpers to construct makeshift home-bases for temporary inhabitation between errands that day. Each group returns to the same space every Sunday, as the gathering areas are informally grouped according to Filipino provinces and regions (Tillu 2011, p. 43). Every Sunday, specific urban interior and exterior spaces in Central are linked by the ritualised inhabitations of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers. What emerges is a unique ecology; a temporary but repeated socio-spatial system of overlapping spaces of an ethnic enclave, a site of contention between the citizens and the Foreign Domestic Helpers, and the recreation of a series of domestic spaces.

1.2 The scope of the thesis

This thesis examines the spatial phenomenon of the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong through analysing their reclamation of space. Due to the legalities of their employment contracts, the 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers are live-in domestic workers with little to no physical or personal space of their own in their employers' homes. Within this restricted domestic environment, Foreign Domestic Helpers have little choice but to abide by their employers' rules to complete domestic tasks as required, speak English or Cantonese only, wear particular work attire, and eat, rest and sleep at designated times and in allocated spaces in the homes. In most cases, Foreign Domestic Helpers are given no personal space of their own, instead they are required to share a bedroom with children or the elderly, thus a common sleeping arrangement is sleeping on the floor on a mattress that can be stored away when not in use. Such restrictions have a significant impact on the Foreign Domestic Helpers' capacity to have privacy and autonomy within the home.

Foreign Domestic Helpers are legally required to work continuously for six days each week, with Sunday as the only day off work. On this day, Foreign Domestic Helpers seek a space of their own, where they can feel free to be themselves. Within these informally demarcated spaces on the walkways, they are not bound by the same rules as in their employers' homes. Instead they are able to speak their own language, dress the way they like, eat the food they want and have the choice to be themselves without the scrutiny of the employers albeit temporarily.

Every Sunday, as the Foreign Domestic Helpers appropriate and transform public space to reconstruct their own domestic interior, the spatial phenomenon of Little Manila dominates the urban landscape of Central, Hong Kong.

In their labour, Foreign Domestic Helpers are activated by their assigned tasks, momentarily in and out of spaces; the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, schools, supermarkets, laundromat and so on. They are only visible within those moments when they are attending to domestic chores, transiting in and out of spaces. When they rest, they temporarily have a space on the floor in beds that disappear when the workday begins. It is rare for Foreign Domestic Helpers to have a private bedroom of their own due to the compact living spaces in Hong Kong. The reduction of space experienced in the domestic space – their so-called home – significantly contributes to the expansion of space that occurs in public space.

Within their claimed spaces on the elevated walkways, Foreign Domestic Helpers invert the spatial condition they experience in the homes – transient and truncated spaces – to clearly demarcate spaces that enable the women to experience a type of privacy (although it is still public) and a temporarily solidified space of their own within their free hours on Sunday. In these spaces, Foreign Domestic Helpers can also be seen and heard collectively as they reclaim physical and personal space, as well as their dignity and integrity in Hong Kong's public, urban realm. This reclamation of space has created a unique socio-spatial ecology that continues to be embedded within the urban landscape of Central, Hong Kong. This ecology is a reoccurring spatial system that consists of particular spatial programs, which the Foreign Domestic Helpers have informally organised and cultivated as their own spatial territory that reappears every Sunday.

This research critically examines how the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong create new spatialities through their weekly reconstruction of a unique socio-spatial ecology. It shows how the Foreign Domestic Helpers resist the socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation they experience in their employers' homes by appropriating and transforming public spaces for themselves on Sundays. Furthermore, I argue this reclamation of space is a form of spatialised resistance that physically challenges the denial of space and autonomy prescribed in their labour.

Through analysing the disciplinary methods that consistently deny the Foreign Domestic Helpers space and integrity in Hong Kong's domestic environment, I argue that Foreign Domestic Helpers have emerged as actors with agency beyond that of docile, disenfranchised, migrant workers. Every Sunday, these women are motivated to reclaim their autonomy and humanity via their use of public space.

1.3 The existing field and the contribution to new knowledge

This thesis adds to the existing literature on two overarching topics: the disenfranchisement of migrant domestic workers (Constable 2007; Lindio-McGovern 2013; Parrenas 2001), and the appropriation of public spaces (Franck and Stevens 2007; Hou 2010; 2016). The first involves the global labour market, domestic and care work, and the dislocated migrant experience. The second investigates the governance of public space, the flexibility and agility within public space, and the possibilities of using public space beyond designated functions. As a case study, the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong reveal a complex socio-spatial problem that extends to individuals' personal exploitation, their collective discipline and disenfranchisement, and a global phenomenon of socio-spatial inequality.

Much of the literature in this thesis on the discourse of migrant domestic workers, in Hong Kong or worldwide, has a common objective: defending the rights of migrant domestic workers. The thesis is motivated by this critical objective, however it provides another understanding of this problem from the discipline of spatial design.

By closely examining the Foreign Domestic Helpers' construction of a temporary spatial territory in Hong Kong's public space, the research addresses the tension that exists between the Foreign Domestic Helpers' domestic environment and their publicly reclaimed spaces. The analyses of the precise processes of their labour, spatially and legally, reveal the near-absolute exhaustion of private space in the employers' homes. This exhaustion is multifaceted, which has socio-cultural consequences. For six days each week, Foreign Domestic Helpers are disciplined by their employers to be efficient, yet docile and subservient workers. At the risk of losing their employment, most Foreign Domestic Helpers oblige and may even self-discipline to secure their job. This is problematic as it reinforces their subordinate position in the workplace. These disciplinary practices have created not a docile migrant workforce, but rather a contingent of migrant women with agency. This motivates their absolute expansion of space that is witnessed in public space once a week. What appears to be a chaotic assemblage of spaces or an ethnic spectacle is actually a form of non-violent, spatialised resistance activated in full force. It is a reconstruction of a domestic environment that allows the Foreign Domestic Helpers to regain a sense of self beyond the docile persona enforced in their employers' homes. It is a weekly reclamation of space and dignity.

Social scientist Doreen Massey proposed the recognition of space "as the product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (2005, p. 9). She also contends that space must be understood as a sphere of coexisting heterogeneity where practices continue to construct space, therefore alluding to space being never fully complete. In a similar way of understanding the continuation of the social creation of space, Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre argued that "social space is a social product" (1991, p. 26). This social space is not static space between walls, rather it is a dynamic space that is constantly changing, becoming and evolving. In *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, architectural researchers Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till emphasise the significance of Lefebvre's definition of space as applicable to spatial agency, arguing that social space is not static because it is inherently political and charged with the bifurcating forces of power and empowerment, interaction and isolation, control and freedom (2011, p. 30). Following this reading of space and agency, Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong operate within such relationships of social space and agency, where dichotomies of power and resistance converge. Within the private, domestic spaces, power is exerted upon them to discipline and restrict themselves. On Sunday, they invert that socio-spatial condition by reclaiming public space. Their repeated construction of social space within the city of Hong Kong is their agency actualised in the form of spatialised resistance. The repeated process of construction and deconstruction, disappearance and appearance of Little Manila continues to be a social space that is never fully complete. Simultaneously, it is also never fully obsolete as it has become an intrinsic part of the spatial dialogue of Hong Kong's urban landscape. As the number of Foreign Domestic Helpers grew from a few hundred in the 1970s to nearly 100,000 in the early 2000s (and now close to 350,000 in 2017), geographer Lisa Law claimed that Little Manila "is now a spectacle of modern life in Hong Kong" (2001, p. 266).

The key contribution of this thesis is how disenfranchised minorities create new spatialities by using public space to resist their disempowerment. Drawing upon primary source materials, this thesis's original contribution also encompasses the research method of ethnographic fieldwork processes using visual documentation and analysis. The materials provide an analysis of the socio-spatial consequences that emerge from economic restriction and illegitimacy, and adds a relevant consideration of public space, migrant domestic labour and citizenship. The following section will outline the specific processes and their contribution. Correspondingly, this research uses literature from sociology, anthropology, urban geography and spatial theory. These are critically examined in the literature review in Chapter Two.

1.4 Methodology: spatial analysis and fieldwork

Spatial analysis

Returning to my first encounter with the Foreign Domestic Helpers in public space described in the first section of this chapter, it was undertaken through spatial analysis and ethnographic observation. This became my approach throughout the intermittent fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong between October 2012 to January 2016 (five field trips of a total of 83 days). As a spatial designer, I undertook a series of site analyses to understand the structure, proportion, scale, patterns of circulation and access. This was supported by more conventional ethnographic methods as fundamental first steps to any developing spatial design project.

Figures 2-4 (on pages 9-11) Examples of some public spaces in Central that I have spent time in throughout my field research on Sundays in Hong Kong between 2013–2015.

Figure 2 **Atrium of World Wide Plaza which Foreign Domestic Helpers use as a meeting point, 2013**, photograph by the author.

Figure 3 **Foreign Domestic Helpers saturate the escalators and stairway of the Central Elevated Walkway from Connaught Road Central, 2013**, photograph by the author.

Figure 4 **Waterfront promenade in Central dominated by Foreign Domestic Helpers who use the open space for group dancing, 2015**, photograph by the author.

I spent 70 days of the total of 83 fieldwork days on Sundays in Central, observing the architectural structures of the public spaces that Foreign Domestic Helpers occupy; the Central Elevated Walkway, pedestrianised underpasses of the Central Elevated Walkway, corporate atriums, train station entrances, pedestrian walkways, store fronts, staircases and public promenades. Each of these areas was first analysed for their structural and spatial features: access points, pedestrian circulation, proportion of the space that Foreign Domestic Helpers used compared to the pedestrian thoroughfare, structural enclosures and openings particularly applicable to the Central Elevated Walkway, proximity of free public amenities, sizes of the various public spaces occupied, and number of Foreign Domestic Helpers occupying each area. After this initial spatial analysis, the second layer of information recorded the activities the Foreign Domestic Helpers were doing in each area. The spatial functions of each area were then mapped out and the spaces began to connect as a network of domestic spaces. The third layer of observation further inquired into each spatial program and the particularities of the temporary formation, such as the details of the makeshift cardboard structures created from disused cardboard pieces that Foreign Domestic Helpers use to delineate their spaces from the pedestrian thoroughfares.

The combination of three layers of spatial analysis allows for a holistic understanding – a macro to micro perspective – of the spaces the Foreign Domestic Helpers occupied, simultaneously extrapolating information about why they might select a certain space for a specific purpose, the size of the spaces they occupy and the details of individual constructions of their temporary shelters. Coupled with spatial mapping, diagramming, photography, observation and note taking, the data collected began to display the typology of the public spaces that are used by the Foreign Domestic Helpers – transient, connective thoroughfares between popular commercial public spaces. These spaces are within close proximity to free public amenities such as bathrooms and free wireless internet. More importantly, they are public spaces that have no distinct inhabitable, domestic features such as benches or tables, rather they are transitory public spaces that are not usually considered for private use by Hong Kong citizens.

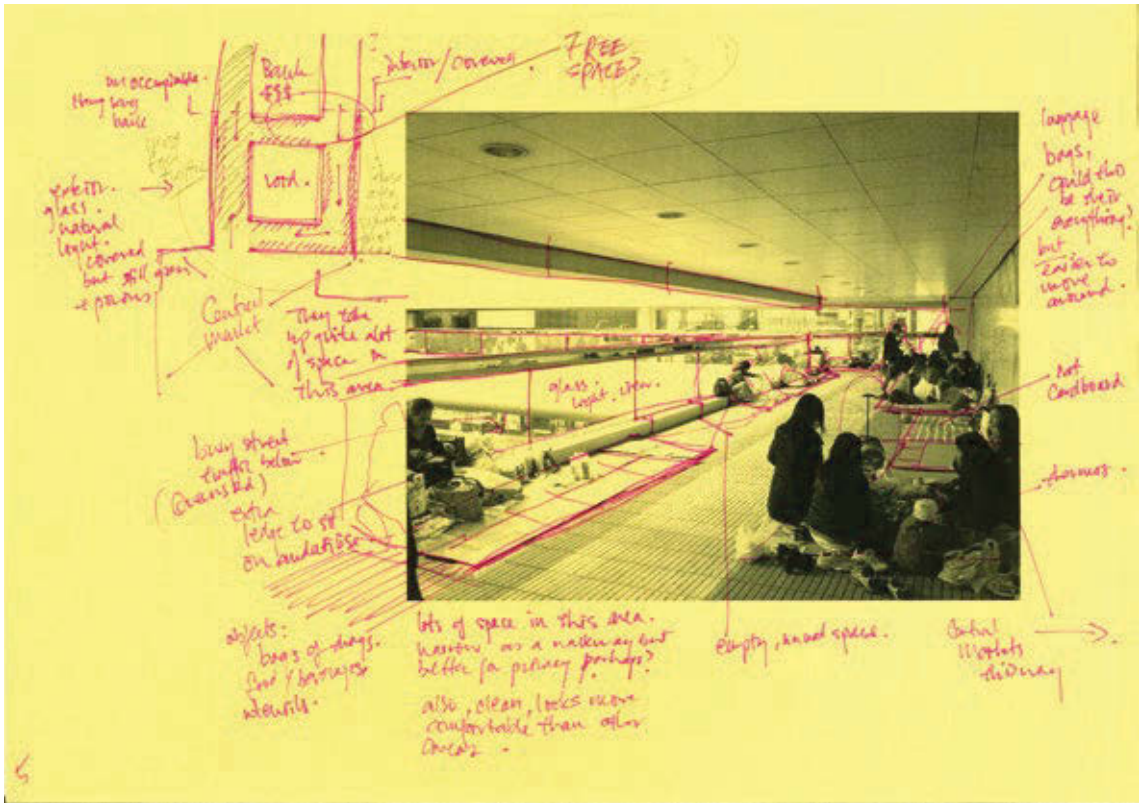

Figure 5 **An example of the spatial analysis conducted with the data collected on site in Hong Kong, 2015,** original sketch with pencil and pen over printed photograph by the author.

The field trips also built on other existing urban spatial case studies such as the works of urbanist William H. Whyte, architect and urban design consultant Jan Gehl and architect Jonathan Solomon. Whyte's influential work *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980) was revolutionary in applying methodologies to how public space can be studied. He initiated a small research group called *The Street Life Project*, where he and his team observed New York

City's plazas, parks and informal areas with an agenda to investigate the success or failure of such public spaces in the city. The team deciphered how dimensions of footpaths, openness of spaces, exposure to sun, proximity to fountains and number of trees influenced the frequency of use of various spaces, which implied their success or failure. The project's published outcomes – as a book and a short film – demonstrated the micro details of urban life that Whyte and the project team discovered and exhaustively investigated.

With a similar focus on public spaces and their capacity to shape the quality of urban life, Gehl conducted projects that closely linked the livability of cities to public spaces. In the book *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (2011), Gehl was interested in how people inhabited the space between buildings. He urged for an understanding of space as related to human activity and emphasised that life between buildings is an important dimension of architecture, urban design and city planning. The book catalogued a wide range of urban situations, activities, conditions, structures and circulations with an abundance of photographs, diagrammatic analysis, annotations and quantified discoveries. He noted that from the first edition of this work to the second edition some 35 years later, his original message continues to be of essential importance: "Take good care of the people and the precious life between the buildings" (Gehl 2011, p. 7). Gehl's work has influenced the fieldwork methodology to always observe the spaces of occupation not simply as spaces, but as facilitators of life for the people who inhabit them.

While the works of Whyte and Gehl are both important to building the foundation of observing urban spaces and the interrelation of human activities, Solomon's guide to Hong Kong's elevated and underground spaces is particularly relevant. *Cities Without Ground* (Frampton, Solomon and Wong 2012) attempts to chart the complexity of Hong Kong's elevated walkways and its pedestrianised underground networks in two-dimensional plan-view site maps as well as digital axonometric exploded drawings that illustrate the vast connections, intertwined paths of circulation and the human activities within. The book traverses an extensive list of densely populated suburbs in Hong Kong, both on Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. Particularly relevant are the three separate maps of Central where the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers and their Sunday inhabitations are made visible; an overview of Central, the Former Central Market and the International Finance Centre Mall (Frampton, Solomon and Wong 2012, p. 38-43). These maps visualised the complex networks and highlighted the spaces above, between and under the infrastructures. It illustrates the proliferation of human activities and proves that public space in Hong Kong is not necessarily demarcated, dedicated or stable ground. More importantly,

it demonstrates the flexible and agile nature of public spaces in Hong Kong, which consequently have allowed the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Central to deploy public spaces as tools for resistance and the reclamation of space.

Adopting the spirit of Gehl's attentive method of social observations, Whyte's focused curiosity on people and space, and Solomon's three-dimensional architectonic understanding of the network of spaces above and below ground, I produced photographs, spatial diagrams and sketches from my field trips. The photographs have been altered to be in black and white, to focus on the Foreign Domestic Helpers and their spaces, and to minimise the distraction of the colour of the background. Photographs were taken on site, along with sketches and some diagrams.

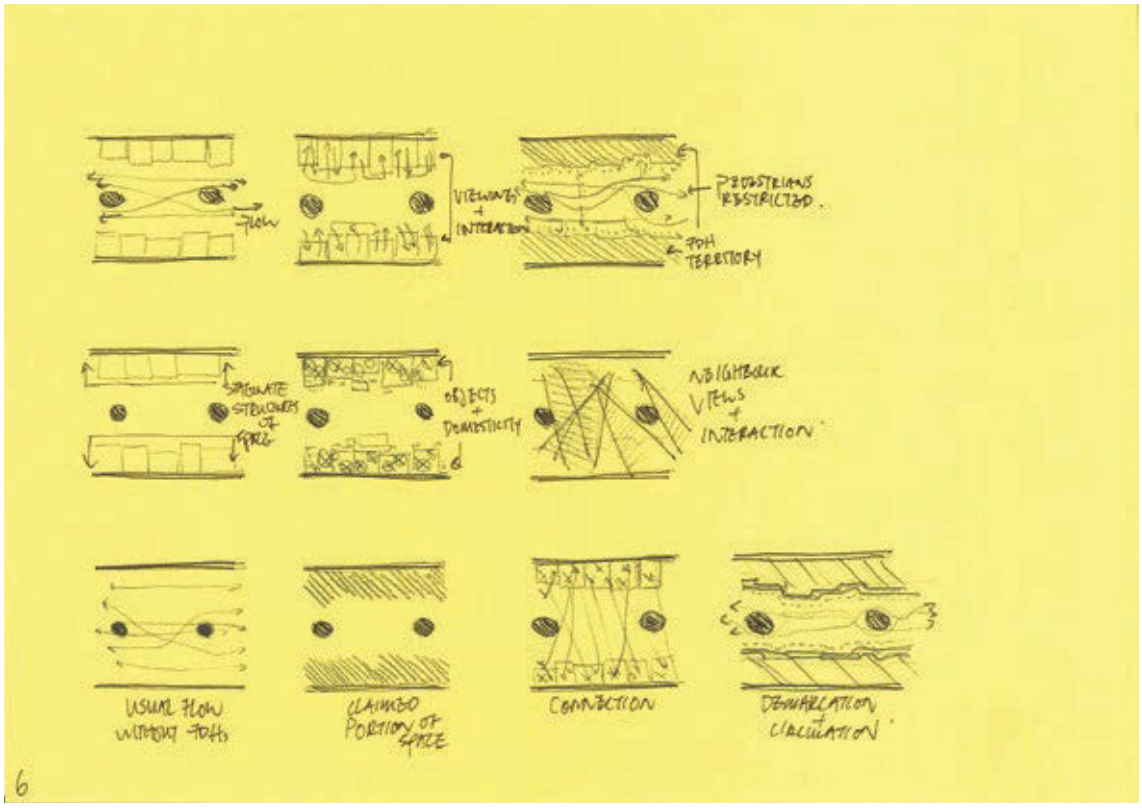

Figure 6 **An example of spatial analysis made on site on the Central Elevated Walkway in Hong Kong, 2013**, sketched diagram, pencil and pen on paper by the author.

Interviews

American anthropologist Paul Stoller conducted a series of intermittent fieldwork studies between 1992 to 1998 in New York City that drew a complex portrait of the lives of West African immigrant traders. In *Money Has No Smell*, Stoller (2002) used social analysis and ethnographic description to decipher the stories of immigrant traders. His fieldwork

studies mostly comprised participant observation in the street markets which the immigrant vendors populated. I used a similar approach in my interactions with Foreign Domestic Helpers, where I spent time with Foreign Domestic Helpers in their temporary domestic spaces listening to their stories about their families, the lives they led in their home country, their situation in Hong Kong and more. My photographic data and spatial analysis gave my research a socio-spatial understanding, however my knowledge was limited to only what I witnessed in public space. I was curious to know more about the Foreign Domestic Helpers' everyday life, how they operate in the employers' homes and their domestic spatial arrangements. I also acknowledged that understanding the events that occur in the interior spaces was necessary to gain a holistic understanding of their motivations, background and insight. Understanding the limitations within spatial analysis and photographs, I conducted a series of interviews. My ethnographic research was granted permission by the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee: UTS HREC REF NO. 2013000252. All interviewees have been given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity.

The interviews began when I was introduced to a friend's Foreign Domestic Helper in Hong Kong in 2013. I was invited to dinner at my friend's home and began talking about my research as their helper Janet was setting the dinner table. My friend offered Janet as my first interviewee. I was aware that I was the friend of Janet's employer and did not want Janet to feel pressured to participate in the research. After I explained the details and objectives of the research to her she was happy to participate and invited me to join her friends the following Sunday at their weekly meeting point in Central. My initial discomfort also came from my status as a Hong Kong Chinese person whose (perceived) social, cultural and economic position was different from that of the Foreign Domestic Helpers. However, my decision to take part in their gatherings as an observer – although I could never fully be a participant because of my perceived status – enabled me to develop a rapport with the Foreign Domestic Helpers and ease possible tensions.

I was aware of the discomfort the Foreign Domestic Helpers may have experienced in their place of work, which could have had a negative impact on their responses to my research or reluctance to participate. Once I had established a rapport with the interviewees, I reiterated that my research project did not intend to portray them as victims or as a public spectacle of migrant women, rather to focus on using their stories to expand the current scholarly discourse around migrant domestic labour, and the social, spatial and political inequality they may experience as temporary residents in Hong Kong.

On a Sunday morning in December 2013, I met Janet at World Wide House in Central. We went to a Filipino food stall where she purchased a rice dish in a plastic takeaway container. She explained that everybody in the group brings a box of food to share every Sunday. As we proceeded to meet her friends I was informed that all the groups have informally designated areas to go to based on their home origin in the Philippines, and each week her friend Yasmine was usually the first to arrive to secure the same spot. On our three-minute walk from World Wide House to Chater Road, Janet passed many Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers she knew who she stopped to greet. When we arrived at her group's area, she introduced me to a group of five women who greeted me. They were sitting on five pieces of cardboard boxes flattened on the ground with their shoes removed and placed on the exterior edge of the cardboard. I duly took my shoes off as they invited me to sit down. In the centre of the cardboard space was a thin sheet of white plastic with bottles of water, fruit juice and containers of hot food placed on top. We drank from plastic cups and Janet offered me some food. The group started to share the food and converse in Tagalog to each other and intermittently switched back to English to include me. Taking in the scene that I was in, I felt that I was a guest in Janet's home with her friends. Not her employer's home, but her own domestic space away from work.

Throughout the day, I began to talk about my research and as the right opportunity arose I asked for permission to audio record. All Foreign Domestic Helpers that I shared a space with, regardless of their verbal participation, were given an information sheet that they had to sign to ensure they were completely aware of my role and my project. As they described their sleeping arrangements and the private spaces they had in their employer's home, I would sketch a rough spatial plan of their description and ask for their confirmation. I was particularly curious about the spaces they have in their employers' homes in comparison to the spaces they delineated for themselves in Central every Sunday.

It was difficult to have continuous voice recordings throughout the interviewing process as conversations flowed from one person in the group to another while walking around. Sometimes the FHDs would stop to talk to their friends who did not wish to be recorded. I was aware that formalising the interviewing process would be less organic and the continuous presence of a recording device might cause some unease. I found that the least invasive process was to converse, observe and participate. At times when recordings were not appropriate, I supplemented with notes and/or sketches.

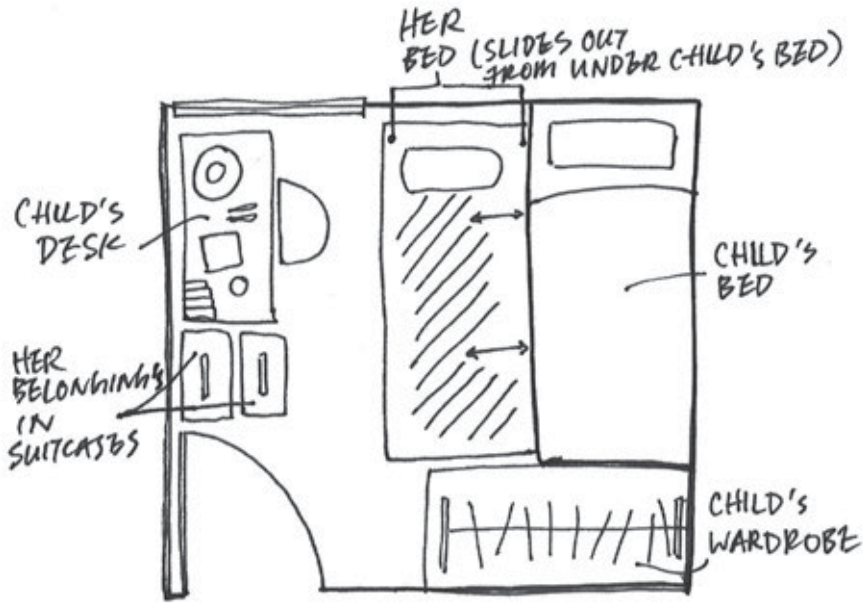

Figure 7 **A sketch of a Foreign Domestic Helper's sleeping arrangement in her employer's home as described by the interviewee, 2015**, original sketch by the author, ink on paper, reproduced with permission.

This method of participant observation has been used by other ethnographers like Stoller. He also referred to American cultural anthropologist Robert R. Desjarlais's articulation of balancing sensitivity towards his research subjects and the lack of audio recordings (Stoller 2002, p. ix). Desjarlais articulated in his study *Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood Among the Homeless* (1997, p. 40-41):

> I spent much of my time hanging about, listening to conversations, and then finding a place to write down the gist of these exchanges… my notes on these conversations, which typically contained quasi-verbatim accounts, lacked the precision that tape or audio recordings could have provided. However, as many anthropologists have found, especially those who have worked among homeless populations, the advantages of unassuming participation in daily activities, during which one can develop lasting, informal ties with people, often outweigh the benefits of information obtained through surveys and more intrusive methods.

Throughout the conversations with my interviewees, many of them referred to their employers and sometimes openly discussed the negative experiences they have endured in the homes. In those situations, they requested I stop the recording and I took notes instead. Every participant's name has been made into a pseudonym and all relevant sketches or drawings made during the interviewing process were approved by the participants to ensure authenticity. The majority of Foreign Domestic Helpers I met showed great enthusiasm towards the research project and were happy to generously include me in their Sunday activities as they continued to talk about the lives they led in the Philippines, their families, aspirations, motivations, previous experiences with Hong Kong employers and their current living and working situations. Through Janet, I was introduced to other Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Central. Similarly in 2015, I met another friend's Foreign Domestic Helper, Christine, who in a similar way invited me to join her group on a Sunday and the number of participants expanded, which gradually snowballed into the 35 participants who were my official research participants. All of the interviews were conducted on site in various parts of Central Hong Kong.

The data collected from fieldwork on site in Hong Kong provided intimate insights into the Foreign Domestic Helpers' lives and the way they work and live in Hong Kong. Moreover, it added another level of complexity to the research as what appears in public spaces demonstrated what is lacking in the domestic environment. Every Sunday, the communal activation and spatial expansion that the public witnesses is the exact opposite of what occurs in the homes

for six days a week – isolation, discipline and absolute socio-spatial reduction. Chapters Three and Four discuss the disciplinary practices and the effects, which continuously incite the Foreign Domestic Helpers' agency. Chapters Five and Six reveal the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatialised resistance in full force through text, photographs and spatial diagrams.

1.5 Hong Kong, in flux

Hong Kong's colonial history and postcolonial political landscape shaped the self-invention of a cultural identity that can be misunderstood as an archetype of 'East meets West' (Abbas 1997; Mathews, Ma and Lui 2008), with *East* being the Chinese origin of Hong Kong while *West* refers to the British occupation and influence. Yet to categorise Hong Kong's cultural identity as a bifurcation of cultures is superficial and generic. The complexities of Hong Kong's colonial past, postcolonial identity after 1997, and the uncertain and possible dissolution of its pro-democratic vision have incited an identity crisis among the Hong Kong people. This enunciation followed by the Tiananmen Square incident of 4 June 1989,[1] induced a tension that set Hong Kong apart from China. Hong Kong's postcolonial, fragmented socio-cultural identity offers a unique political, social and urban-spatial context to this research, which impacts on the socio-spatial ecology that the Foreign Domestic Helpers re-establish every Sunday.

In the final section, I provide a brief overview of the social, cultural, political and historical context within which this research is located. I show how Hong Kong is a space of flux and transition due to the uncertainties associated with its culture, identity and history. Significantly, this state of contingency and transition also characterises the experiences of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong who enact their agency within specific spatial contexts, and do so in ways that create new spatialities and histories. Indeed, space in the context of Hong Kong needs to be understood as in flux and contingent rather than fixed and static.

Geographical and spatial context

Hong Kong is located on China's south coast, connected by land to the Chinese Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen and enclosed by the South China Sea and Pearl River Delta.

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[1] The Tiananmen Square protest of 1989 is commonly known as the June Fourth Incident where student led demonstrations in Beijing were met with military force. Troops with assault rifles and tanks opposed unarmed civilians who were trying to block the military's advance towards Tiananmen Square in Beijing. This incident was a failed attempt at democracy in China, which also served as a turning point where Hong Kong people lost trust in the Chinese government and escalated the fear of post-1997 reforms. Since 1989, candlelit vigils are held every year in Hong Kong on the anniversary of the June Fourth Incident.

With a total land area of 1,106 square kilometres and a population of over seven million, Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated cities in the world (Hong Kong SAR Government Census and Statistics Department 2016). Hong Kong Special Administrative Region consists of Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon peninsula, New Territories and 200 small offshore islands. Hong Kong's geographic terrain is mountainous with hills and slopes throughout Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon peninsula. Approximately 25 percent of Hong Kong's land is available for urban development, with the majority in Kowloon, the north coastal edge of Hong Kong Island, and scattered areas of New Territories. Victoria Harbour runs between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, separating their corporate and commercial skyscraper dominated skylines. Hong Kong's urban density may seem complex and chaotic as shopping malls, hotels, corporate towers and residential towers ascend in quick succession and intense proximity, merging and blurring spatial and programmatic boundaries. Adam Frampton, Jonathan Solomon and Clara Wong summarise Hong Kong's urban planning strategy as "a combination of top-down planning and bottom-up solutions, a unique collaboration between pragmatic thinking and comprehensive masterplanning, played out in three dimensional space" (Frampton, Solomon and Wong 2012, p. 6).

In Central, the commercial district of Hong Kong Island where the Foreign Domestic Helpers congregate every Sunday, the compact density is specifically aided by subterranean and vertical connective spaces. These public spaces are predominantly privately-owned public space (POPs) which are regulated with various modes of surveillance such as frequent security patrols, closed-circuit television and numerous signs to imply a strict sense of spatial order and public behaviour. Homeless people, buskers and other disenfranchised minorities who cannot afford admission into these spaces by means of consumption discover opportunities in the liminal spaces that are in between these. Every Sunday, groups of Foreign Domestic Helpers infiltrate and inhabit the elevated spaces, corporate atriums, underpasses, open stairways and pedestrianised roads. In doing so, they transform these spaces by enacting their agency in ways that create new spatialities and histories.

Culture of disappearance

Renowned cultural theorist Akbar Abbas published an influential book about Hong Kong's fragmented identity and the politics of disappearance at the time of the transferral of

sovereignty in 1997. In *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Abbas emphasises that Hong Kong's status of anxiety does not simply refer to an end to the Hong Kong way of life. Abbas (1997, p. 70-71) states:

> It is something more double-edged, the way an unprecedented and in many cases newfound interest in local culture and politics appear at the moment when catastrophe, real or imagined, threatens. The "end" of Hong Kong is therefore what inaugurates an intense intersect in its historical and cultural specificity… This is very precisely a culture of disappearance because it is a culture whose appearance is accompanied by a sense of the imminence of its disappearance, and the cause of its emergence – 1997 – may also be the cause of its demise.

Abbas argues that this sense of imminence of its disappearance has influenced the way that Hong Kong's urban spaces are seen from within. He uses a number of Hong Kong films created by local filmmakers as examples of how the city is identified by its most visible architecture, scenic shots of the harbour from the Peak and so on. He argues this is a way "to hold on to the familiar for reassurance that the city is real", however no authentic identity emerges (Abbas 1997, p. 77). Within this culture of disappearance, Abbas saw Hong Kong as a city in rapid flux, like a "city without brakes" where the architecture has become merely a visible sign of the city's growing prosperity (Abbas 1997, p. 78-79). Hong Kong's status as a global city has been shaped by the transnational flows of financial capital and labour (both professional and unskilled migrant workers), and this in turn has transformed the local architectural landscape and built environment. As Abbas observes, the spatial and urban forms of Hong Kong have uniquely shaped the experiences of those who reside and inhabit the city-state, and I argue, including the experiences of Foreign Domestic Helpers.

Abbas (1997, p. 80) notes that "The built space of the city not only evokes financial progress and the spatial appropriations of power but also gives cultural residues, dreams of the future as well as intimations of resistance. Built space therefore must not be understood only as spatial forms, but also as something that both produces and is produced by cultural practices."

Abbas attributes these practices to the culture of disappearance. In particular, he acutely observes that the gathering of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Statue Square in Central on Sundays may be understood as illustrative of how heterotopic and liminal spaces of contestation, transition and change emerge as part of the urban vernacular of Hong Kong's culture of disappearance (Abbas 1997, p. 86).

1.6 Thesis structure

Chapter One has provided the scope of the research, the existing field of knowledge, the methodology and the specific context of the research. The following chapters develop the core argument of the thesis.

Chapter Two *Resistance, Marginalisation and Citizenship* reviews existing literature across multiple disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, urban geography, urban studies and spatial theory. It explores the complexity within the particular kind of resistance that Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in that has materialised as a spatial phenomenon. This chapter proposes that the Foreign Domestic Helpers' weekly appropriation and transformation of public space is not a deliberate act of opposition, rather it is a form of temporary, yet repeated, spatialised resistance that enables them to reclaim space for themselves.

Chapter Three *Foreign Domestic Helpers: Discipline and Servitude* presents the continuous narrative of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' misrepresentation and disempowerment in Hong Kong to legitimise their motivation and agency to reclaim space every Sunday. It features materials collected from interviews with Foreign Domestic Helpers conducted in Hong Kong in 2013–2015. Recalling incidents where the Foreign Domestic Helpers have experienced specific forms of control in their employers' homes, the interviews reveal various themes that motivate the specific disciplinary strategies applied to the Foreign Domestic Helpers. These themes revolve around the female body as a sexual or moral threat, such as accusations of sexual threat, altering the image of the perceived threat, separation and isolation, normalising continuous abuse and victimisation without reason. The interviews show how Foreign Domestic Helpers can become disciplined subjects of domestic labour within the private, domestic realm.

Chapter Four *Foreign Domestic Helpers: Invisibility and Spacelessness* highlights the negative impacts of the legalities in the employment contract that sympathise with the Hong Kong employers and ultimately give power to the employers at the expense of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' disempowerment. Analyses of the legalities of the contracts' operation and the primary data from interviews reveal the detrimental effects of the blurred spatial boundaries between the domestic space and workplace including the facilitation of exploitative scenarios that expose the Foreign Domestic Helpers to mistreatment and solidify Foreign Domestic Helpers' spacelessness. The term "spacelessness" is used to describe the condition where the Foreign Domestic Helpers have minimal to no physical and personal space of their own

within their place of employment. Chapters Three and Four illustrate the full extent of Foreign Domestic Helpers' disempowerment, which acts as a compass to navigate the socio-spatial ecology they cultivate in public spaces every Sunday.

Chapter Five *Sunday: Reclaiming Space* emerges from the private, domestic spaces that Foreign Domestic Helpers work and live in. The chapter explores the socio-spatial construction of the spatial phenomenon – Little Manila – by charting the temporary spaces the Foreign Domestic Helpers create and the events that occur within these spaces every Sunday. This chapter explores how this resistance is spatialised in Central Hong Kong, as a network of augmented spaces where Foreign Domestic Helpers have cultivated a collective culture of solidarity, resistance and resourcefulness by reclaiming space to have the capacity and freedom to be themselves. Drawing upon the ethnographic research conducted on site, this chapter uses ethnographic observations, interviews and spatial analysis to illustrate how the spatialised resistance of Foreign Domestic Helpers has constructed a domestic interior in the urban public spaces of Central, Hong Kong. This chapter demonstrates Foreign Domestic Helpers are more than subjects of domestic labour, rather they are actors with agency. With this empowered portrait of Foreign Domestic Helpers, new spatialities and histories emerge.

Chapter Six *Sunday: A Visual Essay* provides a visual narrative of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatial occupation. The photographs were taken during the field research in Hong Kong between 2013 and 2015. They have been selected to show the spatial condition of Little Manila, highlighting the events that occur within. The narrative moves through different areas in Central which Foreign Domestic Helpers inhabit. This photographic account displays visually the reclamation of space that disrupts the city-state's hegemonic spaces every Sunday.

Chapter Seven *Migrant Domestic Labour: Global Disempowerment and Dislocations* illustrates the origins of this spatial phenomenon as not an isolated circumstance of disempowerment, rather a consequence of a global issue. When Little Manila emerges every Sunday in Hong Kong, it reflects power relations and spatial contestations that result from the economic, political and socio-spatial inequality inscribed in the global operation of migrant domestic labour. This chapter exhibits the global context in which Foreign Domestic Helpers' disenfranchisement in Hong Kong originates and the network of disempowerment that is the method of functioning of global migrant domestic labour.

Chapter Eight *Conclusion: A Matter of the Disenfranchised, Space and Socio-spatial Inequality* reiterates the contribution to knowledge through spatial design and summarises the core

argument of the thesis. Ultimately, the thesis argues that the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong create new spatialities and histories through their weekly reconstruction of a unique socio-spatial ecology in the city-state. This is demonstrated through analysis of the various ways in which FHDs have enacted their agency by appropriating and augmenting public space to not only resist the socio-spatial depletion endured in the domestic spaces of Hong Kong but also to reclaim physical and personal space to continue living a dignified life.

Chapter 2
Resistance, Marginalisation and Citizenship

2.1 Introduction

One Sunday afternoon in 2015, the sounds of karaoke and cheering crowds were audible from the underground station concourse of the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) in Central, Hong Kong. Emerging from the escalators to the street level at exit B, the origin of the noise became apparent in full force. Crowds of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers, the majority of which were women, congregated in the undercover atrium of the corporate tower World Wide House, cheering at what appeared to be a performance held on a temporary platform in front of a brightly-lit phone store that spanned a corner block. On the temporary platform stood a host of the event, a middle-aged Filipino man, smiling and introducing a young Filipino woman who appeared to be a contestant. She introduced herself, speaking Tagalog with disparate English words, before beginning to sing to a song that was televised on the screen in front of her. The crowd consisted of a majority of Filipino women who were swaying and dancing, alongside some Western tourists who enthusiastically watched on and applauded.

This event took place on the pedestrian corner of Des Voeux Road Central and World Wide Lane. World Wide Lane is a pedestrian alleyway with a small convenience store and a Filipino fast-food store, bound by arterial roads Des Voeux Road Central and Connaught Road Central. Along the footpath of Des Voeux Road Central in front of the phone store, salespeople abound holding up advertisements, selling overseas phone cards and phone credit. They stood one after another along a metal balustrade between the road and the footpath. Disinterested pedestrians negotiated this junction with the crowd of spectators, salespeople and the overall festive commotion to access the MTR station, disperse down World Wide Lane or continue on Des Voeux Road Central.

As the performance finished, the host asked for an encore and the crowd responded excitedly. Some spectators were taking photographs and videos with their phones and sharing the event on social media. Suddenly, an authoritative voice sounded from a hand-held microphone projector, breaking the applause. A middle-aged Hong Kong Chinese man in MTR uniform emerged from the station entrance and announced in English then repeated in Cantonese: “Please move away from the entrance. Please do not inconvenience our customers. Please do not stay here in front of the entrance.” He repeated his request several times, inching slowly toward the crowd. Some people stopped to look at him, however the host, the contestant and

the spectators in the front paid little attention to the announcement. The MTR employee remained at the back of the crowd and the music continued to overwhelm the announcement. Several people near him shifted away from the entrance as the performance encored. I asked a Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper near me whether she was afraid of the authorities, or what might happen if the uniformed man persisted. Among the cheering and the singing, she replied "It doesn't matter. They're not going to do much. It's just karaoke and we are having fun. If this is really bad they'll call the police. I know it's ok. Today is Sunday and we can find some place else. But this is our place too you know?" (2015, pers. comm., 1 February).

In this recount, the authority's requests were met with passive response and inaction, which can be understood as a form of the resistance Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in every Sunday in the public spaces they inhabit. This method of apathetic resistance may be considered within the power dynamics of marginalised groups and governing authorities in an urban spatial context. In *Geographies of Resistance* (1997), political scientists and geographers Steve Pile and Michael Keith addressed the issues of resistance in power relationships, political identities and space. This triangulation is critical to the thesis as resistance is framed within the power dynamics between the Foreign Domestic Helpers and their employers, and between the Foreign Domestic Helpers' role as migrant domestic workers and the space they occupy in their employers' homes and in public.

Every Sunday, through the appropriation and transformation of public space, Foreign Domestic Helpers' resistance actualises in the temporary semi-public private spaces they construct, where they have the capacity to express themselves in ways they have not been allowed in their employers' homes for six days of the week. Exemplified in the recount above, this form of resistance does not appear as direct opposition or threaten violent collisions with authority, rather it appears through the reclamation and occupation of space and consequently resistance is spatialised. Like Pile and Keith (1997, p. 11), who explain the importance of a spatial understanding of resistance, I too view resistance as a spatialisation that allows for a subtle yet persistent existence rather than a combative eruption:

> By thinking resistance spatially, it becomes both about the different spaces of resistance and also about the ways in which resistance is mobilised through specific spaces and times. The term resistance draws attention not only to the myriad spaces of political struggles, but also to the politics of everyday spaces, through which political identities constantly flow and fix. These struggles do not have to be glamorous or

> heroic, about fighting back or opposition, but may subsist in enduring in refusing to be wiped off the map of history.

It is important to understand resistance within the context of this research as one where the seemingly 'powerful' and the 'powerless' are not fixed, rather their possession of power is constantly shifting. Sociologist Nicole Constable comments on the Foreign Domestic Helpers' resistance: "To regard them simply or solely as oppressed by those 'with power' is to ignore the subtler and more complex forms of power, discipline and resistance in their everyday lives" (Constable 2007, p. 202).

Examining existing literature across multiple disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, urban geography, urban studies and spatial theory, this chapter explores the complexity within the resistance that Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in that has materialised as a spatial phenomenon. I propose that the Foreign Domestic Helpers' weekly inhabitation of public space is not a deliberate act of opposition, rather it is a form of temporary, yet repeated spatialised resistance that enables them to reclaim space for themselves. Furthermore, the literature featured in this chapter aims to dismantle the stereotype of power structures and marginalisation that positions migrant domestic workers as a disposable workforce of docile migrant women.

Feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) recognises the danger of a single story: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

Through this chapter, the thesis begins to breakdown homogenous views of Foreign Domestic Helpers by offering alternate views on marginalisation, strategies of resistance, parasitic relationships and citizenship to illustrate a portrait of Foreign Domestic Helpers as actors with agency, who resist the socio-spatial depletion and cultural discipline they endure in their employers' homes by constructing an ecology of resistance in public space every Sunday.

2.2 Current literature

Current literature discuss aspects of the public activities that the Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in every Sunday, yet not enough has been written about how these migrant women are using public space as a way of resisting the socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation they endure in the homes of their employers. The way this resistance unfolds in the appropriated spaces is specific to the denial of personal space they experience in their employers' homes.

Resistance is a term that has been associated with Foreign Domestic Helpers. Sociologist Ligaya Lindio-McGovern in *Globalization, Labour Export and Resistance: A Study of Filipino Migrant Domestic Workers in Global Cities* (2013) discusses resistance in the forms of establishment of workers' unions and public protests against the exploitative nature of labour export in contemporary neo-liberal globalisation. Lindio-McGovern invites a critical rethinking of neo-liberal globalisation that can translate to policy and influence action for global social justice. While her work illustrates how Filipino migrant domestic workers resist exploitation in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vancouver and Rome via protests and opposition to particular policies, the non-overt social congregations in public spaces that Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in every Sunday is not discussed as a form of resistance. Lindio-McGovern focuses on the exploitative measures within migrant labour policies that have been produced, arguably by neo-liberal globalisation, to continue the exploitation of cheap labour from migrants from the Philippines. While her research is a paramount contribution to the discourse on the feminisation of this labour sector and its global political, social and economic influences and implications, the thesis focus on the spatial phenomenon as a form of resistance is yet to be considered.

Resistance is discussed specific to Foreign Domestic Helpers' use of space in Hong Kong in *Migrants' Agency and the Making of Transient Urban Spaces* (Bork-Huffer et al. 2014). Sociologist Tabea Bork-Huffer and colleagues collated a series of articles that collectively revealed the relationship between migrant populations and the transformation of urban spaces. Bork-Huffer et al. (2014, p. 124-127) claim that metropolitan urban spaces in Asia's megacities breed complex social and power relations and multifaceted conflicts over space and resources. In the case of Hong Kong and the Foreign Domestic Helpers, Bork-Huffer et al. (2014, p. 142) proposed that Statue Square is a space of resistance and resilience because:

> …migrant activities could mold the social texture of the city by intentionally offering support to those in need. As a result, this location or congregations becomes a space of resilience where migrants meet and talk to others, which they cannot do in the highly bounded spaces of work and living in their employers' homes. It is also a space of resistance where migrants meet to protest for more rights, better work conditions, and better payments and which they use for announcements and political gatherings.

While Bork-Huffer et al. (2014, p. 141-142) have recognised the Foreign Domestic Helpers' congregations have formed a space of resistance, the emphasis is on the space – Statue

Square – as a facilitator of the outwardly political events that Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in. What is absent in this argument is that beyond Statue Square, the repeated acts of appropriation and transformation of public spaces proliferate around Central Hong Kong and form a much larger site of resistance that is a spatial phenomenon unique to the socio-spatial inequality experienced by the Foreign Domestic Helpers. Bork-Huffer et al.'s claim was made with the activation of space by distinctly political activities such as protests, without extensions to provide the discursive attention this spatial phenomenon deserves.

Geographer Lisa Law recognises the importance of Little Manila as a site for the Foreign Domestic Helpers' recuperation and preservation of culture. Law has researched extensively the politics of urban spaces in Southeast Asia and tropical Australia. She has discussed how migrant women become embodied subjects in foreign cities, drawing on Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong and their active creation of places in the city that emulate their homes through sensorial experiences (Law 2001). She has also explored the relationship between public spaces and cultural politics in Hong Kong on the gradual commodification of the urban landscape by wealthy property developers in contrast to the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers who gather in Central (Law 2002). In both case studies, Law's concerns are largely the cultivation of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' nostalgia in public space through their sensorial experiences and the cultural landscape that has been created by the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Central defying the regular spatial order in the city's financial capital. While she discusses their public gatherings as a weekly relief from the cultural oppression they experience in their employers' homes, the spatial deprivation that occurs in the homes requires more attention (Law 2001). Law's (2001) claim that Little Manila is a platform for the cultivation of culture and resistance can become a more holistic one, where their spatial reclamation is recognised as a significant factor in the continuation of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' culture and resistance in Hong Kong.

In contrast to Law's claim on Little Manila as a site of relief for Filipino migrant women workers, Asian literature scholar Janet Ng interprets the weekly spatial formation as a genuine use of public space by opportunistic migrant women. In *Paradigm City: Space Culture and Capitalism in Hong Kong* (2009), Ng focuses on complex uses and meanings of urban spaces in Hong Kong as well as dissecting the complex social-political dynamics of the city after the transferal of sovereignty in 1997. Ng describes the Foreign Domestic Helpers' appropriation of public spaces in Central every Sunday as "lively bazaars and street festivals" and "subaltern gatherings using left over space from the weekday's legitimate activities of money and power" (2009, p. 82). This description is problematic as the socio-spatial oppression

that Foreign Domestic Helpers experience for six days each week has not been made explicit as an important reason for their use of space, rather Ng portrays them as "opportunistic city-users" who are engaging in "illegitimate activities" (2009, p. 83). The representation of their Sunday activities as a "bazaar" or "street festival" (Ng 2009) gives an impression that these events are fun, omitting the fact the Foreign Domestic Helpers have no domestic space of their own to socialise in because for six days a week they labour and live within a culturally, socially and spatially disciplined environment. Moreover, the spaces that they gather in, such as elevated walkways, atriums and underpasses, are the only public spaces they can afford due to their scarce economic resources. The Foreign Domestic Helpers cannot afford to use commercial public spaces like regular consumers so it is not an optimal choice that their Sunday activities are on full display in public; rather it is their only option within their circumstances of socio-spatial inequality. Ng concludes that the Foreign Domestic Helpers' "fêting is an unintentional political act", which has transformed a seemingly superficial public space into a truly public space (2009, p. 84). It is reasonable to claim that their activities are an authentic use of public space, however the reiterative festive portrayal of their spatial phenomenon negates their socio-spatial struggles, thus reducing their agency and the significance of their reclamation of space.

The festive description of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' weekly gathering is common in discourse around temporary urban spaces. Landscape architect and urban theorist Jeffrey Hou uses the term "insurgent" to describe the public spaces that are transformed in unique ways in the edited book *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities* (2010). The cover of this book is a photograph of the Foreign Domestic Helpers gathering in the HSBC atrium in Central on a typical Sunday. This photo was referred to in the introduction as the "Filipina guest workers transforming an anonymous corporate entrance to a lively community gathering space where the workers picnic" (Hou 2010, p. 7). This was not further expanded upon.

It can be supposed that Hou recognises the Foreign Domestic Helpers spatial phenomenon as an example of insurgent public space and the Foreign Domestic Helpers could be understood within the context of the book as actors participating in guerilla urbanism. This thesis takes this further by addressing the Foreign Domestic Helpers' appropriation and transformation of public space and their reclamation of space as a spatial phenomenon. Unlike a picnic or a street festival, which is a fun activity that occurs from having the luxury of choice, every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers gather to construct semi-public private spaces in atriums, elevated walkways and underpasses because they have no other space to do so. Simplified

representations of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' Sunday gatherings as picnics reduce the socio-spatial, political and economic inequity that is paramount to the construct of their disenfranchisement and, ultimately, their spatial phenomenon.

As illustrated above, current literature circumvents the socio-spatial complexities of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' labour and space, focusing on themes such as the cultural geographies, paradigms of power and the methods of temporary spatialisation. Some literature recognises the significance of Foreign Domestic Helpers' collective use of public space, yet not enough attention has been given to the Foreign Domestic Helpers' appropriation and transformation of space as a result of the denial of personal space experienced in the home. The reduction of space experienced in the Foreign Domestic Helpers' workplace – their so-called home – significantly contributes to the expansion of space that occurs in public spaces. The socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation that Foreign Domestic Helpers endure in their employers' homes have cultivated their agency to resist. Every Sunday, this resistance is spatialised. This is the antithesis of their socio-spatial experience in the workplace that is also their residence. This antithesis, in the form of reclamation of space, gives Foreign Domestic Helpers the capacity to be themselves.

This chapter explores resistance within urban contexts to understand the Foreign Domestic Helpers' seemingly ordinary but extraordinary method of resistance. Their repeated act of spatial appropriation and transformation has also resulted in an ecology of resistance. This ecology is a complex system of relationships founded on the public spaces they transform and inhabit every Sunday. This can also be understood as their site of resistance.

2.3 Understanding resistance

Resistance is the act or the power of opposing, defying or withstanding domination. To understand resistance beyond structural relationships of power requires a relational analysis of the act itself through evaluating the identity of the participants and the people or institution they are opposing and the potential political and social impact. This thesis positions the Foreign Domestic Helpers' resistance spatially and their resistance is cultivated within space.

Political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott proposes a post-structuralist view of resistance through the notion of the "moral economy" – a concept that was created to articulate the reciprocal relationship between subsistence peasants and landlords in his studies of Asian

peasants in the 1980s (Scott 1985). In *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), Scott makes distinctions between different types of resistance. For example "real resistance" refers to the organised, systematic, preplanned or selfless practices with revolutionary consequences while "token resistance" points to unorganised incidental acts without any revolutionary changes, which is accommodated within the power structure (Scott 1985, p. 290). He clarifies that resistance is an intentional act although no one method is less real or significant than the other (Scott 1985, p. 292). The discussion of "resistance" requires the acknowledgment that there lies within resistance a complex interplay of conflict and consent. Similarly, Pile emphasises the importance of understanding resistance not simply as a duality of the powerful and the powerless, rather a complex and ambivalent continuous "dance of control" (1997, p. 2).

Deploying Scott and Pile's post-structuralist views of resistance to support his notion of "everyday resistance", sociologist Asef Bayat, whose work spans transnational studies, sociology and Middle Eastern studies, further demonstrates this "thickening" of resistance by using the example of the veiling of Muslim working women, which should not be seen simply as an act of submission, rather the act of veiling and unveiling has been considered as an act of resistance and part of an "accommodating protest" (Bayat 2004, p. 87). His argument is that resistance should not be viewed as a one-dimensional universalised form of struggle, always appearing as direct collective action, which may not be the most suitable strategy in situations where dictatorship and suppression rule. Bayat makes distinctions between small-scale individual acts and collective activism and recognises the difficulty and complexities to conceptualise resistance within the spectrum (2004, p. 87-89).

This perspective of resistance – not as a one-dimensional oppositional aggression, rather as one that fluctuates in its appearance and methods – is used to explore the complexities of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatialised resistance every Sunday. They too cannot resist the socio-spatial collapse that occurs in their employers' homes by directly disobeying or collective action. The Foreign Domestic Helpers' two-year visa specifies their live-in arrangement and prohibits them from renting property independently. This non-negotiable aspect of their legally binding contract makes it difficult for them to simply disobey commands they deem unreasonable. As the legitimacy of their right to be in Hong Kong and accommodation is solely connected to their employment, blatant resistance may not be the most productive solution. Many Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed have remained in compliance rather than defiance. However, outside of their employers' homes and away from their control, every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers' resistance can be exercised and actualised as they reclaim personal and physical space to be themselves without inhibitions.

Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong operate within power relations where they have less authority, autonomy or power. This position directly impacts on the use of less confrontational, resourceful and alternative methods of resistance. Pile (1997, p. 2-3) further expands on this:

> …people are positioned differently in unequal and multiple power relationships, that more and less powerful people are active in the constitution of unfolding relationships of authority, meaning and identity, that these activities are contingent, ambiguous and awkwardly situated, but that resistance seeks to occupy, deploy and create alternative spatialities from those defined through oppression and exploitation.

Politics of the "informals"

Bayat dissects the concept of resistance within the politics of the "informals" (2004, p. 79-104), where the term "informal" refers to the "urban marginals" or the "urban disenfranchised". The discourse of urban marginality began in Europe in the nineteenth century (Bayat 2004, p. 81). At the time, marginality was associated with urban unemployment, migration and urban crime by social scientists. Sociologist Georg Simmel examined the socio-psychological traits of new urban settlers and focused on those who have settled into an environment that exercises different social practices and values from their origins (Simmel 1950). This led to a study of the social practices of ethnic migrants in the 1920s and 1930s where many immigrants were labelled as "marginals" and such marginal personality was produced from cultural hybridity of living on the margin of two cultures without being a full member of either (Simmel 1950).

The marginal position that Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong occupy resonates with this as their labour role has been produced from cultural hybridity and they are living between Hong Kong and the Philippines without being a full member of either. During their two-year contracts in Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers are temporary residents earning less than the minimum allowable wage of citizens, with no living quarters of their own. They are legally provided with airfares by the employer for them to return home for two weeks, at the end of the two-year contract. In many instances, their contracts are renewed and they return to work in Hong Kong for many years. They do not pay taxes to the Hong Kong government and the majority of their wages are remitted back to their families in the Philippines. In Hong Kong, they are socio-spatially, economically, culturally and politically

marginalised. In the Philippines, the Foreign Domestic Helpers or Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs, as labelled by the Philippines government) retain their citizenry rights including the right to vote. However, upon their return, the government's reintegration program does not guarantee their reemployment into a sector better than the informal labour sector they engaged in overseas (Constable 1999). Anthropologist Nicole Constable (1999, p. 224) notes in her article that encapsulated the stagnant positions of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers that they are "at home but not at home":

> Migration has provided them with new experiences, desires, options, and visions but with no ready formulas for successfully transplanting them. What is clear, however, is that many women express some ambivalence about return, and so for now they continue to make themselves at home, away from home, in Hong Kong.

In many cases, Overseas Filipino Workers experience deskilling in the host nation, which causes many of them to return less skilled after being employed for simple tasks abroad. Deskilling of labour is especially prevalent among Foreign Domestic Helpers and many of them return with little employment opportunities, even if they were previously qualified for skilled labor in the Philippines (Constable 1999; Parrenas 2001; 2008). As such, Foreign Domestic Helpers are trapped within the marginal position in Hong Kong society and they are also in a precarious position in the workforce when they return to the Philippines. Every Sunday, as they appropriate and transform public space into spaces that permit their expression of oneself, they are also resisting the marginality inscribed in their labour. This resistance resides within Bayat's conception of the politics of "informals" (Bayat 2004).

Bayat (2004) categorises the resistance within the politics of the "informals" into key variants: "the passive poor" (2004, p. 83), "survival strategy" (2004, p. 84) and "the urban territorial movement" (2004, p. 84-5). The following sections review Bayat's categorisations of the "informals" to theorise the Foreign Domestic Helpers' resistance. These three variants lay a foundation for Bayat's theory of the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (2004, p. 90-4), which is a concept that positions and articulates the Foreign Domestic Helpers' pervasive ritual of spatialised resistance. This concept of resistance as a gradual, subtle encroachment is not an aggressive form of opposition, rather a quiet cultivation of resilience, which consequently strengthens the resistance.

It is important to note that Bayat criticises existing views of marginalised groups in urban spaces that are homogenous readings of the powerful and the passive (Bayat 1997; 2002; 2004).

Bayat specifies that this dichotomy reduces the possibilities of a more expansive interpretation and complex understanding of the politics of the marginalised (2004, p. 81). The following sections interpret the Foreign Domestic Helpers as a social group – urban "informals" – in Hong Kong to reveal the complexities of their spatialised resistance in public space every Sunday.

The passive poor

Bayat claims that the "passive poor" refers to the generalised consideration that the poor are a politically passive sector in society (2004, p. 83) and uses anthropologist Oscar Lewis's theory of the culture of poverty to support this notion. Lewis' theory of "culture of poverty" is based upon his ethnographic research in Mexico and Puerto Rico where he discovered a correlation between certain cultural and psychological traits such as rootlessness, unadaptability, criminality and lack of ambition that form the identity of a marginal figure (Lewis 1959; 1961). Foreign Domestic Helpers may be perceived as the "poor" or "passive" in Hong Kong because they are a disenfranchised group with limited economic and political rights, due to their temporary status in Hong Kong as migrant workers earning low wages. However, I argue that they are not "the poor" nor "passive". Many Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers have completed secondary education and are additionally trained to work in the formal labour sector (Lindio-McGovern 2013). It is not simply the lack of employment opportunities that sends them abroad to work as migrant workers. It is a combination of the Philippines' high unemployment rates, disproportionate incomes between skilled work in the Philippines and unskilled work abroad, compounded with individual families' financial needs, that mobilise Filipino women into the global migrant domestic labour sector (Parrenas 2001; 2008).

Once they arrive in Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers receive a minimum monthly wage of HKD$4310, which is below the Minimum Allowable Wage of HKD$28 per hour if their wage is divided by the approximate hours of work for six days each week. There are no laws to regulate the maximum work hours for Foreign Domestic Helpers but interviewees indicated an average of 15 to 16 hours of work each day is considered the industry standard (discussed in detail in Chapter Four). The minimum wage for Foreign Domestic Helpers is outlined in the *Guidebook for the Employment of Foreign Domestic Helpers from Abroad* (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2015). According to Hong Kong government's Poverty Situation Report in 2015, the poverty line for a one person household is HKD$3800 and HKD$8800 for a two person household. Therefore Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong, as individuals with no financial responsibility for an entire household, cannot be strictly classified as below the poverty line in Hong Kong.

Foreign Domestic Helpers are also not passive members of Hong Kong society as they have held many public protests, and established advocacy groups and unions. Social justice NGOs organised by Filipinos include The United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK) and The Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers (MFMW). Public protests are frequent, especially objections against cases of mistreatment of Foreign Domestic Helpers by Hong Kong employers and particular stipulations within the Foreign Domestic Helper Standard Employment Contract such as their minimum wage, the two-week rule and live-in requirement, discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Therefore, it is not wages or their lack of political activism that gives a sense of their poverty or passivity. The lack of autonomy and space in Hong Kong is symbolic of their potential passivity. Within the scope of this thesis, the Foreign Domestic Helpers' weekly appropriation and transformation of public space, as a form of spatialised resistance, is their most defiant act against passivity.

The survival strategy

The second concept of Bayat's variants is the "survival strategy", which takes on James C. Scott's notion of survival strategy where the disenfranchised take action to determine their lives rather than remain powerless and at the will of the powerful (Scott 1985). Bayat acknowledge the criticisms surrounding Scott's "survival strategy" as being one-dimensional in that the marginalised group's primary goal is to survive even at great cost to themselves and contributing to the image as victims without any agency (2004, p. 84).

Bayat differentiates his use of the notion that the "informals" strive to resist their stagnancy and make advances when opportunity arises (2004). This notion could be used to understand the labour path that many Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers have chosen to become migrant labourers, as they are unwilling to remain stagnant in their home country earning minimal wages below that of domestic work abroad. Many Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed expressed their primary motivations for committing to the migratory labour path were to improve their families' living conditions and to provide better education for their children. They enter into their employment contracts with the full acknowledgment of future hardships, including the pain of family separation, transnational family, partial citizenship and non-belonging (Parrenas 2001). Once they are in Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers individually and as a collective enact "survival strategies". Chapter Three discusses methods of discipline that employers impose on Foreign Domestic Helpers and how some Foreign Domestic Helpers remain subservient and self-discipline as a "survival strategy". See Nicole Constable for an extensive discussion on this matter (2007, p. 202-210).

Bayat further notes that within his interpretation of the "survival strategy", the marginalised often create their own opportunities for advancement, by coming together and participating in contentious politics (2004, p. 84-86). Apart from joining protests or advocacy groups, the Foreign Domestic Helpers' reclamation of space every Sunday is a unique and contentious form of the "survival strategy".

Using political sociologist John Friedmann's notion of empowerment, where the marginalised groups self-organise their collective survival through the institution of the household and communal reciprocity, Bayat recognises within his research how the "informals" use their social power to improve their living conditions in the Middle East (Bayat 2004; Friedmann 1992; 1996). This is also a demonstration of collective agency and their unwillingness to have their future predetermined by their social condition. Prior to the import of foreign domestic labour in Hong Kong, some traditional Chinese domestic servants did organise collective households to improve their living conditions and increase their collective social power (Constable 1996; 2007). They were also not legally required to reside in their employers' homes. One particular group, the *amah*, who were older women with previous experiences in domestic and factory work, have had a long historical practice of self-organising accommodation outside of their employers' homes and collectively bargained for better pay and rights. The next chapter contains a more thorough discussion of the history of servitude and how it has informed particular constructs of Foreign Domestic Helpers' disenfranchisement in Hong Kong. The contemporary Foreign Domestic Helpers form part of this lineage of servitude in Hong Kong, yet they have not been given the right to establish their own household.

Indeed, Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatial practices every Sunday are their "survival strategy", which demonstrates their refusal to remain in a constant state of powerlessness. I argue this is an act of empowerment because of what is at stake for them – their legitimacy in the city-state. They are legally in a more precarious position than the *amah* because they are not Hong Kong citizens and are at risk of deportation after two weeks if their employment contract is terminated and not renewed. If an *amah* was terminated from her job and subsequently lost access to accommodation, the *amah* could leave and stay with other *amahs* because the live-in arrangement was not legally required. The *amahs* were citizens independent of their employers while Foreign Domestic Helpers are temporary residents whose legitimacy and safety (to a certain extent) are directly linked to their employers. This makes the risks they take much more personal and the continuous site of resistance they establish much more poignant.

Every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers actively construct semi-public private communal spaces that have become a temporary domestic environment that cultivates beyond resistance; a sense of belonging and community. I speculate that if the Foreign Domestic Helpers had the right to establish their own household, they would not be habitually appropriating and transforming public spaces. Furthermore, their spatialised resistance takes place in some of Hong Kong's most popular, commercial and visible public spaces. As such, the Foreign Domestic Helpers' agency and resistance are displayed within their demarcated spaces. Within these temporary boundaries, they have the capacity to speak their own language, eat what they wish and engage in activities they choose, while citizens negotiate for their right to use those public spaces. The Foreign Domestic Helpers are not "the passive poor", however it is evident that the Foreign Domestic Helpers display a unique "survival strategy" and have furthered their survival by spatialising their resistance in reclaiming spaces to be who they are, beyond the limitations inscribed in their labour.

The urban territorial movement and rethinking the "marginalised"

Bayat's third variant in conceptualising the politics of the marginalised is the "urban territorial movement" (2004, p. 85). Sociologist Manuel Castells and urban research expert Janice E. Perlman insist that the poor are integrated into urban society rather than being on the periphery as a marginalised group (Castells 1983; Perlman 1979). Throughout Perlman's research projects on the urban poor and marginalised peoples in Latin America, she clarifies "marginalisation" as economically exploited, politically restrained and socially stigmatised (1979, p. 91-92). Despite these restrictions, Perlman argues this social group still participated in politics and established their territorial social movements through churches, charities and various social and cultural support networks (Perlman 1979, p. 133). These territorially based actions reflect the group's agency as they contest for community services and insert themselves into shared spaces within the urban community.

Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong align with Perlman's theory on marginalisation, as they are economically exploited, politically restrained and socially stigmatised. Their labour role restricts them to work long hours earning below the hourly minimum wage of citizens, have no space of their own, have no right to eventual citizenship and no legitimate participation in local politics. Despite these marginalisations, they have established workers' unions, exert their right to public space and participate in public protests. What separates them from the urban marginalised groups is that they are an anomaly in Hong Kong

society. They do not live below Hong Kong's poverty line, do not contribute taxes and have no financial responsibility for their own accommodation. They appear to be marginalised because they have limited rights and entitlements compared to citizens and other residents. They exist within the rights of labour with no right of abode, yet they are unlike "the poor" who could be bankrupt and homeless. Their labour contract ensures their residence and they are not expelled to the periphery of Hong Kong society. In fact, they are at the forefront, are truly visible and are a synonymous part of Hong Kong's domestic way of life.

It is useful to re-evaluate the categorisation of Foreign Domestic Helpers within Hong Kong because they are a unique social group that exists in its own jurisdiction and culture. They are unlike the poor or other minority groups such as refugees, living in poverty or camps awaiting integration into society. They remain permanently as Foreign Domestic Helpers, living inside the homes of Hong Kong families with no space of their own except for the spaces they appropriate and transform every Sunday. There are no social groups like them that exist in Hong Kong – in a permanently irregular state of impermanence. To group them within "the poor" or the "marginalised" risks homogenising their unique identity and therefore reducing the significance of their spatialised resistance in public space.

Bayat's "urban territorial movement" is applicable to Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatialised resistance because the Foreign Domestic Helpers are political bodies that appear in the urban landscape of Hong Kong. Indeed, their repeated acts of occupying and creating shared space offers solidarity, which relates to what Bayat calls "spatial solidarity" as coined by geographer Bernard Hourcade (1989). Hourcade and Bayat use this term to discuss the phenomena of political mobilisation of the disenfranchised in Latin America and the Middle East (Bayat 2004, p. 88-9). I argue that the generation of solidarity through the creation of communal spaces and the gathering of people within urban spaces, despite their political, economical or social disenfranchisement, is pertinent to the continuous "survival" of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong. They are restricted within the socio-spatial confines of their employers' homes for six days each week. Every Sunday, they emerge from the private residences to reclaim space to have autonomy and cultivate "spatial solidarity". The continuous appropriation and transformation of public spaces reflects the socio-spatial solidarity it has created for Foreign Domestic Helpers, even if they are not from the Philippines or gather in Central. Every Sunday, Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers have their own "survival strategy" and ways of cultivating socio-spatial solidarity and exercising resistance in Causeway Bay, as detailed later in this chapter.

Quiet encroachment of the ordinary

Moving from Bayat's conceptualisations of the politics of the "marginalised" or "the informals", the most applicable conceptualisation to understanding the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatialised resistance is the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (Bayat 2004, p. 90). Although Bayat admits the shortcomings of the previous categorisations, he believes the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" could overcome the inadequacies and better encapsulate urban-subaltern politics within globalisation. Bayat (2004, p. 90) details:

> The notion of the 'quiet encroachment' describes the silent, protracted, but pervasive advancement of ordinary people in relation to the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives. It is marked by a quiet, largely atomised, and prolonged mobilisation with episodic collective action – open and fleeting struggles without clear leadership, ideology or structure.

Every Sunday, the Foreign Domestic Helpers individually emerge from the domestic realm to create spaces for themselves that are free, with semi-privacy to facilitate activities that they cannot conduct in their employers' homes. These gatherings are not organised by a leader with a clear objective to occupy public space to protest their socio-spatial inequality, rather they are repeated constructions of domesticity and community that allow each individual Foreign Domestic Helper to recover from the socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation that occurs six days each week.

Bayat cautions that the gains of the agents do not come at the cost of themselves, or other marginal groups, but of the rich and the powerful. Bayat uses an example of the urban poor in the Middle East tapping electricity from municipality power poles to light their own shelters, instead of their neighbours (2004, p. 91). To the same effect, Foreign Domestic Helpers do not take away public space from pedestrians. They use spaces that are mostly unoccupied and are transitory spaces that are only used as conduits, not for regular inhabitation. On the elevated walkways, underpasses and staircases, the Foreign Domestic Helpers clearly demarcate spaces with clear paths for the pedestrians. They do not simply take over public spaces at the expense of other city users, rather at the expense of the shopping mall owners, the government or private owners of those spaces who provide extra cleaners, security patrols, free wireless internet connection and public bathrooms.

In addition, the Foreign Domestic Helpers have been able to gradually expand the spaces they inhabit, which relates to Bayat's description of "cumulatively encroaching as the agents

expand their space by winning new positions to move on" (2004, p. 98).m Bayat (2004, p. 91) notes "This type of quiet and gradual grassroots activism tends to contest many fundamental aspects of state prerogatives, including the meaning of order, the control of public space etc."

There have been small gestures from the authorities of the public spaces which the Foreign Domestic Helpers inhabit, where extra security patrols, cleaners and unexplained cordoning of spaces have appeared. These gestures demonstrate that while the authorities cannot stop the Foreign Domestic Helpers from using the public spaces as their actions are not illegal, they are quietly inserting boundaries to establish spatial order.

Bayat discusses the activities carried out by the "urban poor" that are considered as "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" are not political acts, rather they are driven by force of necessity – the necessity to survive and improve a dignified life (2004, p. 91-94). It can be easily assumed that the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatial formations every Sunday are a deliberate political act, however, it is not productive to reduce their habitual spatialisation as a political act. I argue that the Foreign Domestic Helpers are political bodies, with agency, who assert themselves into the public realm repeatedly to resist the continuous socio-spatial collapse that occurs in their employers' homes, ultimately to reclaim physical and personal space and to live a dignified life. The act itself, constructing cardboard units to socialise and rest in, is not an act of protest. The inverted use of public space as domestic space is not a choice Foreign Domestic Helpers have the luxury to make, but an act of resourcefulness that improves their wellbeing while living in Hong Kong. It is also a subtle encroachment towards socio-spatial equality. What embodies politics is the fact that they are denied private spaces in their employers' homes and have no other space they can afford on their day off.

Over time, the encroachment, with little initial political meaning, can evolve into a collective political act. This can come about when authorities confront them and no longer see their encroachment as ordinary exercises. When sensing a threat against their gains, the agents may defend through quiet noncompliance without necessarily engaging in collective resistance. Recalling the karaoke incident in the introduction of this chapter: the security guard was largely ignored and the Foreign Domestic Helpers continued cheering the performance. The Foreign Domestic Helper I spoke to was confident that the level of authority would not escalate because the Foreign Domestic Helpers were not actively pushing back against the authorities but were simply exercising subtle disobedience, quietly infringing the regular spatial order of public space. By remaining largely inactive when confronted by authority, quiet encroachment can serve as a viable strategy for enabling the continuation of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' dignified existence in Hong Kong.

In similar ways, other urban dwellers have also engaged in methods of quiet encroachment and engaging in subtle disobedience when spatialising resistance. The next section elaborates with an example from Hong Kong that adds to the theoretical understanding of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatialised resistance.

2.4 Guerilla war in Hong Kong

Using longitudinal studies conducted along several traditional market streets in Hong Kong, design researcher Kin Wai Michael Siu unpacks how city users are tactically inhabiting public spaces in ways that are not prescribed by the city planners or officially approved by the authorities (Siu 2007, p. 37-56). Siu argues that in the intermediate realm between the authority and the users, there is no direct opposition between the prescribed ways and the spontaneous. The opposition is a more subtle one, where the powerful or the 'strong' as Siu puts it, can enact force as a point of negotiation. However, the 'strong' do not always win because the 'weak' use less positional strategies, acknowledging their limited power and natural disposition in a positional confrontation (Siu 2007, p. 42). Therefore, the 'weak' will deploy other tactics, aiming to fight in a 'guerrilla war' rather than a 'positional war' (Siu 2007).

Siu uses the term 'guerrilla wars' to describe the less positional tactics that illegal street hawkers in Hong Kong use against the authorities (2007, p. 37-56). The Hong Kong government's Hawker Control Team often carry out inspections along the street in an attempt to control illegal hawking. Direct confrontations between such officers and the hawkers are rare as the hawkers avoid prosecution by operating only during the hours when the control team is off duty. The hawkers do not directly, challenge or react to the authorities. Their strategy, like guerrillas, is to insinuate themselves into the space of authority in order to seek opportunities (Siu 2007, p. 42). The hawkers' main objective is not to own this space, but to momentarily operate in it and claim it, reap the benefits, then retreat. This fluctuating mode of operation makes it difficult for the 'strong' to exert force directly.

In similar ways, Foreign Domestic Helpers are also engaged in a "guerrilla war" as they resist the socio-spatial discipline in their workplace by reclaiming space every Sunday. The field observations and interviews show the Foreign Domestic Helpers' main objective every Sunday is not to exert ownership of public space in a forthright manner, rather it is about having access to space. Furthermore, it is about having the capacity to co-exist with other users of the city. Consequently, the act of reclaiming space gives these women autonomy to be themselves within those demarcated spaces.

Akin to the street hawkers in Siu's case study, the Foreign Domestic Helpers acknowledge their limited rights in Hong Kong and the possibility of punitive consequences – deportation – if they engage in illegal activities. This is evident by the fact they do not trespass areas where there are signs clearly indicating the prohibition of congregation, yet they seek spaces that are unclaimed and unmarked. They quietly transgress boundaries of regular spatial order, subtly disobeying and avoiding a positional war in order to continue their right to public space that they have repeatedly exercised.

Every Sunday, Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers (like the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers) gather in the hundreds and thousands in Victoria Park in Causeway Bay. Hong Kong locals use the park for sporting events and various municipal functions. Many Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers gather in the park, as well as saturating the forecourts of shopping malls nearby, underpasses and even traffic islands. Causeway Bay is a popular shopping destination with a wide range of shopping malls and arcades that are closely clustered. Different from Central, where there is a concentration of high-end international fashion houses, Causeway Bay attracts a wider range of locals shopping for daily essentials as well as the latest street fashion and gadgets. Non-commercial public spaces in this area are limited even without the influx of Foreign Domestic Helpers on Sundays. Beyond the opportune occupation of large disused traffic islands under highways, the most surprising and clever appropriation of public space is the temporary inhabitations of the domestic stages in the Swedish furniture showroom Ikea.

The showroom is located underneath a large shopping mall adjacent to Victoria Park. Every Sunday, groups of Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers can be seen using the staged apartments as their own; relaxing on the lounges in the living rooms, gathering around the dining tables, and using the complimentary wifi to connect to family and friends. The showroom managers do not ask them to leave as the Foreign Domestic Helpers are legitimately using the showrooms as they are intended. Like Siu's description of the street hawkers deploying guerrilla tactics while avoiding an oppositional war, the Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers have infiltrated the commercial public spaces of Causeway Bay, seeking temporary refuge.

Figure 8 **Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers using spaces in the Ikea showroom in Causeway Bay as their own makeshift 'domestic' space on a Sunday, 2015**, photograph by the author.

Simultaneously, the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers also temporarily claim public spaces in Central while avoiding an oppositional confrontation every Sunday. Central is the financial capital of Hong Kong, which houses a multitude of international corporate towers interconnected with high-end fashion flagship stores and luxury hotels. Privately owned public spaces that prohibit public gatherings abound with the constant presence of security guards and frequent police patrols. Without the financial resources to participate in these commercial spaces, Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers find opportunities for temporary inhabitation in spaces that connect the commercial hotspots. They are only temporarily occupied by the fluctuation of pedestrian flow, and are neither a part of a luxury shopping mall or a corporate bank tower. They are spaces that link the commercial spaces that prohibit congregations but they are external to their jurisdiction. By positioning themselves in the conduits between these commercial spaces, the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers have strategically avoided an oppositional war with the security officials of the commercial spaces, while still having access to the public amenities and being in the centre of the financial capital.

The authorities of the privately owned commercial spaces in Central have noticed the growing congregations of the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in the transitory spaces

between, below or in the periphery of their spatial jurisdiction. They too understand they cannot fight a positional war by limiting the freedoms of other users or being too aggressive towards patrons. Therefore they have employed subtle and passive strategies such as implementing multilingual signs in spaces where congregation is unwanted, installing more rubbish bins on sections of the Central Elevated Walkway which Foreign Domestic Helpers frequently occupy, employing cleaners specifically for those areas on Sundays and extending the perimeter where security guards patrol beyond the interior of the commercial spaces.

Understanding the subtle tactics in Siu's guerrilla war in Hong Kong (2007) and Bayat's variants of resistance and the quiet encroachment of the ordinary (2004) theorise the spatialised resistance that the Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in every Sunday as a non-aggressive, repeated act of spatial transgression and reclamation that allows them to temporarily have physical and personal space and to live a dignified life. The discussion of their illegitimate spatial acts and the progressive transgression of boundaries and quiet encroachment to such tactical wins point to De Certeau's reasoning around tactics and strategies (De Certeau 1984). He notes that strategies and tactics do not exist within a hierarchical structure rather in opposition whereby strategies require control and predictability, which can be too rigid in contexts that constantly shift. On the other hand, tactics are adaptive and flexible, which makes an ally of unpredictability. The following quote supports the interpretation of the nature of tactics and its relevance to the Foreign Domestic Helpers' repeated acts (1984, p 37):

> It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers.

The appropriation and transformation of public space is seemingly ordinary yet extraordinary encroachment towards socio-spatial equality in a city that they labour in that gives them few entitlements. One of the legalities within their visa that prevents them from legitimate equality in Hong Kong is the denial of eventual citizenship. The next section continues to dismantle perceived categories of Foreign Domestic Helpers as a marginalised group by unfolding citizenship discourse to position Foreign Domestic Helpers in a more legitimate position beyond temporary migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong society.

2.5 Exploring citizenship

Foreign Domestic Helpers cannot obtain citizenship in Hong Kong. In 2013, the Hong Kong High Court denied Evangeline B. Vallejos, a Filipino national, the eligibility to apply for citizenship although she had lived and worked in Hong Kong as a Foreign Domestic Helper for 17 years. This was a contentious case as Hong Kong's immigration laws allow any foreign person who has lived in the city-state continuously for seven years to apply for citizenship. Despite this the ruling made Foreign Domestic Helpers an exception and demonstrated no leniency towards Vallejos' continuous contribution to her Hong Kong employers. Furthermore it symbolised a disregard for the integral role that 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers play in Hong Kong society and a non-acceptance of them beyond the intermittent status of a temporary guest worker. It also placed them in a state of exception that separates them from other foreign workers in Hong Kong. Nearly all the interviewed Foreign Domestic Helpers had renewed their two-year Foreign Domestic Helper visa more than two times and had been working in Hong Kong for over five years. The denial of citizenship not only solidifies their subordinate and impermanent status, it confines them within their employers' domestic interiors with no right to live outside on their own. The denial of citizenship simultaneously decreases their autonomy to have personal space within their employers' homes.

Section 2.3 on understanding resistance proposed the ineffective use of the term "marginalised" to describe Foreign Domestic Helpers. They are not marginalised because, despite their temporary residency and exclusively limited rights, they play an intrinsic part in Hong Kong's economy and lifestyle by replacing the unpaid domestic role of mothers, thus facilitating two sets of income in households. They are also not "the poor" in Hong Kong despite their low income because they are not threatened by potential homelessness or bankruptcy. They are neither marginalised or poor, nor are they Hong Kong citizens or regular foreigners. Foreign Domestic Helpers dwell within philosopher Gorgio Agamben's 'state of exception' where they are permanently in a 'zone of indifference' where the internal and external do not exclude, rather blur with each other (2005).

Their exception to the norm presents two issues: firstly the complex interdependent relationship between Foreign Domestic Helpers and Hong Kong society, and secondly their continuous role in Hong Kong despite being legally categorised as temporary residents. Drawing upon the research of cultural theorist Daisy Tam's engagement with French philosopher Michel Serres's work *The Parasite*, and political scientist Saskia Sassen's positioning of citizenship and alienage, these two issues reveal an alternative way to position the Foreign Domestic Helpers, not just as one-dimensional migrant workers participating in informal labour, rather as actors with

legitimacy and agency (Sassen 2005; 2008; Serres 2007; Tam 2016). This informs the Foreign Domestic Helpers' reclamation of space as a form of spatialised resistance and a unique spatial phenomenon that continues to cultivate their resistance, resilience and solidarity.

The parasitic ecology

Tam is an ethnographer whose research spans environments that enable ethical practices, food and urbanism, migrant workers and their communities. In the chapter "Little Manila: The Other Central of Hong Kong" in the edited book *Messy Urbanism: Understanding the "Other" Cities of Asia* (2016), Tam discusses the "messy" geographies of Little Manila and the parasitic relations between Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers and Hong Kong (2016, p. 119-135). Using Serres's reading of *The Parasite* (2007), Tam introduces a paradigm where the guest workers and hosts – Foreign Domestic Helpers and Hong Kong – are interdependent and co-existing rather than a one-sided parasitic dependency from the guest workers on the hosts. Tam (2016, p. 129) expands on the problematic generalisation of the parasite:

> In contemporary political media, migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers are often portrayed as poachers, perceived through metaphorical associations of taking without giving back, profiteers off the host country. The figure of the parasite regarded as a purely negative, destructive, or undesirable agent is widely deployed to stigmatize and evoke distrust, for example, the blaming of economic problems and unemployment on migrant labourers or benefit cheats.

Instead of placing Foreign Domestic Helpers within this negative position as a parasite, which the Hong Kong media often have, leading to misconceptions and prejudice towards the Foreign Domestic Helpers, Tam deploys Serres's point that "the parasitic relation is intersubjective, that the roles of hosts/guests are not fixed, that every identifiable actor is capable of taking up the place of the other with the shift of circumstance" (Tam 2016, p. 130).

This point is of crucial importance as the complex interdependent relations between the Foreign Domestic Helpers and Hong Kong unfold. Tam outlines a chain of actors who benefit from the Foreign Domestic Helpers within Hong Kong and beyond (2016, p. 131). In Hong Kong, agencies profit from fees obtained from Foreign Domestic Helpers and employers, households gain another set of income since domestic labour allows another family member to take on formal employment, and the Hong Kong government benefits from more citizens participating in the formal sector and not needing to provide social welfare for Foreign Domestic Helpers as they are temporary residents. The Philippines also have a chain of beneficiaries. The

Foreign Domestic Helpers earn a higher salary in Hong Kong than at home, their families are supported by their remittances, remittance agencies collect fees from their monthly transfers, mobile phone and cellular data companies profit from most Foreign Domestic Helpers who keep in touch with their families digitally, agencies profit from training courses that some Foreign Domestic Helpers participate in before arriving in Hong Kong, and lastly the Foreign Domestic Helpers' remittances contribute greatly to the GDP of the Philippines. From these interconnections, it becomes apparent that Foreign Domestic Helpers activate a series of financial benefits where it is no longer valid to view them within a hierarchy where they are simply parasitic guests. The relations described by Tam are a collection of economic and social networks that have become a parasitic ecology that the Foreign Domestic Helpers operate in.

The complex relationship between the Foreign Domestic Helpers and the Hong Kong employers reflects the "zone of indifference" (Agamben 2005) that I propose Foreign Domestic Helpers operate in. They are not a parasitic migrant labour force taking advantage of Hong Kong, rather they are an important part of a parasitic ecology that enables a circuit of benefits. Tam's use of Serres's theory of the parasite allows for a more holistic understanding of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' role within a complex framework. Instead of placing Foreign Domestic Helpers and the hosts – Hong Kong employers or the government – in static roles, Tam's analysis of their mutual dependency introduces a more fluid understanding of a "quasi-equal relationship" (2016, p. 132). Consequently, this clarifies that Foreign Domestic Helpers should not be positioned as marginalised people or "weak" or the "urban poor" or as "parasites". They should be recognised as legitimate contributors to Hong Kong society. As put by Tam (2016, p. 133), "In Little Manila, migrant workers do not vandalize the face of Hong Kong. They are what *makes* Hong Kong."

Citizenship and alienage

The consideration of Foreign Domestic Helpers as 'quasi-equal' to their employers brings to question their temporary residency or legitimacy in Hong Kong as the socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation that Foreign Domestic Helpers experience in their employers' homes stem from the imbalance of power between the roles of employee and the employer compounded by the socio-economic superiority of the citizen over the migrant.

Political scientist Saskia Sassen (2005, p. 79) outlines the need to reposition contemporary understandings of citizenship and alienage as she states:

> The two foundational subjects for membership in the modern nation-state, the citizen and the alien, are undergoing significant changes in

> the current period. The effect is a partial blurring of each of the citizen subject and the alien subject.

The status of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong should be understood as a blurred status between citizen and non-citizen. The blurring of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' intermittent migrant status yet established labour role renders their status more complex to define when they act with agency. Despite being temporary residents with limited socio-economic power, they emerge from the domestic spaces where they exist only as subjects of labour to appear collectively in public space, and to occupy public spaces every Sunday. Their reclamation of space resists the socio-spatial depletion they experience in their employers' homes. Moreover, in those temporary reclaimed spaces, they resist their inferiority as migrants and refuse to be silent, subservient labourers.

Sassen notes that there are certain global transformations that are shifting the relationship between citizenship and the nation-state: firstly it is the expansion of globalisation-linked policies that have resulted in economic privatisation since the 1980s; secondly and consequently, the communities and social groups that are strengthened by these transformations have increasingly questioned the need to identify with a nation as represented by the state (2005, p. 80). The concept of citizenship is a complex one, especially in the current global political climate where people are constantly moving for work, seeking refuge or due to displacement. To reposition citizenship against these global transformations requires a process of deconstructing the basic understanding of citizenship.

Citizenship can be defined as the state of being given the rights, privileges and duties of a member of society. It is also a powerful political ideal as it relates to being a legitimate part of a society rather than an illegitimate or a temporary one. It entitles protection for people in their home country and abroad. Citizenship also eludes to equality irrespective of a person's gender, ethnicity, wealth or sexual orientation. Sassen (2005) illustrates that it is not formal features of citizenship that have changed, rather the embeddedness of citizenship and the nation-state. She argues that the global forces are destabilising the relationship of citizenship and the nation-state, thus creating opportunities for the emergence of new types of political subjects and new spatialities for politics. New types of political subjects can be various non-formalised or partly formalised political actors. Furthermore, Sassen (2005, p. 80-81) specifies:

> Informal practices and political subjects not quite fully recognised (as citizens) can nonetheless function as part of the political landscape. Undocumented immigrants who are long-term residents engage in

> practices that are the same as those of formally defined citizens in the routines of daily life; this produces an informal social contract between these immigrants and the community.

I propose Foreign Domestic Helpers are a new type of political subject that are neither citizens nor non-citizens (or "aliens" as Sassen calls) materialised from the destabilisation of the citizenship and nation-state couplet. From my spatial observations, every Sunday the Foreign Domestic Helpers are inserting themselves into public space, exercising the right to public assembly by transforming public space into semi-public private spaces that allow them to operate without their daily inhibitions. This is a right that citizens have in Hong Kong, but this is also a right granted to temporary residents. Public gatherings and appropriation of public spaces are common to both Foreign Domestic Helpers and citizens, albeit the Foreign Domestic Helpers practise it weekly and in larger groups of people. The spaces that they choose to gather in, elevated walkways, underpasses, public atriums and forecourts, are all spaces that facilitate access between commercial buildings that provide everyday activities for citizens. Foreign Domestic Helpers can access those spaces too, but because they cannot financially afford to participate in the same commercial activities, they inhabit the spaces outside them that are free.

Foreign Domestic Helpers are not legally recognised as citizens but they are an integral part of Hong Kong's labour force. As such they are an indispensible part of the local economic, social and political landscape. They engage in informal practices through political marches and their weekly spatialisations. They do not have the official capacities to vote or legitimately participate in the politics of Hong Kong (the majority of local citizens also do not have this capacity) yet they can appear in public spaces in their own capacity during their days off work, and as temporary residents cultivating a unique socio-spatial ecology every Sunday. Foreign Domestic Helpers are by definition within Hong Kong categorised as temporary residents with limited political rights. Without citizenry entitlements to space and autonomy in Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers experience socio-spatial collapse to various degrees in the homes of their employers. Juxtaposing the inequities they suffer with their habitual appearance in public where they reclaim space demonstrates that they have considerable political agency. For this, they are political bodies in Hong Kong and have become what Sassen has called emergent political subjects (2005). Every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers exercise their right to public assembly; appropriating, transforming to reclaim spaces to be themselves. By engaging in this repeated act, they are pushing the boundaries of their limited rights as temporary residents. Foreign Domestic Helpers' temporary residency, as spatialised in public spaces in Hong Kong, can otherwise be posited as how Sassen has

described new emergents – as subjects of denationalised forms of citizenship (2005, p. 81-88).

Reconsidering how Foreign Domestic Helpers are categorised within the discourse of citizenship is relevant due to the spatial context Foreign Domestic Helpers inhabit. Sassen notes that the repositioning of citizenship and alienage is particularly visible in the global city as the global city is a strategic site for new types of operations, where new socio-political claims materialise and assume concrete forms (Sassen 2014, p. 9-10). Sassen (1998, p. 131) has claimed that Hong Kong is in fact a global city, a strategic site where:

> …disadvantaged people, while powerless, gain presence and hence the possibility of a new kind of politics and culture. Insofar as immigrants and political refugees are part of the disadvantaged, the global city is also a site for post-colonial history. Hong Kong remains as a space for a certain type of contestation.

Relating to this argument that Hong Kong is a global city, it is also a space of contestation and a site where people with less power, such as Foreign Domestic Helpers within the scope of the thesis, can gain presence, autonomy and to an extent, power, to create a new kind of politics and culture. Sassen further elaborates that the global city enables a partial reinvention of citizenship and this reinvention shifts away from the narrowly defined nation-state towards citizenship practices that revolve around claiming rights to the city (2005, p. 81-82). Sassen (2005) claims that in global cities, urban practices contain the possibility of directly engaging strategic forms of power, a point that she interprets as significant in a context where power is increasingly privatised, globalised and elusive. As emergents of denationalised forms of citizenship in a global city, Foreign Domestic Helpers have reinvented their relationship with Hong Kong by their weekly spatial practices, which simultaneously are a claim for their rights to the city.

Political geographer David Harvey (2012, p. 10) proposes that philosopher Henri Lefebvre's vision for the right of the city is:

> Far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.

Furthermore, Lefebvre argues the right to the city "rises up from the streets, out from the neighbourhoods, as a cry for help and sustenance by oppressed people in desperate times" (Harvey 2008, p. 23). This is relevant to the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong as their inhabitation of public spaces is a so-called 'cry' against their everyday socio-spatial oppression and 'rising up' to reclaim space. Their weekly Sunday assemblies emerge from the oppression they face in the domestic interiors for six days each week, and manifest in the streets as spatialised resistance every Sunday. However, if the right to the city is assumedly embedded within the rights of citizens, which Foreign Domestic Helpers are not, then they are claiming a right that they are not privileged to claim. Dwelling between a blurred status between citizenship and temporary residency in Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers, as emergents of a denationalised form of citizenship, continue to reclaim space, together with their right to the city.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined literature relevant to understanding the Foreign Domestic Helpers' resistance. Siu's concept of engaging with guerrilla warfare rather than an oppositional collision suggests that power does not always belong to the 'strong' while the 'weak' are not necessarily powerless and have the ability to momentarily manipulate the situation for their benefit (Siu 2007). Bayat (2004) explores the politics of the urban "informals" and poses that a quiet encroachment of the seemingly ordinary can be a strategy that urban minorities deploy to inch closer to having resources or spaces that they are denied. Pile and Keith (1997) describe resistance as a continuous dance, which I interpret as a constantly shifting tension held between those involved in the power dynamic. Tam (2016) uses Serres' parasitic analysis to explore the series of benefits between Foreign Domestic Helpers and Hong Kong and others in between. Rather than echoing the existing perception of the one-sided relationship of the workers benefiting from the employers, Tam explores the mutual benefits of all parties involved and shows that the relationship is parasitic only in concept but interdependent in reality.

These theories create a network that explores the complexities within the territory that Foreign Domestic Helpers operate in: resistance, power and illegitimacy. Through alternative views on marginalisation, strategies of resistance, parasitic relationships and citizenship, Foreign Domestic Helpers can be recognised as actors with agency. Their agency is further explored in the next chapter which discusses the disciplinary practices that occur in the homes of the employers. For six days each week, Foreign Domestic Helpers endure various forms of control that reinforce their subservient position. This results in their socio-spatial reduction and cultural dispossession, which motivates their spatialised resistance every Sunday.

Chapter 3
Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong: Discipline and Servitude

3.1 Introduction

Following from the previous chapter which positioned the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatialised resistance, deconstructed their marginality and reevaluated their status as a new type of political subject beyond the bifurcation of citizen or alien, this chapter discusses the formation of their agency by examining the disciplinary construct of their labour in Hong Kong. Fieldwork undertaken between 2012 and 2016 is the primary research used throughout the thesis. The collected data from interviews and spatial observations made on Sundays in Central, Hong Kong has given insight into the Foreign Domestic Helpers' living conditions in Hong Kong, their reasons for participating in foreign domestic labour and their everyday interactions with their employers.

Within their employers' homes, the Foreign Domestic Helpers are in a position of restricted autonomy where the employers deny them privacy and personal space. They are required to communicate to their employers in a manner that reflects obedience, and to speak in English or Cantonese. Many families prefer the Foreign Domestic Helpers to speak English in the home, especially to the children. However, where the employers' English skills are not proficient, they may specify they want a Foreign Domestic Helper who speaks Cantonese. Foreign Domestic Helpers learn Cantonese in training agencies in their home country or through intensive courses provided by agencies in Hong Kong.

Employers also impose various forms of discipline over the Foreign Domestic Helpers including enforcing strict house rules, applying time-based tasks or anthropologist Nicole Constable's so-called "budgeting" time, specifying the Foreign Domestic Helpers' physical appearances and controlling their food practices. These strategies are echoed in Constable's *Maid to Order in Hong Kong* (2007), where she examines the dialectic relationship between discipline and resistance in the lives of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong. Similar narratives have emerged from my interviews and Constable's research, including the strategy where employers coerce the Foreign Domestic Helpers to do extra work by manipulating them to believe they are an equal member of the employers' family. Constable calls this tactic "part of the family" where employers give the Foreign Domestic Helpers a false sense that they are equally respected as a regular member of the family and therefore may lead the Foreign Domestic Helpers to assist the family outside of contractual

agreements, work extra days or receive less pay (Constable 2007, p. 112-115). The coercive nature of this method places Foreign Domestic Helpers in a vulnerable position as relationships with different family members can be used against Foreign Domestic Helpers as reason for personal conflict.

This chapter uses material from five of the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed during the fieldwork in Hong Kong: Paige, Belinda, Yasmine, Belle and Diana. They recalled incidents where they have experienced disciplinary methods in their employers' homes. The interviews reveal various themes that motivate the specific disciplinary strategies applied to the Foreign Domestic Helpers. These themes revolve around the female body as a sexual or moral threat, such as accusations of sexual threat, altering the image of the perceived threat, separation and isolation, normalising continuous abuse and victimisation without reason. The material obtained from these interviews illustrates a portrait of the Foreign Domestic Helpers as disciplined subjects of domestic labour.

Foreign Domestic Helpers as a labour group in Hong Kong form part of a continuous history of servant labour of female domestic servants from China. This section deploys the arguments and conclusions from geographers, anthropologists and cultural theorists whose studies focus on the traditional Chinese female domestic servants in Hong Kong (Constable 1997; 2007; Gaw 1991; Watson 1980), the blurred boundaries and roles of wives, concubines and servants in pre-colonial and early colonial times (Sankar 1978; Watson 1991), the private relationships and tensions between female employers and female servants (Constable 1996; Jaschok 1988; Rollins 1985) and the misconstrued sexual deviance of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong (Constable 1997). Such conclusions provide the historical and cultural context of servitude in Hong Kong and demonstrate the influence it has had on the current disciplinary practices imposed on Foreign Domestic Helpers.

Constable contends in *Sexuality and Discipline among Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong* (1997) that Hong Kong employers discipline Foreign Domestic Helpers because they hold onto the past images and memories of obedient Chinese servants who 'know their places' and posed no moral challenge to existing patterns of authority. In contrast, they see contemporary Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers as sexualised foreign women thus legitimising their exercise of control to satisfy previous standards of servitude (Constable 1997; 2007). Constable (1997) adds that the public concern about Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers' sexuality is linked to broader changes in women's roles in the home and the public workforce, and in the social identities of Foreign Domestic Helpers.

The historical influence of the traditional Hong Kong Chinese domestic servants and the contemporary methods of discipline used in the homes of employers are problematic. Together, they have distinctly solidified Foreign Domestic Helpers' socio-spatial and cultural disenfranchisement in Hong Kong beyond their minimal wages prescribed by their temporary visas.

The most crucial element that has facilitated the disciplinary practices is the lack of spatial separation between the workplace and private space. The cross-contamination of the workplace and home is problematic for both the employers and the Foreign Domestic Helpers as spatial and professional boundaries dissolve. For the employers, sharing their homes with an employee for six days each week potentially exposes their personal relationships and behaviours that they otherwise would not share with their regular co-workers. Conversely, Foreign Domestic Helpers have little to no private space or sufficient time away from their place of work (that is also their home) to recover from their continuous labour routine. Both the employers and employees operate within a complex environment where professional and personal boundaries constantly dissolve, fluctuate and reform.

This chapter presents the specific disciplinary methods that contribute to the continuous depletion of space and deprivation of culture endured by the Foreign Domestic Helpers in the private, domestic realms of their labour. These disciplinary methods have shaped the spatial practices and spatialised resistance that Foreign Domestic Helpers demonstrate in public space every Sunday. This chapter presents the continuous narrative of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' misrepresentation and disempowerment in Hong Kong to legitimise their motivation and agency to reclaim space every Sunday, both physical and personal. This reclamation of space gives them the capacity to be themselves beyond the limitations of a disciplined domestic worker.

3.2 Hong Kong's history of domestic servitude

The concept of servitude and the servant as a common figure within the domestic realm of Hong Kong run deep into its Chinese and colonial history (Jaschok 1988; Watson 1980). During the mid-nineteenth century, wealthy Chinese families on the mainland relied on free and unfree men and women workers. Up until 1949 "China had one of the largest and most comprehensive markets for the exchange of human beings in the world" (Watson 1980, p. 223). Participation in domestic labour by both local men and women was practised in Hong Kong Chinese households and the homes of British government personnel from the early

1900s (Carroll 2007; Tsang 2007). Opportunities arose for men to work as manual labourers, rickshaw pullers or drivers, which gradually decreased their participation in domestic labour, thus "Hong Kong experienced a stricter 'feminization' of household work" (Constable 1996, p. 452). As Hong Kong's manufacturing sector expanded exponentially in the 1960s, older Hong Kong women who might otherwise have worked as domestic workers opted instead for factory work, while new service sector jobs attracted younger middle class women into the paid workforce (Constable 1996, p. 453). The number of traditional Chinese domestic workers decreased because of old age, retirement and other job opportunities, thus the demand for household workers continued to increase. This gap led to the import of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries. The number of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers rapidly increased from a few hundred in the early 1970s to 130,000 in 1995 (Constable 1996, p. 448). Currently there are approximately 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong, with over half from the Philippines (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016). Since the 1960s, domestic work in Hong Kong evolved into a sector that is synonymous with temporary female migrants from Southeast Asia, especially those from the Philippines.

Comparisons of the quality of service are made between the previous league of Chinese servants and the contemporary Foreign Domestic Helpers as Constable (2007, p. 44) notes: "fuelled by a powerful sense of nostalgia, Hong Kong Chinese employers carry prejudice towards the Foreign Domestic Helpers with the notion that Cantonese domestic servants were more superior." Historically, in late Imperial China and Hong Kong, Chinese servants came from a variety of social groups and were integrated into the family for the entirety of their lives (Gaw 1991). As this chapter shows, it is apparent that modern Foreign Domestic Helpers are not accepted into the family as a regular member and are identified as foreign strangers in the home.

The employment of domestic servants was common in wealthy Chinese families in mainland China throughout the mid-nineteenth century and extended to Hong Kong when it became a British colony (Constable 2007, p. 46). At the time, house workers consisted of both free and unfree men and women. The majority of free servants were men, while most female servants were unfree. There were two main types of female Chinese servants: the *muijai*[2], who were young women purchased to become lifelong servants to a family; and the *amah*

[2] The term muijai is defined as a young girl, as young as ten years old, who was transferred from her biological family to another family with the intention that she be used as a domestic servant without a regular wage and not at liberty to leave the employer's family on her own free will or her parents' will (Constable 2007; Watson 1991).

who were older, sworn spinsters who worked for a family (Watson 1991). The fundamental difference between the two women's labour conditions and identity rested upon their free or unfree status; the *muijai*, who was a commodity purchased by the family, held a lower socio-economic status and had less power than the *amah* who was a contracted employee of the family (Constable 1996). These typologies of domestic workers are no longer practised as they became outdated and were eventually replaced by Foreign Domestic Helpers. Within the cultural context of Hong Kong, the contemporary Foreign Domestic Helpers are part of that lineage and are often compared to the stereotyped identity of *muijai* – the docile, obedient female commodity of the household (Constable 1996; 2007).

Muijai were synonymous with unfree and young female servants. They were sold to become indentured servants. Indentured servitude refers to the labour system widely practised in the British colonies of North America in the eighteenth century where servants worked for a fixed number of years without pay to obtain freedom to then work on their own. Migrants who travelled across the ocean to escape poverty in Britain were sold as indentured servants by the seamen who brought them over. This was an exploitative situation, as the indentured servant essentially signed over their freedom for life as the employer retained the servant's identification – the employment contract – and repeatedly sold it along with the servant to other employers. The *muijai* in Hong Kong followed a similar trajectory as the indentured servants in the West. In many cases, to obtain lifelong support outside of indentured servitude, female subjects preferred to be married off, even in their teens, to another family even as mistresses or concubines[3]. Constable states that "the ending of a *muijai's* obligation to her master at marriage theoretically differentiated the practice from other more extreme forms of slavery" (2007, p. 49). This transferal of identity as indentured servants to married subjects continually reinstated the women's lives as illegitimate commodities that remained within the domestic realm. The practice of *muijai* remained in effect until the 1940s in Hong Kong (Jaschok 1988, p. 133)[4]. Although the Foreign Domestic Helpers do not participate in indentured servitude, their legitimate residency in the city-state, including their accommodation and income, relies solely on the employment contract.

The *amah* were a particular type of Chinese domestic workers different from the profile of the *muijai*. During the 1930s, spinsters or widowed women from nearby provinces in southern China relocated to Hong Kong seeking employment. The majority of these women worked in

[3] They could not be wives as they were deemed as illegitimate and unsophisticated. (Constable 2007, p. 50).
[4] Queen Victoria abolished slavery in 1844, however the practice of muijai was often undetected when the female servants were disguised as members of the family.

sericulture which collapsed as a result of the Chinese civil war and the Japanese occupation in 1937 (Gaw 1991). Simultaneously, the recruitment of *muijai* was not illegal yet decreasing in social acceptance, therefore with the influx of older women with previous work experience, *amah* became more appropriate candidates for domestic work. The term *amah* is a derivative of several other Chinese terms pertaining to wet nurse, nurse or little mother, all of which have one common word – *mah* – which means 'mother'.[5] *Amah* were commonly employed to perform specific tasks within the household. In the past, many households hired more than one *amah*, as they were employed individually as wet nurses, to take care of the children, and for washing, ironing and cleaning. The contemporary Foreign Domestic Helper is expected to embody all the skills that used to require several *amahs* to perform.

Aside from the differences in age and relative autonomy of *amah* in comparison to *muijai*, the *amah* were paid higher wages and had external support from other sworn spinsters. Many *amah* belonged to sworn sisterhoods which allowed them to be less dependent on their employers and gave them collective bargaining power for better work conditions. The sworn sisterhoods became a kind of informal workers' union, a network that supported each other, prevented others from working for offending employers, organised loans and bought property together for their retirement (Constable 1996, p. 460). Aside from the sisterhood, many *amah* also drew on family networks to bring new domestic workers to their employers or other potential employers. *Amah* were not obliged to reside in their employer's home, only doing so if it was necessary. If they did reside in the home, they were provided with a separate room or a space within the servants quarter depending on the employer's socio-economic status (Gaw 1991). A fundamental difference between the *amah* and the *muijai* was that the *amah* were not required to be live-in workers. They had the choice of organising their own accommodation separate from the employer's home and had autonomy over their private affairs. In the contemporary practice of Foreign Domestic Helpers, the right to external accommodation outside of the employer's home is still a contested matter. It is the defining factor that deprives the Foreign Domestic Helpers of their personhood and restricts them to work and live in an environment of constant discipline. Although some *muijai* were married off and did not remain as domestic servants, as workers they had no autonomy over their own accommodation or affairs (to the extent of their marriage) and as married women, they remained owned by the employer, husband or household. In this way, the historical

[5] According to Constable, the term 'amah' is not often used when speaking Chinese but has been used by Chinese who speak English and by English speakers in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. The exact meaning and origin of the term has been debated by Chinese Singaporean and Malaysian academics Mimi Chan, Helen Kwok and Kenneth Gaw. See Chan and Kwok (1990, p. 204-5) and Gaw (1991, p. 87-89).

identity of the *muijai* left behind an outdated legacy that is partially inherited by the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong and can be argued to have influenced the spatial, social and cultural discipline that current Foreign Domestic Helpers endure in their employers' homes.

3.3 House rules

On a Sunday afternoon on Chater Road in Central in 2015, I met Paige, a 32-year-old Foreign Domestic Helper from the Philippines. She was among a group of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers that I was introduced to by Christina (introduced in Chapter One). I sat with Paige and her friends on flat cardboard boxes and plastic picnic sheets on the footpath, leaning against the back of a bus shelter.

Paige first arrived in Hong Kong in 2008 and has been working for the same employer for seven years. Upon arrival at the employer's home on Hong Kong Island, she was introduced to their two young children aged four and six, shown around the small apartment, given a list of house rules and given the mattress that she would be using to sleep on the bedroom floor between the beds of the children. Along with the list of house rules, Paige was asked to address her employers as "Sir" and "Madam", a common request by Hong Kong Chinese employers, while the children were asked to address her as "Aunty Paige". The list of house rules extensively outlined the tasks that she must attend to and what activities or behaviour was not acceptable. Retold by Paige (2015, pers. comm., 8 February), some of the rules included:

- Wake up at 7 am Monday to Friday to prepare breakfast, pack children's lunches and iron clothes for the family.
- Have dinner ready by the time her employers arrive home from work.
- Clean the house during the day when nobody is home, not at night when everyone is home.
- Go to bed only when all the tasks are finished, however she must attend to the family at any time during the night if necessary.
- Come home on Sunday night by 10 pm.

In addition, she recalled items that were not permitted:

- Do not wear makeup during work.
- Do not wear dresses and skirts or any revealing clothing.
- Do not wear any clothing without sleeves.

- Do not have a shower in the morning when everyone is rushing to work, only shower at night.
- Do not use the bathroom for more than ten minutes.
- Do not eat food from the fridge that is reserved for family meals.
- Do not take the children anywhere else after school. They can go to the park but only when permission is given. At the park you must watch the children carefully and do not let them talk to strangers.
- Do not buy the children candy or junk food.
- Do not bring friends home.
- Do not use the mobile phone in the bedroom when the children are asleep.
- Do not use the phone during the day to talk to friends. Only use it at night when all tasks are done.

The items that Paige recalled were part of a larger document that was given to her upon arrival. The document outlined specific domestic tasks, the family's annual festivities schedule where she could be required to work, her monthly wage and monthly food allowance. Over the first two years, Paige rigorously complied with the directives until her employers gradually relaxed the rules and became more flexible with phone use and shower time. Paige suspected that her employers did not trust her initially as their previous Foreign Domestic Helper was dismissed on the grounds of suspected theft when valuable items in the house went missing.

Instructions and guidelines that migrant domestic workers like Paige learn from training programs in the Philippines take effect within the employers' homes. Not all Hong Kong employers provide a document of provisions as extensive as Paige's, however all of the Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed mentioned some form of instructions and rules delivered verbally or in writing (2013, pers. comm., 24 November and 2015, pers. comm., 1, 8 and 15 February). The regulations varied from general requirements such as not wearing shoes inside the home to the more specific and personal rules such as not allowing the Foreign Domestic Helper to wear makeup or have long hair. Some rules appeared to be reasonable, however they were all various methods of control and discipline.

Constable contends that the controls extend from the product of a domestic worker's labour into her private domains: "Her body, her personality, her voice, and her emotions may be subject to her employer's controls" (2007, p. 90). The Foreign Domestic Helper is expected to fulfil her employer's presumption of acceptable behaviour as a domestic helper by obeying

what the employers deemed as appropriate clothing, language, tone of speech, shower time and time for resting. Evident in the house rules that Paige had to follow – time management, personal appearance and food – are discernible means of control. Every Sunday, Paige and other Foreign Domestic Helpers' identity and space are free from the discipline of their employers' house rules and are momentarily reclaimed on Chater Road. This freedom allows them to defy the socio-spatial depletion they endure in the private domestic realm.

3.4 Controlling Foreign Domestic Helpers' appearances

The physical appearance of a Foreign Domestic Helper can be used to represent the employer's power and the family's social status (Constable 1997). In 1975, when Foreign Domestic Helpers first began to operate in Hong Kong, many employers required them to wear a uniform, especially when guests were visiting the home. At the time, Foreign Domestic Helpers wore a maid's uniform, typically a short-sleeved, knee-length loose fitting dress in light blue, pink or grey, sometimes with an apron attached. When uniforms for Foreign Domestic Helpers were common, maid's uniforms were sold in many places in Hong Kong, including in the shops in World Wide Plaza in Central, where Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers gathered every Sunday. The visual identity of the uniform was phased out from the early 1990s onwards. Today in Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers do not have a designated uniform. Their work attire is usually what their employers deem appropriate. However, on the websites of recruitment agencies in Hong Kong and the Philippines, candidates are still pictured wearing a maid's uniform similar to the one described. This outdated image of the maid reminds employers of a particular kind of servitude they may expect from Foreign Domestic Helpers that is unrealistic and outdated.

Figure 9 **Advertisements of Foreign Domestic Helper candidates on the shopfront of agencies in Hong Kong, 2015**, candidates are shown wearing a typical maid uniform with an apron and their personal details such as marital status, number of children, country of origin and education are on public display. Photograph by the author.

The custom of the domestic worker's uniform in Hong Kong shares similarities with the traditional appearance of Chinese servants; *amah* and *muijai*. The typical *amah* was dressed in a black and white traditional Chinese worker's suit with their long hair braided back. The *muijai* who were usually much younger girls or women were dressed in a similar worker's suit in a youthful, floral pattern. These uniforms clearly signified them as domestic servants and the families with servants were traditionally of high socio-economic status (Rollins 1985, p. 129; Romero 1992, p. 112). Enforcing uniforms on domestic workers had been a long-standing tradition and a form of body discipline (Constable 2007, p. 102). Today, Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong no longer wear uniforms, yet their appearance remains under the scrutiny of their employers.

This entitlement of having control over the appearance of the Foreign Domestic Helpers has been enhanced by the popular misrepresentation among Hong Kong citizens that Foreign Domestic Helpers pose a sexual or moral threat to the families because they have not come from a lineage of obedient, chaste women who dedicated their entire lives to the families they work for Constable (1996) provides an extensive history of the various typologies of female Chinese servants. They can also be misunderstood as being selfish mothers and wives who have willingly abandoned their families to earn higher wages in Hong Kong than in the Philippines (So 2015). In reality, this is a prejudiced misconception that is untrue. Based on interviews with Foreign Domestic Helpers, and the research of Constable (1996; 1997; 1999; 2007), Parrenas (2001; 2005; 2008) and Lindio-McGovern (2011; 2013), the main reason these women participate in domestic labour abroad is to support their families back home. They are dedicated mothers, wives and daughters whose decision to migrate is made under difficult circumstances where sacrificing time with the family is necessary in order to financially support the family.

On the Sunday when I met Paige on Chater Road, she was wearing make-up, her hair was brushed back but left long, and she was dressed in a turtle-neck jumper, a fashionable vest, knee-length skirt with leggings underneath and short ankle boots. She claimed that she cannot dress like this at work not only because her employers prevent her from wearing skirts but also because she does not want her employers to think she is an "irresponsible worker" (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). Gesturing to her group of friends, Paige said that every Sunday they can be "who they really are" (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> [On] This day each week, we can be women, mothers, friends and eat and talk and use this place to be the way we are back in the Philippines. At home here [in Hong Kong], we are not us, we are workers.

Few of the Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed had the power to choose their work attire. Many had restrictions imposed on them by their female employers specifying conservative clothing to be worn in the home similar to Paige's description of the rules imposed on her, which subsequently suppressed the female figure. Some Foreign Domestic Helpers commented that they have felt their female employers' nervousness around young, attractive Foreign Domestic Helpers. Paige recalls occasional unpleasant comments made towards her about her clothing choice on Sundays by her female employer (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> I was wearing a dress and some boots, she says I'm looking too sexy. She tells me that Hong Kong people look at us [Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers] and think we are not good women when we dress like that.

Similar comments were made by other Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed. Some recalled accusations of being "distracted" and comments about their inefficiency at their job, when they spent time on their appearance, even on their day off work. Paige's employers and others making various comments about the Foreign Domestic Helpers being a potential sexual threat is problematic as it gives legitimacy to the imposition of bodily discipline. The misrepresentation of Foreign Domestic Helpers as a sexual threat is further skewed by their representation in mainstream Hong Kong media, as noted by Constable (1996, p. 458):

> …where Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers are often criticised by employers in private conversations and in the media – for their independence, immorality, impertinence, and lack of commitment and dedication to the families for whom they work.

Similarly, the website of a privately-owned Foreign Domestic Helper employment agency, under *notes for the employer upon the application for a foreign domestic helper*, stated in English (Peony Employ 2015): "Both the husband and the wife shall jointly select the Helper. A beautiful or young good-stature helper is more attractive for the husband, and may cause an affection dispute."

This statement is appalling. It places the physical appearance of Foreign Domestic Helpers as a possible cause of a couple's dispute. This assumption is factually unsubstantiated and ethically irresponsible as causing disputes between family members is not the responsibility of the Foreign Domestic Helper. Moreover, the suggestion of the possibility of the physical appearance of the female Foreign Domestic Helper threatening a marriage or invading a relationship is sexist. Public statements like this continue to misrepresent Foreign Domestic

Helpers and amplify the prejudices against them. Additionally, it reflects a dichotomous identity that Hong Kong employers place on Foreign Domestic Helpers from the outset as sexualised strangers with ill intentions and lazy servants.

Belinda is 27 years old and worked as a migrant domestic helper in Singapore for two years before working in Hong Kong. She did not receive a list of requirements from her employer, however she was coerced into changing her appearance. Belinda explained (2015, pers. comm., 1 February):

> When I first met M'am [her female employer], I had my long hair tied up. She says it can get messy, maybe even get into the food. I said I can wear a cap when I cook. In the second week of work, we went shopping together one afternoon and we went into a hair salon. I thought she was getting a hair cut, but instead she asked me to sit down. I told her I don't want to but she forced me. I told them [the hairdresser] to just cut a little bit but M'am said something in Cantonese and my hair was cut short to my ears, like a boy. I was really sad. She told me not to cry and it's better to work with short hair.

Belinda's employer also told her not to wear any jewellery, apply nail polish or wear make-up except on her day off work. The implementation of these and other similar restrictions is a common practice of exercising control over Foreign Domestic Helpers. From specifying items of clothing to banning all cosmetics or long hair, the female body is under direct surveillance and discipline, with the aim of oppressing individuality and femininity. Belinda and Paige have both been subject to bodily discipline motivated by the sexualised threat of the female body. In contrast to Paige, Belinda experienced a more severe disciplinary imposition as the perceived threat, her femininity in the form of her long hair, was forcibly removed without her consent. Stripping away Foreign Domestic Helpers' control over their own physical appearance and hiding particular physical manifestations of femininity, disciplinary practices shape Foreign Domestic Helpers to become homogenous bodies that only exist as unthreatening subjects of domestic labour.

3.5 Budgeting time

Time is another key element that assists in the socio-spatial depletion of Foreign Domestic Helpers in the private domestic sphere of Hong Kong. Constable (2007, p. 96) remarks, "rules

not only govern a domestic worker's behaviour and attitude, they also control her use of time and the pace of her work".

As seen in the list of house rules given to Paige, her employers dictated her bodily appearance as well as her work schedule and use of time. There were rules that assigned the time to wake up, amount of time spent in the bathroom and even set a curfew on her day off. Legally, Foreign Domestic Helpers are entitled to a continuous 24 hours of rest each week (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2015), however not many Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed have been able to exercise that right due to their employers' demands. Limiting the Foreign Domestic Helpers' personal time, whether in the home between working hours or on Sunday, suppresses the identity of Foreign Domestic Helpers that exists outside of the role of the domestic labourer. Setting curfews on their day off work shortens the time they have to rest, meet with their friends and attend to their private matters. This method of minimising their personal time reflects the control that the employers have, and feel they are entitled to have, over the Foreign Domestic Helpers beyond the hours of work and the workplace. It gradually also suppresses the capacity of Foreign Domestic Helpers to be themselves, which is already enforced throughout six days each week. The concept of time for Foreign Domestic Helpers is reframed and reintroduced to trainees at the Hong Kong Institute of Household Management in Manila (n.d.) as something that is different and unique to Hong Kong. The handbook (Hong Kong Institute of Household Management n.d., p. 2) quotes:

> There is no place for laziness in the job you have accepted. There is a difference between a lazy and slow person. We tend to do things in the Philippines at a slower pace due to the hot weather but in Hong Kong where the weather is cold, people move fast and this is what they expect to see in other people.

A relearning of time is also imposed:

> Learn to clock watch. Schedule your time and work. During your free-time, rest if you must, but be ready to answer the door or the phone. Sew clothes or other special chores like repotting plants and cleaning kitchen cupboards (Hong Kong Institute of Household Management n.d., p. 2).

These examples demonstrate the high expectations that Hong Kong employers are perceived to have for the Foreign Domestic Helpers. Echoing this expectation, many interviewees described a variety of circumstances where employers made unrealistic demands of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' productivity within limited timeframes.

Belinda's employers required her to work to a daily timetable that was structured by increments of 15 minutes. Tasks were allocated according to an estimated time of completion. For example, cooking breakfast, washing the dishes and ironing were categorised as 15 minute tasks, while cooking dinner, washing clothes or taking the child to school were 30 or 45 minute tasks. Belinda was expected to follow the timetable without delays and find more tasks to do if she had finished the assigned tasks. This approach of scheduling daily chores to time increments and the demand for continuous productivity are part of the rules that Hong Kong employers widely impose on Foreign Domestic Helpers. Nearly all of the Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed were given some form of timetable verbally or in printed form, especially when they first began the job. They also described their employer's attitude toward domestic labour as easy work and as such should be a continuous occupation throughout the day as there is "always more to do" (2013, pers. comm., 24 November, 1 December; 2015, pers. comm., 1 and 8 February).

In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault describes the timetable as an instrument of control as it is "based on the principle of non-idleness and designed to eliminate the danger of wasting time, which is a moral offence and economic dishonesty" (1979, p. 154). Foucault contended that discipline created new forms of individuality for bodies, which enable them to efficiently perform in different systems (Foucault 1979, p. 220). He also argued that discipline creates "docile bodies", ideal for working in ordered regiments, provided that these bodies are constantly under surveillance and control, and that the discipline must be exerted without excessive force (Foucault 1979, p. 221). Foucault referred to the body and bodily practices as "mechanisms", where "the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful" (Foucault 1979, p. 137-138). The timetable is not just a checklist for the employer, but it was also an efficient method of disciplining and "budgeting" the Foreign Domestic Helper's time (Constable 2007, p. 96-101). Foucault (1979, p. 138) also developed "mechanisms of power" which:

> defined how one may have hold over other's bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies.

Following this theory, when employers apply time-based tasks to Foreign Domestic Helpers, they are not only ordering them to complete a task, but they are demanding a particular

method and speed at which the task should be completed. As such, Foreign Domestic Helpers are restricted from individual thoughts and methods of operating, rather strictly following time-based instructions, which gradually mould them to become docile and disciplined subjects of domestic labour.

In addition, budgeting time aims to limit the personal time that the Foreign Domestic Helpers might have between tasks, making it difficult to distinguish between time on and time off. Despite the scheduled time of waking up and sleeping, due to the confluence of spaces between the workplace and the home which denies spatial separation between the employer and the Foreign Domestic Helper, employers may request assistance from the Foreign Domestic Helper during her rest period. This blurring of spatial boundaries compounded by the time-based strategy of discipline creates extra hours of work from the Foreign Domestic Helpers that are difficult to account for and depletes the Foreign Domestic Helpers' private space and individuality, thus reinforcing their docility, shaping them into compliant subjects of domestic labour.

From Monday to Friday, Paige begins work at 7 am and stops work at about 10.30 pm. On most nights, her employers return home from their work at 8.30 pm. Paige serves the evening meal and when that is completed she bathes the children and puts them to bed. After the employers have finished their dinner, Paige cleans up the dining room and the kitchen. After this task she takes a shower and when she finishes she irons her employers clothing for the next day. At 10.30 pm Paige then retires to sleep on a mattress on the bedroom floor between the beds of the children. On average, Paige works 15.5 hours a day for five days of the week. On Saturdays, she wakes at 8 30 am and has a more relaxed schedule as her employers engage in social activities outside the home. However, there are exceptions to the Saturday schedule for instance when the family invite guests to the home. Paige will commonly work yet another 15.5 hour day. On some occasions, she takes care of the children or other urgent matters throughout the night during her rest period and is expected to follow the morning schedule of the next day. On Sunday, when she has her day off work, she leaves home around 9 am and has a curfew set by her employers of 10 pm. Some employers, like Paige's employers, justify the curfew as a safety measure.

Similarly, Belinda's employers also impose a curfew on Sunday as they regard Belinda as young and naive, ignorant to the dangers of Hong Kong at night. As the Foreign Domestic Helpers do not live in unsafe areas, this imposition of time control is patronising towards Belinda, Paige and other Foreign Domestic Helpers as "domestic workers are often mature

and responsible women – more accurately view such restricts as unfair, overly restrictive, and patronising or maternalistic" (Rollins 1985, p. 173). Curfews set on their day off are also illegal as they curtail the continuous 24 hours of rest the FHDs are entitled to. As most Foreign Domestic Helpers are committed to 14 to 16 working hours each day, strict time management and the expectation of fluid work hours benefit the employers and exploit the Foreign Domestic Helpers' labour with little regard for their personal space and time. This method of control makes transparent a common perception of Foreign Domestic Helpers as commodities of labour.

Every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in activities of their own choosing in the extended block of time rather than the small increments demarcated by their labour in the semi-public private spaces they create. As such, the appropriation and transformation of public spaces by Foreign Domestic Helpers can be viewed as a resistance to the commoditisation of their time, space and labour. Futhermore, their spatialised resistance enables them to reclaim space to express themselves and have the capacity to operate without inhibitions.

3.6 Food practices as discipline

Sociologist Josephine Beoku-Betts analysed the relationship between food consumption and preparation practices among women in marginalised cultural groups in the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina (1995). Through several years of intermittent fieldwork, she found that women who are in subordinate positions in the household use food preparation and consumption as a method of cultivating and preserving their cultural identity (Beoku-Betts 1995). From the primary data gained from the interviewees and secondary resources, it is apparent that food is an important part of the culture identity of the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers (Constable 2007; Law 2001). This part of their identity is substantially restricted as they do not have access to their own cuisine in Hong Kong, and the food they prepare and consume is dictated by their employers. In some circumstances, food becomes a form of discipline in the homes.

Food consumption practices often reflect the power relations within Hong Kong households as "employers can determine not only what a domestic worker cooks for the family meal but also what, where, when, and how much a domestic worker eats" (Constable 2007, p. 109). To satisfy the Hong Kong employers' expectations of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' capability to cook Cantonese cuisine, migrant domestic worker employment agencies provide culinary training. Belinda and Paige both learnt how to cook basic Cantonese dishes in their agencies

in the Philippines before their arrival in Hong Kong. Cantonese food is not completely different from the regular Filipino cuisine Foreign Domestic Helpers are accustomed to, however Foreign Domestic Helpers rarely have opportunities to cook or consume Filipino cuisine in their employers' homes. Many Foreign Domestic Helpers have been ordered not to cook their own traditional foods and some employers deem Filipino food to be too spicy or have a strange smell. Popular Filipino dishes reminiscent of home such as braised meat dishes *adobo* or *bistek* are not allowed to be prepared or consumed in the homes of many employers. Some do not even allow the Foreign Domestic Helper to cook Filipino food even when the employers are absent. Over the last two years in Hong Kong, Belinda has never cooked Filipino food in her employer's home. Her employer is accustomed to using Chinese medicinal herbs in most meals and has taught Belinda to make numerous soups that involve long hours of cooking. She insisted on Belinda consuming the medicinal dishes too as in her employer's opinion Belinda has "low-energy, is unfit and moves slower than a pig" (2015, pers. comm., 8 February).

Unlike other Asian cuisines such as Japanese, Korean, Thai and Vietnamese that have long been embraced and adopted into Hong Kong's ethnically diverse food culture, Filipino food remains largely unknown in Hong Kong. Law (2001) argues that this lack of exposure and unwillingness to accept Filipino cuisine, or attempt to, in employer homes reflects the social and cultural disparity between employers and Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers. In her article, *Home Cooking: Filipino Women and Geographies of the Senses in Hong Kong,* Law (2001, p. 278) contended that through the process of ingesting Filipino food in Hong Kong, the domestic workers create new associations between Hong Kong and the Philippines and that food consumption becomes a way in which nationalism and ethnicity are resignified. In other words, the culture of Foreign Domestic Helpers can be expressed through Filipino food practices. Disallowing the preparation and consumption of Filipino cuisine in the home disregards the national identity of Foreign Domestic Helpers. It is also a method of limiting their individuality in the private domestic realm for six days each week. Therefore, the consumption of Filipino food outside of their employers' homes is a way that the Foreign Domestic Helpers recover from the cultural discipline they experience in their employers' homes (Law 2001). It also becomes a defiant act of national and cultural identification.

Food consumption as a method of discipline extends beyond what is consumed to the amount of food that is provided for a Foreign Domestic Helper. The employment contract specifies that food should be provided free of charge, and if no food is provided, a food allowance of no less than HKD$300 each month is required (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2015,

p. 10). Although this is a legal requirement, many employers exercise this at their discretion. Many Foreign Domestic Helpers consume the same food as the family, or are given a separate list of food items that are usually much cheaper. For the minority who have a food allowance, many are given no more than half of the prescribed monthly food allowance (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). Besides that, HKD$300 each month for food is grossly insufficient. It equates to HKD$10 (approximately USD$1.28) each day. Belinda was not accustomed to eating Cantonese food every day, especially food with distinct medicinal flavours. In the past, she has asked for a food allowance, which was declined by her female employer who subsequently provided Belinda with bread, eggs and some tinned foods. When Belinda asked why she cannot choose her own food, her employer bluntly expressed that she should be "eating less and lose weight" (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). On a Sunday on Chater Road in 2015, Belinda was enjoying Filipino food with a small group of friends. Between mouthfuls of Filipino food she and her friends were sharing, Belinda recalled how she lost her appetite for the first six months of working for her employer (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> I did not want to eat her soups they were too bitter. Too much herbs and Chinese medicine. I don't like it. I just wanted some simple meat and rice. I asked her for $30 (approx. USD$3.86) so I can buy *char siu farn* (a popular Cantonese takeaway meal of barbecue pork and rice) but she said that is bad for me. She does not eat breakfast and so she said I don't need breakfast. I was tired and ate very little. Only on Sunday when my friends bring Filipino food then I'm happy. I was ill in winter and the doctor said I was not eating enough. That scared M'am [her employer]. So she gives me fruit and vegetables and rice and meat now. When I go shopping now she lets me buy some food that I like and I can cook my food after I have cooked for the family.

Belinda added that although she was allowed to cook her own food, her female employer still did not allow her to make Filipino food as she thought it would "make the house smell bad".

Controlling the kind of food consumed disconnects the Foreign Domestic Helpers from their culture and disables the autonomy they have over their eating habits. Suggesting that they have a weight problem is an unprofessional remark and another method of disciplining the female body, thus removing the perceived sexualised threat. Based on the interviews conducted during the fieldwork, incidents like Belinda's are common where employers exert their own ideologies over Foreign Domestic Helpers and view compliance as a measure of

appropriate behaviour as an employee. Every Sunday, as Belinda and many other Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers gather with their friends in the spaces they temporarily construct, they resist the cultural deprivation and suppression experienced in the home of the employers. Aside from the disciplinary practices through controlling their bodies, use of time and food consumption, the next section portrays the use of psychological dimensions to manipulate and discipline the Foreign Domestic Helpers.

3.7 Coercion through being 'part of the family'

The cross-contamination of the workplace and domestic space gives employers the opportunity to use various methods of control over Foreign Domestic Helpers at their discretion. The relationship between Foreign Domestic Helpers and their employers is potentially more intense than regular relations in other workplaces and the personal bond can become a subtle yet more subversive method of exploitation than others (Constable 2007, p. 110-116; Romero 1992, p. 123).

The combined workplace and domestic space is problematic for the employers and the family because their privacy is also exposed to the Foreign Domestic Helper who is not a member of the family. Foreign Domestic Helpers witness behaviours that only closest family members are otherwise privy to. The transparency and exposure of intimacy over a sustained period of time can facilitate the development of friendships between employers and the Foreign Domestic Helpers but it can also create tension between Foreign Domestic Helpers and employers. Such tensions may increase the risk of abuse and exploitation of the Foreign Domestic Helpers. The possibility of this is made evident by the Hong Kong Institute of Household Management in Manila which advises trainees to maintain distance between themselves and their employers, always remain professional and avoid answering back inappropriately (Hong Kong Institute of Household Management n.d., p. 3). Paige recalled her three-week training intensive in Manila, where they were taught to always remain professional and not be too emotional (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> We are the domestic worker, so we need to obey and do the work without saying no. Even if they (employers) get angry, we should not get angry. We should not show we are frustrated or upset. We need to hide our emotions and always be patient.

The teaching of absolute compliance and obedience is commonly practised by employers. Foreign Domestic Helpers have been instructed by their agency in the Philippines or in Hong Kong to conceal anger, frustration and other emotions during work. They should remain as calm subjects of servitude, not as vocal, equal members of the household (Hong Kong Institute of Household Management n.d., p. 2-3). This approach is problematic as it reinforces the subservient status of the Foreign Domestic Helper within the household and discourages them from speaking up against unfair treatment and reporting (to the police or the Immigration Department) exploitative or harmful situations.

Many Foreign Domestic Helpers prefer to keep a safe emotional distance from the employer and remain compliant to avoid or minimalise emotional investment in the employers' family (Constable 2007, p. 115; Romero 1992, p. 126-127). It is difficult for Foreign Domestic Helpers to keep distance as the live-in requirement requires them to live in their workplace. Servants of the English manors, which had their own servants quarters by the late seventeenth century, who worked throughout the house could retire back to their quarters to claim space to express themselves without inhibition and the *amah* and *muijai* had their own servant bedrooms in their employers' homes, but Hong Kong's contemporary compact living spaces cannot provide a separate room in apartments for Foreign Domestic Helpers. As such, some employers like to welcome Foreign Domestic Helpers as a part of the family ideologically, which can be appealing to some Foreign Domestic Helpers as they are separated from their own families and it gives the prospect that the Foreign Domestic Helpers may be treated with respect like a family member (Anderson 2000; Constable 2007; Parrenas 2001). Belinda's employer's persistence and insistence that Belinda had a weight problem exemplifies a strange 'employer as family' and 'maternalistic' dynamic that can be perceived as protecting the Foreign Domestic Helper rather than controlling her appearance and disciplining her body (Rollins 1985, p. 173-203). As noted earlier, many employers use being 'maternalistic' as an excuse to impose all kinds of restrictions on Foreign Domestic Helpers (Rollins 1985, p. 173-203). Realistically, the family analogy is an idealistic illusion that has a coercive side that distorts professional and fair working conditions. The majority of the interviewees expressed their awareness of the coercive nature of the family analogy but sometimes have had little choice to ignore it.

Yasmine, 30, a Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper I met in Hong Kong in 2013, has experienced another assertion of the family analogy used by her employers to persuade her to work on her scheduled day off work. At the time of the interview, Yasmine had a husband and a six-year-old daughter in the Philippines and had been working in Hong Kong for

three years. Her main motivation to work in Hong Kong is to support her family, especially her sister who became a widow two years ago and has two children of her own. Yasmine's employer sometimes required her to work on Sunday when it was her standard day off work. This occurred when there were birthdays or festivities that involved the extended family gathering at the home or at the home of another family member. According to the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract, Foreign Domestic Helpers are only allowed to carry out duties for the employer stated on the visa and the work that the Foreign Domestic Helper performs should only assist the employer and the immediate household. Asking the Foreign Domestic Helper to work for another family member in another home is a violation of the visa's restrictions (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016). Her employer would insist on Yasmine's presence as she was part of the family and that the grandmother's 80th birthday or the young son's birthday were too important for her to miss. Yasmine felt trapped in those situations and she reflected (2013, pers. comm., 1 December):

> It sounded like I am wanted like part of the family at first, but I know she just wanted me there to clean and cook. She will say that I will have fun too and there'll be so much food and cake and it would be very nice. But I know I wanted to be with my friends, eating my own food and relaxing. I feel bad for saying no and I know I can't really say no. She will let me have the day off after but that is Monday when all my friends are working.

Instances like this not only exploited Yasmine as a "member of the family", they also isolated her from her friends. Apart from their day off work, Foreign Domestic Helpers only have momentary interactions with each other while running errands such as when they escort their employers' children to and from school. Unlike the majority of employment situations where employees can share tasks or vent frustrations to each other in the same workplace, Foreign Domestic Helpers work in almost solitude six days each week. This isolation is a disciplinary strategy as Foucault noted "solitude is the primary condition of total submission" (1979, p. 237). This incident exemplifies another theme within the disciplinary practices imposed on Foreign Domestic Helpers – separation and disconnection. Employers who use the "part of the family" analogy control and exploit Foreign Domestic Helpers with false family obligations that can often isolate the Foreign Domestic Helpers from their peers, thus continuing to shape their docile servitude. As noted earlier, there are discrepancies between the representations of the term "Foreign Domestic Helper" in the Chinese and English versions of the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract, which parallels this contradictory and exploitative method of treating a Foreign Domestic Helper as "part of the family".

Being "part of the family" can place Foreign Domestic Helpers in an ambiguous position between members of the family and expose them to continuous abuse that becomes normalised. Belle, a 37-year-old Foreign Domestic Helper from the Philippines who has worked in Hong Kong for seven years, remembered that she was often accused of being the reason that her employers argued about household affairs (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> Ms [female employer] would say that I am not quick enough at my job, that's why Sir [male employer] gets angry and upset. She tells me my cooking is not very good and that makes him angry too. When they yell, sometimes in the bedroom and I take little miss [the daughter] to shower, I cannot really hear what they are fighting about. He doesn't say anything to me and stays in the bedroom. Ms comes out and gets upset and tells me it's all my fault. Sometimes she cries to me. It makes me feel very uncomfortable.

When asked how she dealt with such situations, Belle said sometimes she stayed awake through the night to express sympathy and her employer switched from blaming her to confiding in her: "I always listen, just listen, sometimes give her tissues. I feel bad for her" (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). Taking on emotional labour is an invisible task within domestic labour that is difficult to negotiate and navigate, and emotionally exhausting for the Foreign Domestic Helpers (Constable 2007, p. 110-115). It blurs the professional boundaries and the Foreign Domestic Helper may progressively invest emotionally in her employer's family. This heightens the risk of emotional and physical exploitation of her labour and in some cases leads to termination when the female employer feels threatened (Constable 2007; Parrenas 2001). In the case of Belle, being confided in by her employer became an interaction that normalised the unprofessional and abusive behaviour of venting frustration on her when her employers' relationship was in turmoil.

Diana is a 35-year-old Filipino woman who came to work in Hong Kong as a Foreign Domestic Helper in 2007. The disciplinary strategies imposed on her were influenced by an invisible projection that victimised her, which led to an abrupt termination of her employment contract without reason. Diana had been working for her first employer for just over two years at the time. Her female employer confided in her and often talked to her about her marriage and Diana always responded with positivity and sometimes with narratives of her own marriage. Although she knew her employer was not guarded around

her, Diana was cautious not to be too friendly, as she was also trained to keep professional distances with her employers (2015, pers. comm., 1 February):

> One day, after sir [male employer[left early in the morning, I heard M'am [female employer] crying in her room. I knocked on the door and asked if she was ok, she said yes. I took baby [employer's child] to school (kindergarten) and when I came home, she told me I should leave. I asked her why, she said Sir might not come back and she's too embarrassed. She told me I have until the end of the week to pack my bags and find another place [employer]. It was very strange. I was upset. She told me I talk too much and talk behind her back to my friends. I said I never. She didn't believe me.

Throughout the interviews with Paige, Belinda, Belle, Yasmine and Diana, the themes that perpetuate their employers' disciplinary practices navigate the terrain of the female workers as a sexualised threat. Consequently, employers project their fear of the threat by deploying various ways of suppressing, removing or victimising the Foreign Domestic Helpers.

Sociologist Judith Rollins, whose work focuses on women's studies and the intersection of gender, class and race, argued in her seminal book *Between Women: Domestics and their Employers* (1985) that confiding in a domestic worker is not a sign of equality but rather the (female) employer's view of the domestic worker as a silent confidant, someone who enabled her to relieve her misfortunes. Evidently, Diana was not treated as an equal by her employer and it could be assumed that her employer perceived her only as an agreeable confidant, perhaps because she was readily available in the comfort of her own home. Diana never knew the true reason why she was terminated so suddenly (2015, pers. comm., 1 February):

> I thought we were like family, but not family, you know? I wish her happiness and I know I was like a friend to her, but when she stopped my contract, I knew we are not friends, not family. She did not care. I was *bata tanga* (young and stupid).

Employers exert visible and subtle forms of discipline over the Foreign Domestic Helpers. Through controlling their appearances, the Foreign Domestic Helper's body is stripped back to be less feminine. By managing their time, the Foreign Domestic Helpers' privacy is made transparent as every minute needs to be accounted for and equated to employer's "money well spent". Preventing Filipino food being prepared or consumed in the home disconnects

and separates the Foreign Domestic Helpers from their cultural heritage. Forging familial relations manipulates their kindness and capitalises on their vulnerability as they are isolated from their own families and from their peers. All methods of discipline systematically deplete the Foreign Domestic Helpers' personal space, individuality and deprive them of their cultural practices, which result in Foreign Domestic Helpers becoming docile, disciplined commodities of labour. The personal experiences recounted by the interviewees during the fieldwork have added another dimension to the existing literature that discussed the mistreatment and sufferings of the Foreign Domestic Helpers in their workplace. This dimension is twofold: firstly the Foreign Domestic Helpers respond with resilience to the invasion and deprivation of their space and autonomy, and secondly the Foreign Domestic Helpers show determination to resist the continuous deprivation that they endure for six days each week. Every Sunday, their appropriation and transformation of public space is not just a simple weekly social event; it is their respite. This interval of relief has become a collectively spatialised resistance that pushes against the disciplinary practices imposed on them in the homes of their employers.

Many employers project their fear of the perceived foreign female as immoral, which motivates all kinds of misjudgments that legitimise the employers' perceived entitlements to discipline the Foreign Domestic Helpers. Prejudiced misconceptions or fears may be formed from misinformation or xenophobia, however it did not simply begin in the 1970s when Foreign Domestic Helpers first arrived in Hong Kong. Employers' superiority over domestic workers, domestic servitude and expected obedience are ingrained ideologies within Hong Kong's historical practices of household servants which have become concealed features inherited into the contemporary role of the Foreign Domestic Helper.

3.8 A matter of nostalgia and obedience

Foreign Domestic Helpers have been known to be compared to both the *muijai* and *amah*, where younger and less educated Foreign Domestic Helpers are linked to the past image of the *muijai* and the older Foreign Domestic Helpers to the traditional *amah*, resulting in the traditional Chinese *amah* portrayed as the more superior candidate for domestic work (Constable 1997; 2007; French 1986; Gaw 1990; Jaschok 1988). The *amah's* self-proclamation as sworn spinsters meant that they had no interest in finding a husband, having children of their own or starting their own family. This was preferred by employers as there was a deeper sense of lifelong loyalty from the *amah* to the employer's family. Anthropologist Andrea Patrice Sankar suggests that the traditional *amah* is defined by "her adherence to the classical

standards of the master-servant relationship and her unquestioning, lifelong dedication to her master's family" (Sankar 1978, p. 54-55). Another reason for the romanticised preference of the *amah* was that they posed little threat to female employers. Constable proposes in her article *Sexuality and Discipline among Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong* that female employers' exercise of discipline on their Foreign Domestic Helpers is representative of not just the general anxieties about the perceived sexuality of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers but extends to possible threats to the construct of the Chinese family and Hong Kong society at large as Hong Kong was transitioning from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (Constable 1996, p. 539). In the second edition of Constable's seminal work, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong* published in 2007, ten years after the handover, she adds that Hong Kong's past status as a colony was a time when domestic servants "knew their place". Constable (2007, p. 62) attributes Hong Kong's anxiety to the authenticity of its Chinese heritage and the nostalgia attached to the glorified image of the *amah*:

> As a colony that never fought for independence, Hong Kong, especially in the 1990s was in an awkward situation… Reunification with the mainland, which has itself undergone phenomenal sociocultural, political, and economic transformations over the past decades, inevitably stirred up concerns and questions about the degree of Hong Kong's Chineseness. In this context, the imagined Chinese *amah* glorified a time and place – well away from Communist China – where there was no guilt about wealth, power or class difference.

This statement proposes the nostalgia provoked by Hong Kong's transition from British colony to Special Administrative Region of China as a reason that the past has been romanticised and portrayed as idealistic. This is reminiscent of philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin's insight that "Anything about which one knows that one soon will not have it around becomes an image" (Benjamin 1973, p. 87). Hong Kong's colonial identity, the economic power and socio-cultural practices attached to it were gradually shifting and feared to be disappearing towards the handover of sovereignty in 1997. Constable (2007, p. 44) also remarks that:

> The notion of the 'superior' Cantonese domestic servant – inaccurate as it often is, and fuelled by a powerful sense of nostalgia – was never far below the surface of the Hong Kong Chinese discourse on foreign domestic workers… Complaints and criticism about foreign workers were common within the privacy of the employers' households, but were also

broadcast on television, aired on the radio and expressed in the form of editorials in local newspapers.

The romanticised image of the *amah* as a humble, subservient subject symbolises an idealised past. This idealisation creates an unrealistic expectation that current Foreign Domestic Helpers cannot satisfy, which causes tension between employers and Foreign Domestic Helpers. The other outdated candidate, the *muijai*, also perpetuates an inappropriate comparison. Although Foreign Domestic Helpers are not sold off and purchased as indentured servants as the *muijai* were, the contemporary Foreign Domestic Helpers have no access to property, cannot live outside their employer's residence, and have little negotiation power over their work conditions. *Bunmui*, the colloquial Cantonese term that represents Foreign Domestic Helpers, translates to 'Filipino girl'. The Cantonese word *mui*, which is the same as in *bunmui* and *muijai*, translates to 'young girl'. This term is often used regardless of the nationality or the age of the Foreign Domestic Helper. Most Foreign Domestic Helpers find this colloquial Cantonese term offensive and inappropriate. Foreign Domestic Helpers also do not appreciate being called a 'maid' or a 'domestic helper'. Most prefer the term 'worker'. Bound by stigmatism, the comparison of the Foreign Domestic Helpers to that of the powerless, young female servant owned by the family still has some roots entrenched within Hong Kong's current conceptualisation of domestic servitude.

It is problematic for Hong Kong employers to carry past customs of servitude to form their expectations of servitude on Foreign Domestic Helpers. This has led to aggressive forms of control such as cutting off Belinda's hair. As hard working as the Chinese domestic workers were, it is important to acknowledge the reality of domestic slavery; the hardships and exploitations that they endured beyond the nostalgic and romanticised images of them (Constable 2007, p. 61). The contemporary Foreign Domestic Helpers should not follow the trajectories of the *muijai* or *amah*. Moreover, the Hong Kong employers should not try to compare them to the past systems, which were established in an antiquated time where slavery was permitted and women had few if any rights and autonomy over their own affairs.

3.9 Conclusion

The socio-cultural context of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers should be clarified to dispel unsubstantiated perceptions of them. The migrant workers should not be operating under misapprehension and misrepresentation as immoral women coming to Hong Kong attempting to obtain permanent residency or to threaten the sanctity of marriage. As

illustrated in this chapter, such prejudices lead to unreasonable forms of discipline that denote an archaic master and servant relationship rather than a contemporary, professional employment agreement. Filipino women are dedicated mothers, wives and daughters who are working long hours in domestic spaces of a foreign country and sacrificing time spent with their own family to financially support them. During the field research, Foreign Domestic Helpers unanimously acknowledged that their working in Hong Kong and the subsequent enforced absence from their families is not a preferred employment path. Their decisions to work in Hong Kong should be recognised as made under immense pressure and self-sacrifice. Furthermore, the reality of their living and working situation in Hong Kong is a treacherous one of permanent indeterminacy. They are spatially bound to live within the compact homes of their employers, with minimal privacy and restricted autonomy, and are exposed to various strategies of discipline and subject to varied degrees of abuse and exploitation.

The next chapter examines the legalities of the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract and details of the Foreign Domestic Helper visa that are spatially binding and economically restrict Foreign Domestic Helpers to remain in their place as subjects of servitude. In effect, the legalities of the Foreign Domestic Helper operation designed and permitted by the Hong Kong government give more power to their citizen employers at the expense of sanctioning Foreign Domestic Helpers' invisibility and spacelessness.

Chapter 4
Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong: Invisibility and Spacelessness

4.1 Introduction

The depletion of space that occurs for six days a week in employer homes is one of the reasons that has motivated Foreign Domestic Helpers to reclaim physical and personal space every Sunday. As the previous chapter explored the methods of discipline and Hong Kong's history of servitude, this chapter reviews the legalities in the current Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016b) that continue to facilitate the socio-spatial divisions faced by Foreign Domestic Helpers. Foreign Domestic Helpers have been regulated to appear, work, behave, eat and speak at their employers' discretion due to the effective lack of specificity in the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract and its legal obligations. When the stipulations within the contract are analysed, they reveal an absence of protection for Foreign Domestic Helpers and the hidden leniencies awarded toward their employers. As such the employment contract inadvertently exerts controls over Foreign Domestic Helpers at the expense of their wellbeing. These regulations have made the Foreign Domestic Helpers a legal invisibility geared towards exacting obedience in their spaceless status as migrant workers.

Foreign Domestic Helpers are granted temporary residential permits in their contract on a two-year basis. Their visa and contract detail the requirements for their employment, however some terms and conditions have loopholes and therefore have been misinterpreted and skewed in favour of the employer. Melville Boase, a Hong Kong based English attorney and advocate for migrant workers, stated, "No matter what fine words one may have written on paper, they only have significance or meaning if they can be enforced" (Boase 1991, p. 90). More than two decades on, this statement is still relevant today. The Hong Kong Helpers Campaign, an independent organisation formed by activists in Hong Kong to promote the rights of the Foreign Domestic Helpers, has isolated three regulations within the contract that have the most negative impacts on Foreign Domestic Helpers: the two-week rule, deregulated working hours and illegal agency fees (Hong Kong Helpers Campaign 2016). These regulations are problematic because they collectively disempower the Foreign Domestic Helpers. In effect, this deprivation of power and autonomy influences Foreign Domestic Helpers to obey and self-discipline to secure their employment. Through many conversations with Foreign Domestic Helpers of various age groups during the field research in Hong Kong,

it has become clear that their main objective for working in Hong Kong is to support their families back home. This is also evident in the research findings of Constable (2007), Law (2001), Lindio-McGovern (2013) and Parrenas (2001; 2008) whose works closely examine Filipino migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and in other countries. This motivation prioritises their families' needs before themselves and, combined with their precarious status as temporary residents and given their work and accommodation is directly provided by the employers, discourages them from vocalising issues and problems or pursuing claims of abuse. Anthropologist Nicole Constable noted that even when the Foreign Domestic Helpers know their rights, many choose not to act because of the processes and financial costs involved, which they cannot afford at the expense of their employment (Constable 2007, p. 119). In the words of Diana (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> I'd rather stay quiet and not make a fuss or make them [her employers] unhappy. I want to stay here [in Hong Kong] so I can get more money and my children can go to school outside the village. They can be better in the future. I'm ok to be here.

Sociologist Rhacel Salazar Parrenas describes four key dislocations that Filipino domestic workers experience in their global migratory labour process: pain of the transnational household, contradictory class mobility, non-belonging and partial citizenship (Parrenas 2001, p. 23). Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong are no exception to such dislocations. They also operate under confrontational methods of spatial, behavioural and bodily discipline which are directly prescribed by or indirectly permitted by the legalities of their employment. As discussed in the preface, the disparity in translation within the terminologies used in the Chinese and English versions of the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract misrepresents the expectations of employment. It also disadvantages the Foreign Domestic Helpers as the Hong Kong Chinese employers have the capacity to command the terms of employment that denote the master-servant relationship. The contract also outlines the minimum wage permitted as below that of Hong Kong citizens, does not require a separate bedroom for the Foreign Domestic Helper within the home, and gives leniency towards employers in the termination of the employment contract intersected by the two-week rule. These aspects reinforce the Foreign Domestic Helpers' subordinate position as they allow their employers to exercise discipline and control at their discretion.

This chapter highlights the negative impacts of such policies by including the obstacles faced by Foreign Domestic Helpers where the legalities of the contract sympathise with

the Hong Kong employers and ultimately give power to the employers at the expense of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' disempowerment. These experiences illuminate the ways in which government policies are regulated in a spirit contrary to the international labour convention – ILO Convention 189, the Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (ILO 2011). One of the main objectives of Convention 189 (ILO 2011, p. 1) advocates:

> The consideration that domestic work continues to be undervalued and invisible and is mainly carried out by women and girls, many of whom are migrants or members of disadvantaged communities and who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in respect of conditions of employment and of work, and to other abuses of human rights.

The convention outlines the fundamental principles and rights at work for domestic workers including fair wages, effective protection against all forms of abuse and harassment, appropriate living conditions and decent accommodation, weekly rest and regular rest breaks, due regard and respect for their health and wellbeing, and effective access to legal assistance and other legitimate dispute resolution mechanisms.

The rule that has the most negative impact on the Foreign Domestic Helpers' socio-spatial disintegration is the live-in requirement. This restricts all Foreign Domestic Helpers to live in their employers' homes, which simultaneously nullifies their right to rent property independently in Hong Kong. From the first moment Foreign Domestic Helpers arrive in Hong Kong, they are absorbed into the intimate, private domestic spaces of their employment. Throughout their labour, the lack of privacy, physical separation and personal space outside of work hours make it difficult for Foreign Domestic Helpers to mentally disconnect from work. This absence of division between work and rest creates an unhealthy domestic atmosphere for both parties, where the employers have less privacy at home among family members and the Foreign Domestic Helpers have minimal or no room to retreat to or separate themselves from being constantly under surveillance.

As mentioned in Chapter Three the cross-contamination of the domestic space and workplace negatively impacts both Foreign Domestic Helpers and employers. For Foreign Domestic Helpers, the blurring of these spatial boundaries has created dangerous and exploitative scenarios that expose the Foreign Domestic Helpers to the risks of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. This chapter builds on this to show that the deprivation of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' private space is amplified by the terms within the contract, leading to Foreign Domestic Helpers' spacelessness in Hong Kong. The term "spacelessness" is used in

the thesis to describe the condition where the Foreign Domestic Helpers have minimal to no physical and personal space of their own within their employment. Sympathising with the spatial limitations of Hong Kong's domestic environments, the legalities of the employment contract appear to be framed around the privileges of the Hong Kong employers. These imbalanced sanctions silence the Foreign Domestic Helpers and render them spaceless – with no space of their own – and therefore invisible. The narrative of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' disempowerment acts as a compass to navigate the socio-spatial ecology they cultivate in public spaces every Sunday.

4.2 Overworked and underpaid

Long working hours is the single biggest complaint among Foreign Domestic Helpers (Asian Migrant Centre 2001; 2005; 2008; Constable 2007; Hong Kong Helpers Campaign 2016; Mission for Migrant Workers 2014). As shown by the interviews of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Chapter Three, time is used by the employers at their discretion to exert excessive discipline and control over the Foreign Domestic Helpers' work and free time. The cross-contamination of the workplace and home blurs the boundaries between rest and work, which minimises Foreign Domestic Helpers' privacy. The deregulated working hours and low wages further disempower the Foreign Domestic Helpers within their space and labour. According to the Practical Guide for the Employment of Foreign Domestic Helpers (Hong Kong SAR Labour Department 2016), all Foreign Domestic Helpers are entitled to a monthly wage of no less than the legal Minimum Allowable Wage for Foreign Domestic Helpers of HKD$4210 and one weekly rest day of no less than a continuous period of 24 hours. Amongst interviewees, the lowest monthly wage is HKD$4200 (USD$545) and the highest is HKD$5500 (USD$714). It is commonly practised that Sunday is the usual day off work for Foreign Domestic Helpers, however some employers might require assistance on Sunday in exchange for another day off.

Most Foreign Domestic Helpers prefer to have Sunday as their designated day off work because they can align their time off with other Foreign Domestic Helpers, and with their family in the Philippines, who they can connect with via technological devices. Some interviewed Foreign Domestic Helpers also noted that they enjoy Sunday because they can go to an early church service with their friends and it can be a more festive occasion. Adhering to the Minimum Allowable Wage and one weekly rest day appear to be reasonable. However what is not specified within the contract is the acceptable number of working hours each day. The lack of standardised working hours exploits the Foreign Domestic Helpers' labour and

their equivalent monthly wage per hour fluctuates depending on how many hours they are actually on duty. In response to the lack of standardised working hours for Foreign Domestic Helpers, the Hong Kong SAR Labour Department and Immigration Department claim that household work cannot be measured and that precise work hours would be too difficult to enforce (Constable 2007, p. 133-6). This response disadvantages the Foreign Domestic Helpers and reflects an allowance for individual employers to determine acceptable work hours. All of the Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed work approximately 15 hours per day or between 7 am to 10 pm Monday to Saturday, which they claim to be the "industry standard". If so, this is an average of 15 working hours each day, equating to 90 hours each week. According to Hong Kong SAR Labour Department's Employment Ordinance (2012), the average weekly working hours for full-time employees in Hong Kong regardless of labour sector or residency status is 49 hours. Foreign Domestic Helpers work nearly double this amount. Non-standardised working hours have been a contentious issue in Hong Kong for both citizens and foreigners. Currently, there are no general statutory provisions for maximum working hours, overtime limits or overtime pay in Hong Kong (Hong Kong SAR Labour Department 2012).

Many of the Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed expressed physical exhaustion from long working hours. Melissa, a 32-year-old Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper, who usually socialises with her friends in Statue Square on Sunday, was part of a group of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers I was introduced to by Christina (as introduced in Chapter One). At the time, Melissa had been working for the same Hong Kong employer for six years. She recalled the long hours of her daily routine at work (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> When I first started, M'am [her female employer] asked me to wake up at 6.30 am every morning and go to sleep by 9 pm at night. They leave the house at 8.30 am in the morning and I take the boy [employers' child] to school at that time. Many nights M'am and Sir [her male employer] finish work and are home by 9 pm. So I cook for them and clean up after. I do not stop working until around 11 pm. I also have to check on the boy and he goes to sleep about 8 am but he wakes up and wants to stay up longer when they [her employers] come home. Sometimes I get in trouble for not making him sleep earlier.

With this daily schedule, Melissa was expected to be on duty for nearly 16.5 hours each day. Although her employers have set a daily standard work period for her, it was often difficult to abide by those hours. In households where there are infants, young children or

the elderly, Foreign Domestic Helpers often have to wake up throughout the night and are expected to begin work the next day on scheduled time. From the employer's perspective, Foreign Domestic Helpers usually have several hours during the day at home when the children are at school and the adults are at work, which was considered as 'free time' (Constable 2007, p. 96-101). This assumption is false because within that period, Foreign Domestic Helpers are still technically on duty. They should and would be attending to other chores, such as shopping for groceries, cleaning the house, washing clothes, and walking the dog. As discussed in some cases in earlier chapters, employers have scheduled chores in 15-minute increments to fill up the Foreign Domestic Helpers' schedule, maximising their work hours and wage's worth. When asked how she usually spent her time during the day, Melissa laughed, "Working! I am still working" (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). She described a typical day after taking the child to school where she would buy groceries for the family, clean the house, sometimes run errands to the post office or to the dry cleaners, iron clothes, and prepare food for cooking: "Of course I keep working, just nobody is here to see" (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). Whether Melissa was actively engaged in a task or was between tasks, she was technically on duty for approximately 99 hours of work each week.

Depreciation of wages

In 2015, Melissa's monthly wage was HKD$4600 (approximately USD$592) which was above the Minimum Allowable Wage of HKD$4210 (approximately USD$542). The statutory minimum hourly rate for Hong Kong citizens since May 2015 is HKD$32.50 or USD$4.18 (Hong Kong SAR Labour Department 2015). To illustrate mathematically how Melissa's wage depreciates with her long hours of work, her hourly rate can be calculated by dividing her monthly wage by her daily hours of work multiplied by the number of work days each month:

$$4600 / (16.5 \times 25) = \text{HKD\$11.15 (approximately USD\$1.35)}$$

Melissa's hourly rate of USD$1.35 as a Foreign Domestic Helper is one-third of the Statutory Minimum Wage of Hong Kong citizens' hourly rate of USD$4.43 as awarded by the Minimum Wage Ordinance Cap.608 (Hong Kong SAR Labour Department 2017). If Melissa has shorter work days, between 10-12 hours each day, her work hours equate to approximately 260-300 hours each month, compared to her actual working hours of 412.5. This is a difference of over 100 hours. Under these more reasonable working hours,

Melissa's hourly rate could be obtained by dividing her monthly wage by the estimated working hours within the month:

> 4600 / 260 or 4600 / 300 = HKD$17.70 or $15.33
> (approximately USD$2.15 or $1.86 respectively)

Currently or speculatively, Melissa's hourly rate as a Foreign Domestic Helper, at best, can only be half the rate of Hong Kong citizens' legal hourly rate. This meagre rate is unjust. However, beyond showing how low her real hourly wage is, it is how much Melissa's income depreciates due to the lack of standardised working hours that is most problematic. The difference between the number of working hours in her current routine compared to the speculated scenarios of a regulated 10-12 hours is 112 to 150 hours of labour each month. This is a significant difference.

Based on these calculations, it is apparent that Melissa and many Foreign Domestic Helpers are often paid disproportionately to the hours of work they realistically do. The deregulation of Foreign Domestic Helper working hours allows employers to exploit the Foreign Domestic Helpers' labour and personal time, while appearing to pay them the legal monthly wage.

Privately negotiated wages

Aside from the imbalance of working hours to minimal wage, another problem lies in precarious situations where the Foreign Domestic Helpers independently agree to or were coerced to receiving wages below the legal standard. As Boase (1991) noted on the (un) enforceability of contractual terms, specificity in the employment contract is only meaningful to the Foreign Domestic Helper if the employer respects and upholds their responsibility in the agreement. There are instances where Foreign Domestic Helpers enter into agreements with employers where they are paid below the minimum wage, on the basis of a verbally-promised pay rise in the near future (Asian Migrant Centre 2001; 2004; Constable 2007). Ten of the 35 Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed initiated their work with a monthly wage below the legal Minimum Allowable Wage.

When Mary, a 35-year-old Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper who was a friend of Melissa, first arrived in Hong Kong in 2008, the Minimum Allowable Wage for Foreign Domestic Helpers was HKD$3480 (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2009). Mary was initially offered HKD$3000 as her monthly wage and claimed she only agreed because she felt she did not have the power to negotiate and her family was in need of financial support

(2015, pers. comm., 8 February). Her employers promised a pay rise of HKD$100 every six months if her performance was satisfactory. This transaction was discussed verbally and no record was made. To pretend her wage was meeting the Minimum Allowable Wage standard, her employers asked her to sign a fake receipt every month, forging that she was receiving a monthly wage of HKD$3500. At the time of the renewal of her visa after two years, Mary was earning HKD$3200, instead of the promised HKD$3400 if her employers had awarded her a pay rise every six months. Mary asked to be paid at least the Minimum Allowable Wage after the first two years, to which her employers responded she did not deserve those pay rises without giving an explanation why not. In addition, her employers threatened to terminate her contract and hire someone 'cheaper' to replace her if she took further 'action'. Mary spoke to an advocate at the Mission for Migrant Workers and they encouraged her to find a more reasonable employer. Mary expressed anxiety about the falsified receipts she was forced to sign and feared that without a new employment contract, she would be deported back to the Philippines. The two-week rule means all Foreign Domestic Helpers have to find a new employer within two weeks after the termination of a contract. After two weeks they will be deported back to the Philippines and the whole process of application begins again. This rule is another problematic aspect of the contract that is discussed further in this chapter. Given her fears, Mary ended up staying with the same employer. Three months after the renewal of her visa, with her monthly wage still below the Minimum Allowable Wage, her employers terminated her contract, claiming she was no longer suitable. Mary then approached the Mission for Migrant Workers again and they helped resettle her with a new employer within two weeks.

Situations similar to Mary's often occur unnoticed by the Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department and Labour Department. Article 10 of the ILO Convention 189 (ILO 2011, p. 5) states:

> 1. Measures shall be taken towards ensuring equal treatment between domestic workers and workers generally in relation to normal hours of work, overtime compensation, periods of daily and weekly rest and paid annual leave in accordance with national laws, regulations or collective agreements, taking into account the special characteristics of domestic work.
> 2. Weekly rest shall be at least 24 consecutive hours.
> 3. Periods during which domestic workers are not free to dispose of their time as they please and remain at the disposal of the household in

> order to respond to possible calls shall be regarded as hours of work to the extent determined by national laws, regulations or collective agreements, or any other means consistent with national practice.

Under the Employment Ordinance, which regulates the terms within the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract, only the second aspect – the weekly rest of 24 consecutive hours – advocated by the ILO Convention is implemented (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2009, p. 13). Since the Hong Kong SAR Labour Department insists that specific working hours cannot be set due to the flexible nature of domestic work, point one and three are not enacted despite the Convention's insistence on alignment with national regulations.

Hong Kong's non-compliance with all aspects of the Convention is detrimental to the wellbeing of Foreign Domestic Helpers. Situations like Mary's are problematic as not only are they unseen and often unreported, they reflect the power employers have over the Foreign Domestic Helpers and how easy it is to exert power when regulations are not enforced to ensure the protection of the more vulnerable party – in this case – the Foreign Domestic Helpers. It also makes transparent the daily anxiety that the nearly 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong could be working under every day.

Many interviewees are expected to be on duty throughout the night taking care of infants, and work according to the regular schedule the next morning. These hours are not regarded as extra work hours, rather as a standard part of their duty. The ILO Recommendation 201 (ILO 20011, p. 11) attached to Convention 189 has suggested that the maximum number of hours per week, month or year should be clearly communicated and there should be a compensatory rest period if the period of rest is interrupted by being on continual standby. The recommendations also clearly specify for domestic workers whose normal duties are performed at night, taking into account the constraint of night work, that workers should be fairly compensated (ILO 2011, p. 12). Despite upholding some aspects of the ILO Convention 189, the exclusion of standardised work hours allows Hong Kong employers to maximise for their benefit the work hours of Foreign Domestic Helpers. The deregulation of working hours and lack of compensation for hours on standby during their time of rest continue to be issues that contribute to Foreign Domestic Helpers being overworked and underpaid.

The imbalance of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' long work hours and low wage impacts their use of public spaces within Hong Kong's Central district on Sundays. Despite their long hours at work for six days each week, their wages do not allow them legitimate participation

in commercial public spaces in Hong Kong as regular consumers. Foreign Domestic Helpers cannot dine and buy goods in Central's vast landscape of shopping malls because their wage level does not permit these activities. In other words, they cannot contribute as shoppers and participate in the formal economy of Hong Kong as valued customers. Their wages can only allow them to gather on the exterior spaces that connect the shopping malls where consumerism is 'free' to share Filipino food in plastic containers, speak in Tagalog and socialise in temporary self-constructed spaces.

Foreign Domestic Helpers' status in Hong Kong is temporary and their labour is informal. Their wages are insufficient for them to become valued consumers of the capitalist society, thus they remain hidden economically and are not protected by the law. Therefore, they are invisible in the home, the workplace and in Hong Kong's economy. They are invisible contributors to Hong Kong's society and they only exist spatially, economically and legally within the continuous cycle of domestic tasks, or temporarily on their mattresses provided. The systematic physical and personal spacelessness Foreign Domestic Helpers experience for six days each week is momentarily suspended on Sunday when they appropriate and transform public spaces. Every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers have the capacity to reclaim personal and physical space within the city that has continued to sanction their invisibility.

4.3 The two-week rule

The precarious status of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong has been shaped by the lack of legal specificity within their Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract. While the lack of standardised work hours depreciates their wages and allows employers to exploit their labour, the two-week rule amplifies their anxieties of unemployment and deportation. The two-week rule requires Foreign Domestic Helpers to find a new employer within a non-negotiable period of two weeks if their employment contract is terminated. This rule applies regardless of reasons of termination.

The Hong Kong SAR Immigration and Labour Department claim the two-week rule was created to prevent Foreign Domestic Helpers from job hopping and over-staying, however statistics have never been produced to demonstrate the effectiveness of this rule (Constable 2007, p. 146). According to the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract, employers are responsible for the airfare of the Foreign Domestic Helper to her home country (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016b). If the contract is renewed, the Foreign Domestic Helper is entitled to a two-week vacation in her home country (and paid

return airfare) before the new visa begins. If no contract is to be renewed at the end of two years, the Foreign Domestic Helper must receive one month of notice and is still entitled to a single journey airfare returning to her home country. In cases where the contract is terminated without adequate notice, Foreign Domestic Helpers risk overstaying their visa and deportation while struggling to find new employers within the two weeks stated in their employment contract.

The risk of deportation, unemployment and the lack of accommodation constrain Foreign Domestic Helpers to endure poor working conditions, physical and emotional abuse and overworking in an effort to secure a contract renewal (Constable 2007; Hong Kong Helpers Campaign 2016). The Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed unanimously expressed the unfairness of the two-week rule and the pressure it creates. Ten of the interviewees have experienced unlawful termination (at least once) and were not compensated with the airfare to return home or assistance during the two-week period. Rita, a 34-year-old Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper, has been in Hong Kong for eight years and had an experience with a previous employer who, after renewing her contract once in the third year of her employment, asked her to leave with five days notice without reason (2015, pers. comm., 15 February). I met Rita on a Sunday afternoon on the elevated walkways near Exchange Square. I talked to her and three other friends for over an hour about their experiences with unreasonable dismissals. They have all expressed various grievances about the negative impacts of the two-week rule. Rita described her experience with her last employers (2015, pers. comm., 15 February):

> I was told on Tuesday afternoon by the lady [the female employer], that they wanted someone new to look after their son. I asked her why and she gave no reason. I know they [husband and wife] have been fighting the week before. I didn't know what was wrong but they have been very strange to me. Later, she said I have to be out (of their home) by Sunday, and that I should pick a date the week after to fly home (to the Philippines) if I am not staying in Hong Kong to find another employer. They said they will buy my tickets. I had to pack my bags and leave on Sunday. My friend, who is also a worker, helped me. Her employers were on vacation, so I was allowed to stay at her home for about five days. She told her employers what had happened to me and they helped me find a new employer. I was lucky because if I didn't find a new family [employers] in two weeks, I would be illegal. When I told my old employers that I

> have a new family [employers], they were very rude to me and did not pay me the money for my flights as they were supposed to. They stopped paying my wages for the last five days of work. Two months later they gave me the money, but never for the flights back to the Philippines.

Despite her abrupt dismissal, it was a fortunate outcome for Rita as she had temporary shelter and had found a new employer within two weeks. If Rita wanted to take legal action against her past employers about her dismissal without the required month's notice and compensation, she would have needed time and resources to remain in Hong Kong without income and accommodation. In many cases of abrupt termination of contract, many Foreign Domestic Helpers cannot find a new employer within two weeks. Some over-stay their visa and seek temporary shelter in migrant organisations such as the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge. The Hong Kong SAR Labour Department has claimed that the two-week rule prevents Foreign Domestic Helpers from job-hopping (Wee and Sim 2005, p. 188). In doing so, the rule protects the employers and discourages Foreign Domestic Helpers from leaving their employers at the risk of unemployment and deportation. Clauses 10 and 11 of the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2012, p. 2) give contradictory information that ultimately gives more power to employers to terminate a Foreign Domestic Helper's contract without legitimate reason. Clause 10 states that either party can terminate the contract with a month's notice, however Clause 11 disregards the need for notice if there were probable circumstances as permitted in Chapter 57 of the Employment Ordinance which include (Hong Kong SAR Labour Department 2016, p. 20):

> (a) wilfully disobeys a lawful and reasonable order;
> (b) misconducts himself/herself, such conduct being inconsistent with the due and faithful discharge of his/her duties;
> (c) is guilty of fraud or dishonesty;
> (d) is habitually neglectful in his/her duties; or
> (e) has caused the employer, on any other ground, to be entitled to terminate the contract without notice at common law.

The clause contains terms such as "wilful disobedience", "reasonable order", "misconduct" and "dishonesty" without definition or further clarification. This is problematic as the employers can interpret these terms of reference to suit their reasons for termination. Part E of the clause is the most problematic as it gives the employers the right to terminate the contract on any other ground. This demonstrates the ultimate control that employers have over the Foreign Domestic Helpers – dismissal without accountability.

Clause 11 also outlines the permissible grounds where the helper can terminate the contract without notice (Hong Kong SAR Labour Department 2016, p. 21):

> (a) if he/she reasonably fears physical danger by violence or disease which was not contemplated by his/her contract of employment expressly or by necessary implication;
> (b) if he/she is subject to ill-treatment by the employer; or
> (c) on any other ground on which he/she would be entitled to terminate the contract without notice at common law.

Due to the pressure that the two-week rule places on the importance of renewing an employment contract, the vast majority of contracts terminated before the expiry date are not terminated by the Foreign Domestic Helpers but by the employers (Constable 2007). Mary and Rita have had their employment terminated on the grounds of being 'no longer suitable' without reason. Other interviewees also raised not being given substantial grounds for their dismissal, echoing similar sentiments and stating that they have been treated unreasonably until they had to make a decision to find new employers before their contracts finished. The probable circumstances in Chapter 57 of the Employment Ordinance for the employer to terminate the contract such as misconduct or negligence are not defined specifically with examples, thus the employers can make the decision with only their interests in mind at their discretion. Contrastingly, the grounds for Foreign Domestic Helpers to terminate the contract are more severe and personal – physical danger or ill-treatment – which reflects the difference in the power relation between employers and Foreign Domestic Helpers, and effectively the subordinate position of Foreign Domestic Helpers in the contractual relationship. Foreign Domestic Helpers have much more at stake as their contracts represent both their income and shelter in Hong Kong, and their families in the Philippines depend on their ability to earn a consistent income.

The two-week rule is established with the intention to deter Foreign Domestic Helpers from job-hopping. In reality, the rule has produced opportunities for employers to exploit the labour of Foreign Domestic Helpers, and unfairly terminate their contract. The power imbalance suggested in the contract is also evident in the documentation required for termination. When a Foreign Domestic Helper employment contract is terminated, the employers are required to submit a form to the Immigration Department. The one page 'Notification of Termination of Employment Contract with Foreign Domestic Helper' shows the reason for termination not listed as a category on its own, rather a fine print at the end of the document above the signatures, with a bracketed 'optional' (Hong Kong SAR

Immigration Department 2010). This demonstrates how little relevance the legitimate reason for termination is given and reflects the precarious and disposable nature of the employment agreement.

The Hong Kong Domestic Helpers Campaign (2016) claims that Hong Kong violates international standards with the implementation of the two-week rule. Articles 30 and 31 of the ILO Migrant Workers Recommendations (ILO 1975) state "the loss of employment should not in itself imply the withdrawal of the worker's residence". It also recommends that migrant workers should be given sufficient time to find alternative employment with residence extended accordingly. The Hong Kong Domestic Helpers Campaign (2016), ILO (2013) and Amnesty International (2013) have been calling for the abolition of the two-week rule for over a decade. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Hong Kong is a signatory, argued that the two-week rule pushes Foreign Domestic Helpers to "accept employment which may have unfair or abusive terms and conditions in order to stay in Hong Kong" (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2012, p. 62). Furthermore, a report published by the United Nations Economic and Social Council proposed that Hong Kong should repeal the two-week rule and "address discrimination and abuse against migrant domestic workers as a consequence of this rule" (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2013, p. 5). Alongside the UN Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Oxfam have also urged the Hong Kong authorities to repeal the rule as it has a direct impact on the conditions of employment and living conditions of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong.

The two-week rule negatively impacts on Foreign Domestic Helpers' socio-spatial wellbeing as the terms within the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract continue to disempower them and give hidden leniencies to employers to exert controls over the Foreign Domestic Helpers. The rule also becomes a pressure point that is suspended over the Foreign Domestic Helpers' time at work, as their income, shelter and legitimacy in Hong Kong are interconnected and could be denied without legitimate reason and legal protection that supports them. In this way, Foreign Domestic Helpers are more likely to remain silent and comply with working long hours and other unprofessional requests. Their lack of personal space within their employer's home can also become a superfluous feature that they would forfeit as long as they are employed.

4.4 Accommodation: sanctioned spacelessness

Among the regulations that govern the Foreign Domestic Helpers' temporary residency in Hong Kong, the live-in requirement is the most detrimental provision as it limits the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatial mobility by assigning them one space to work and live in – their employers' homes. This regulation has provided private grounds for employers to exert control and discipline over the Foreign Domestic Helpers at their discretion. Every Sunday, the impact of this regulation manifests in public spaces where thousands of Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in series of domestic rituals as if they had private spaces of their own. They appropriate and transform public spaces to reclaim the spatial autonomy they are deprived of. Every Sunday, they resist the sanctioned spacelessness prescribed by their labour.

In August 2015, a Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper leapt to her death from her employer's apartment window when she was allegedly accused of theft. The 47-year-old Foreign Domestic Helper was caught sifting through the handbag of a female friend of the employers and was asked to pack her bag and leave. It was understood that the Foreign Domestic Helper became stressed and inconsolable before jumping out of the bedroom window. Eman Villanueva, the vice-chairman of the Filipino Migrant Workers Union in Hong Kong, urged the police to investigate further and spoke publicly about the negative effects of the live-in policy (*South China Morning Post* 20 August 2015):

> It goes back again to the issue of domestic helpers not being allowed to live outside, where they can have access to friends. Speaking to someone about it is the first thing to do. They are working in the flat six days a week and this is very stressful. It is paramount that all domestic helpers in difficult situations should stay calm and contact their friends or NGOs, which would advise them what their rights were and what they could do.

This incident is a poignant example of the negative impacts and consequential effects that the live-in policy has on Foreign Domestic Helpers. Their lack of spatial mobility and autonomy reinforces their position as a servant and breeds their inferiority and invisibility. The cross-contamination of the domestic space and the workplace creates an unhealthy domestic atmosphere for both the employers and the Foreign Domestic Helpers, who are both continuously on duty as employers and employees, without pause. Constable (2007, p. 109) contends that the delineation of household territories and the use of space within the home serve as status makers and means of discipline. Almost all of the Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed (33 of the 35) did not have a separate bedroom to themselves and

they complained of being powerless within the home because they have no space of their own". It is common practice that they share a bedroom with one or two children and sometimes the grandmother.

Mary, in her seven years of employment in Hong Kong, has never had a room of her own (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). She first started working when her employers' child was an infant and she has been sharing the bedroom with the child since the child was a one year old and the child was now eight years old (at the time of the interview). She recalled the difficulties in the first couple of years as she was on duty throughout the night when the child was still an infant. At the time I met Mary, her employers had divorced so she had the child's bedroom to herself for one night of the week while the child stayed with the father.

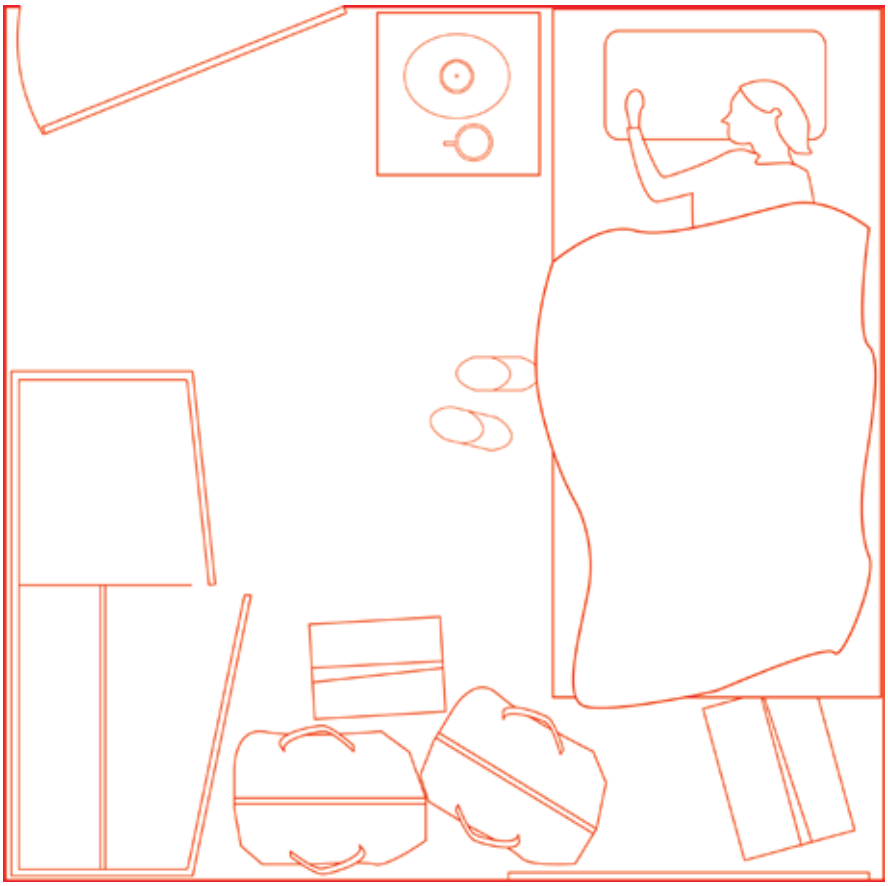


Figure 10 **Drawing of Janet's sleeping arrangement in her employer's home as described by the interviewee, 2015**, Janet is one of two interviewees that have a room of their own in their employers' home. Digital plan drawing recreated by the author, reproduced with permission.

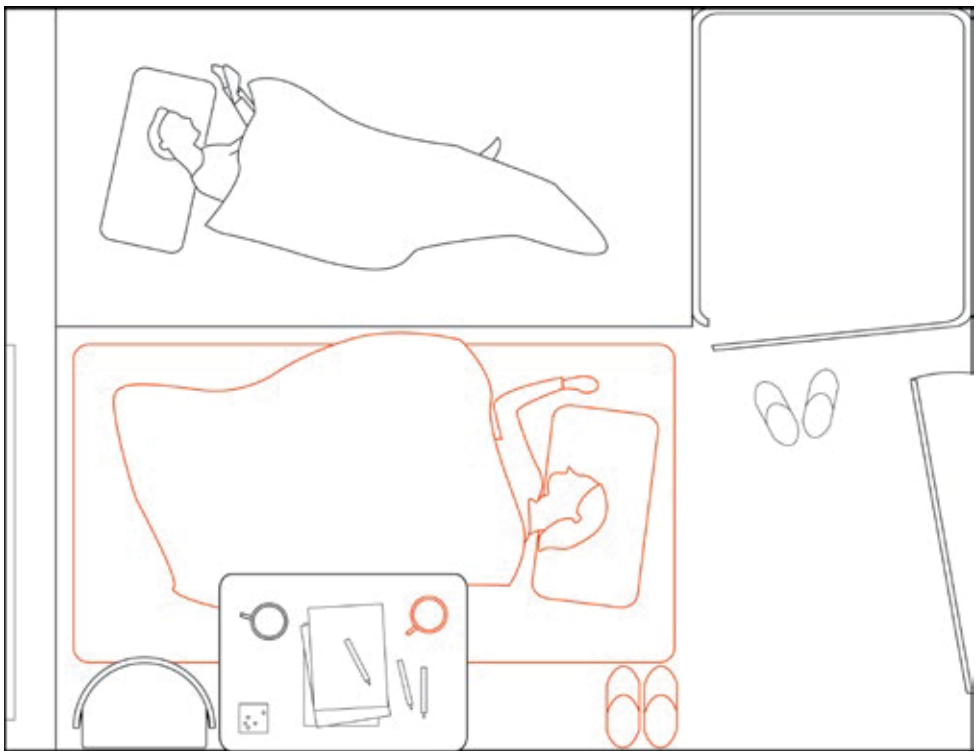


Figure 10a **Drawing of Mary's sleeping arrangement in her employer's home as described by the interviewee, 2015**, digital plan drawing recreated by the author, reproduced with permission.

Through Mary, I met her friend, Danielle, a 31-year-old Foreign Domestic Helper from the Philippines. Her sleeping arrangement was a makeshift bed in the living room. Danielle has been working for four years in Hong Kong with the same employers who have two children and a grandmother residing in a three-bedroom apartment. She recalled that the grandmother did not want to share a room with her, which left her no other option but to sleep on a mattress in the communal area of the apartment (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> She [the grandmother] said she doesn't like me in the same room [as her]. So m'am [female employer] asked me to sleep outside [in the living room]. Everyone goes back into their bedroom at about 10.30 pm at night so I sleep then, but sometimes I have to move when there's soccer on TV. M'am is nice because she bought me a wall [a divider] that I can use to separate from the others but I can still hear the noise. It is very hard sometimes to sleep peacefully.

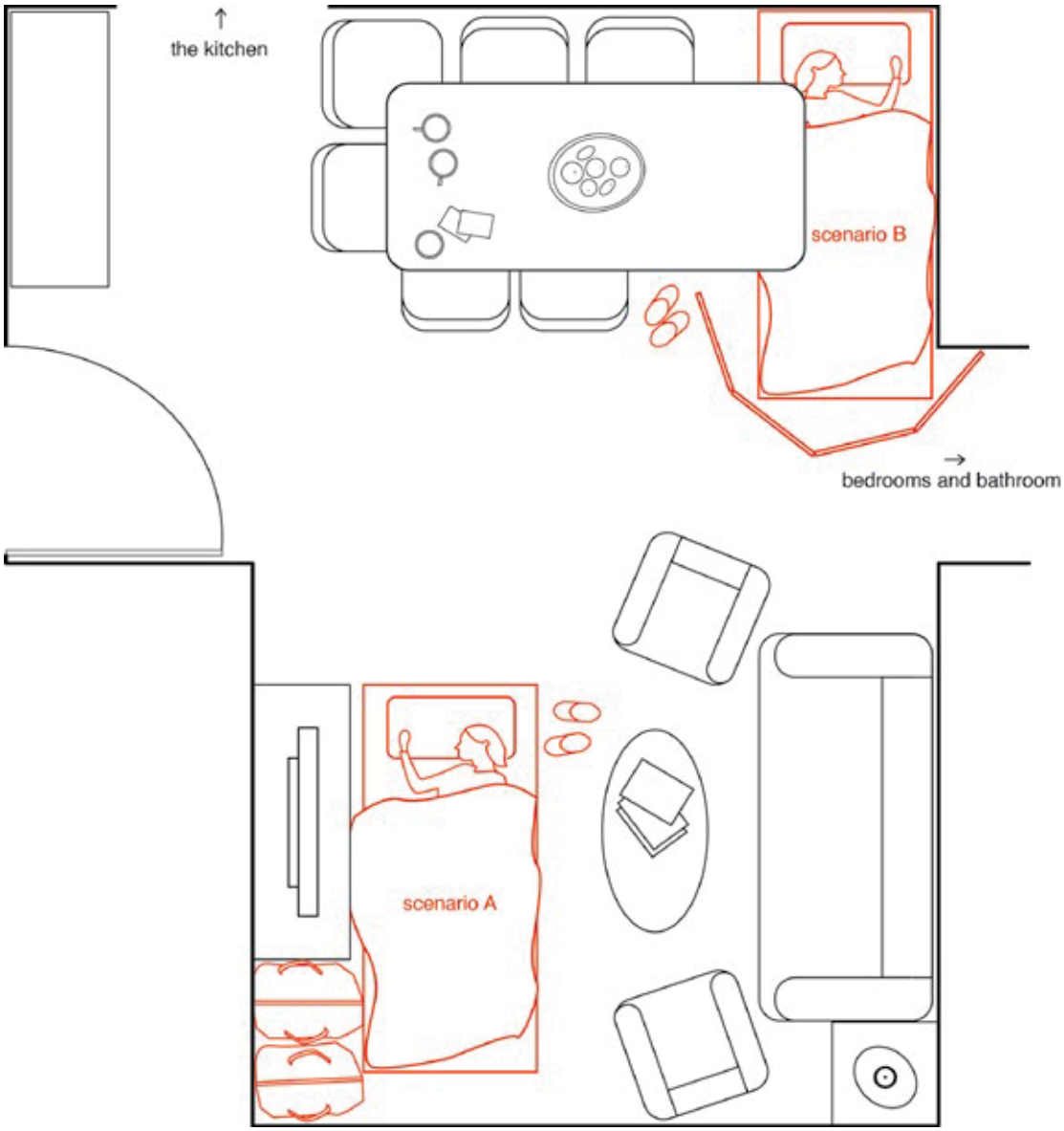


Figure 11 **Drawing of Danielle's sleeping arrangements next to the TV unit (scenario A) and under the dining table (scenario B) in her employer's home as described by the interviewee, 2015**, digital plan drawing recreated by the author, reproduced with permission.

Danielle described her makeshift bed as a thin, foldable single bed-sized mattress placed next to the television unit in the living room. She had a pillow, a blanket and wore an eye mask to sleep. When the television was used late at night, she moved her mattress to the dining area where half of the mattress was tucked under the table. She used the thin divider to create a semi-enclosed space between her mattress, the dining table and the adjacent wall.

I sat with Danielle and Mary on their temporary space on the elevated walkway near Exchange Square. Their space was made up of flattened cardboard three pieces wide by five pieces long. They had created vertical barriers with three cardboard pieces that separated their space from the pedestrian thoroughfare. The vertical pieces were held up by sticky tape and hinged with string on the corners connected to the top of the balustrade of the elevated walkway. At the time of the interview, only Danielle, Mary and I were sitting in their cardboard structure, but I was informed that they usually share it with two other friends, who were running errands at World Wide House. Their temporary space was approximately 1500 mm by 3000 mm long. The vertical pieces stood approximately 800 mm high. Although she had to share this space, the group could expand the size of their gathering space as they wished. Compared to the makeshift bed space Danielle had for six days each week in her employer's home, her temporary space on Sunday on the elevated walkway was nearly three times as large.

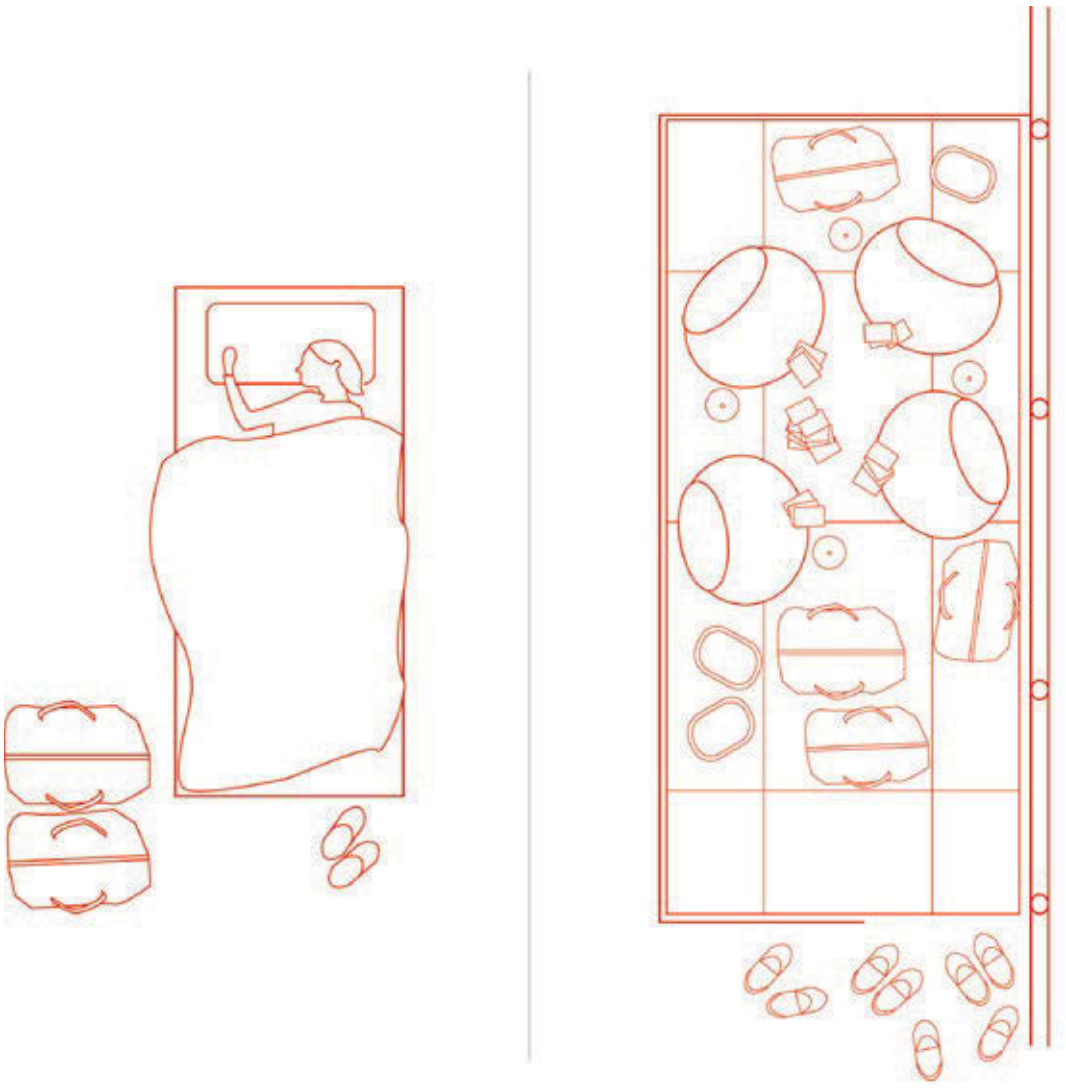


Figure 12 **Drawing comparing the size of Danielle's space in her employer's home (left) and that of the cardboard unit she occupies on the Central Elevated Walkway on Sunday (right), 2015**, digital diagram recreated by author, reproduced with permission. Note: the spaces are drawn to scale to each other, but they are not to scale in print.

Danielle's circumstance was not unique, which echoes the findings of other researchers and organisations (Amnesty International 2013; Asian Migration Centre 2004; Constable 2007; Law 2001; Zoitl 2008). Of the 35 Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed, 21 slept on mattresses in children's bedrooms, 12 slept in communal spaces with or without spatial dividers, and only two had their own bedroom. In rare circumstances where Foreign Domestic Helpers have a room of their own, these rooms might not be regular bedrooms, rather they are large cupboards or wardrobes, laundry rooms or windowless rooms created by inserting a divider or temporary wall at the end of the corridor. Nicole Constable notes through her research that in cases where Foreign Domestic Helpers have their own 'quarters', they are generally a small windowless bedroom and if they have their own 'servant's bathroom', it typically has less fixtures than the family bathroom, a squat toilet rather than a seat, and a shower that is a faucet that drains to a hole in the floor rather than a separate shower stall (Constable 2007, p. 109). Of the two Foreign Domestic Helpers I met who had their own room, one had a regular bedroom while the other was sleeping in a room that was once a walkin wardrobe. All of the Foreign Domestic Helpers who did not have their own bedroom mentioned the discomfort, difficulties and other unpleasant experiences due to the lack of their own private bedroom.

Makeshift bedroom

The omission of standard requirements such as a separate bedroom for Foreign Domestic Helpers within the employers' homes in the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract is problematic as employers provide what they deem as acceptable accommodation for the Foreign Domestic Helpers. The style of sleeping arrangement that employers see as appropriate often differs from the Foreign Domestic Helpers' realistic needs. As outlined in the examples recalled by the interviewees, most of them have been provided with makeshift sleeping arrangements that are not suited to privacy or conducive to restful sleep.

The *Guidebook for the Employment of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2015, p. 9). states "the worker should work and reside in the employers' home in accordance with the Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties in the Foreign Domestic Helper employment contract."

The main points of the *Revised Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties* (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016, p. 1-2) are summarised below:

1. Consent to the provisions set out in the schedule from the employer and helper.

2. The approximate size of the residence provided in dimensions and the number of persons to be served in the residence, including their age, gender and whether any of them will require constant care such as infants and the elderly.
3. Accommodation and facilities to be provided to the helper.
4. The Foreign Domestic Helper should only perform domestic duties within the employer's home.
5. List of domestic duties that are expected to be performed by the helper and the acknowledgement that the helper should only perform duties within the employer's residence.
6. The employer is also required to submit a new schedule should any substantial changes occur.

Accommodation and Facilities to Be Provided (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016, p. 1) follows on with accommodation requirements and has two parts. Part A reads:

> While the average flat size in Hong Kong is relatively small and the availability of separate servant room is not common, the Employer should provide the Helper suitable accommodation and with reasonable privacy. Examples of unsuitable accommodation are: The Helper having to sleep on made-do beds in the corridor with little privacy, sharing a room with an adult/ teenager of the opposite sex, etc.

In this excerpt of the English version of the contract, the term "*Helper*" and "*Servant*" were used in the same sentence to refer to the Foreign Domestic Helper. The ambiguity in terminology continues to reflect the perception of the Foreign Domestic Helper as a domestic helper and a family servant.

The employer has the options of selecting (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016, p. 1):

> Yes. Estimated size of servant room _____ *square feet/square metres.
> Or
> No. Accommodation arrangement for the Helper:
> - Share a room with _____ child/children aged _____
> - Separate partitioned area of _____ *square feet/square metres
> - Others. Please describe.

As stated, it is not compulsory for the employer to provide a separate bedroom for the Foreign Domestic Helper. By listing examples of other options if a room is not provided, the clause reflects sympathy towards the employer and the spatial limitations of the average Hong Kong housing situation. It negates concern for the lack of privacy and the consequential negative impacts that the Foreign Domestic Helpers experience from this discretion. Disallowing accommodation separate from their place of work already undermines the fundamental need and common practice of daily alleviation away from work in other occupations. It also dissolves the Foreign Domestic Helper's time on and time off work, which advantages the employers as it allows the continuous control of their labour through day and night. By accepting other forms of accommodation that are less than a separate bedroom, the clause allows the employer to restrict the Foreign Domestic Helper's private space and disregards the importance of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' physical and psychological wellbeing. The flexible description of accommodation allows the Foreign Domestic Helper's personal space to be a negotiable term at the employer's discretion. Their privacy becomes not a necessity but an abstract notion further reinforcing a continual labour on demand. Despite the clause stating that "made-do beds in the corridors with little privacy" are unsuitable, many employers have ignored this clause by providing Foreign Domestic Helpers with makeshift beds within the shared spaces of the apartment with little to no privacy.

On acceptable standards for domestic workers' accommodation within employers' homes, Article 6 of the ILO Convention 189 (ILO 2011, p. 3) states:

> Each member shall take measures to ensure that domestic workers, like workers generally, enjoy fair terms of employment as well as decent working conditions and, if they reside in the household, decent living conditions that respect their privacy.

This article is supported by the recommendation that when accommodation and food is provided for, the following are essential (ILO 2011, p. 13):

> (a) a separate, private room that is suitably furnished, adequately ventilated and equipped with a lock, the key to which should be provided to the domestic worker.
> (b) access to suitable sanitary facilities, shared or private.
> (c) adequate lighting and, as appropriate, heating and air conditioning in keeping with prevailing conditions within the household.

> (d) meals of good quality and sufficient quantity, adapted to the extent reasonable to the cultural and religious requirements, if any, of the domestic worker concerned.

Many Hong Kong employers do not uphold such recommendations. However, they have satisfied the loose requirements within Hong Kong's Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract. As previously pointed out, in many cases Foreign Domestic Helpers' sleeping arrangements take the form of a mattress on the floor of the child's bedroom (Amnesty International 2013, p. 11; Wohrer 2008, p. 50-57). Amnesty International (2013) reported over 60% of Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed did not have a room of their own in their employers' home. Mariam, a 33-year-old Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper, had worked for the same Hong Kong employer for six years and has never had a bedroom of her own (2015, pers. comm., 15 February). Every Sunday, her temporary cardboard unit stood next to Mary and her friends' on the elevated walkway. Mariam described her sleeping arrangement as a single-sized mattress placed on the floor of the children's bedroom. There were two children in the room, girls aged four and six. At night she slept on the mattress placed on the floor between the two girls' beds. In the morning the mattress can be folded into three parts and stored upright in the corner of the bedroom. Mariam constantly had backaches and enquired about obtaining a more supportive mattress or even a proper bed. Her employers were willing to replace the mattress with a new one that had more support. Nonetheless it was a foldable mattress as ease of storage determined the priority and quality of the mattress. Realistically, there was not enough space in the children's bedroom for a permanent bed and no other viable space in the house for Mariam to use. Mariam spoke of her frustration (2015, pers. comm., 15 February):

> I rather sleep in the girls' room than in the living room. There is very little room anyway. I am at least not sleeping in the kitchen. Once they [her employers] joked that the only room that can fit a bed is the bathroom, over the bathtub. They were joking! I would not like to be sleeping in the bathroom!

Figure 13 **Drawing of Mariam's sleeping arrangement in her employer's home as described by the interviewee, 2015**, digital plan drawing recreated by the author, reproduced with permission.

Part B of the Revised Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties refers to the facilities provided that require employers to select 'yes' or 'no' to the items below:

(a) light and water supply
(b) toilet and bathing facilities
(c) bed
(d) blankets and quilts
(e) pillows
(f) wardrobe
(g) refrigerator
(h) desk
(i) other facilities.

This list includes a disclaimer that reads: "Application for entry visa will normally not be approved if the essential facilities from item a) to f) are not provided free" (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2016, p. 2).

As the bedroom Mariam shares with the children had barely enough space, she was also not provided with storage or a wardrobe of her own, instead she shared part of the small wardrobe with the children. Most of her clothes were folded in her suitcase and stored under the bed of one of the girls. Mariam's employers had not fulfilled the criteria in the list of requirements and the disclaimer. As the schedule does not define what is acceptable as a wardrobe, a bed or give examples of the variations of such features, they can be interpreted and skewed to the convenience of the employers.

More importantly, similar to the criteria for a separate space and its listed variations, the facilities are set out as options that may be negotiated or not provided by the employers at their discretion. The items on the list are everyday essentials that should not be optional but mandatory. The disclaimer noting that the visa will *normally* not be approved if selected items were not provided implies the possibility that the visa may still be approved in special circumstances. The document should clearly define the mandatory essentials of everyday, ensuring the employers are providing a healthy, safe and supportive domestic environment for the Foreign Domestic Helpers to work and reside in. However, the lack of specific mandates in the schedule reflects sympathy and leniency toward the employers' spatial limitations, prioritising such limitations above the quality of living of Foreign Domestic Helpers in the homes of their employers. In addition, the clauses within the live-in policy have caused the spacelessness of Foreign Domestic Helpers in the home.

Outside of her sleeping hours, Mariam's mattress and personal belongings were stored away and out of sight in her employer's home. Ultimately, she could claim no legitimate space of her own inside this home. Her privacy was limited to time she spent in the bathroom and spatially contained within her collapsible mattress between the children's beds. Conceivably it can be suggested that Mariam is spatially 'invisible' for the majority of her work and living. For six days each week, Mariam, Mary, Danielle and many Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong become visible only in the list of continuous domestic duties. Their occupancy at home is neither provided nor settled and as such is considered transitory. From the outset, the legalities of their labour are lenient toward the employers. This leniency gives more power to the employers to limit the Foreign Domestic Helpers' space in the employer's home. This depletion of space perpetuates the invisibility and spacelessness of Foreign Domestic Helpers, thus disempowering them and encouraging a culture of docile and disciplined domestic workers.

Spatial confinement

Another indication of spatial restrictions as a means of discipline and control over Foreign Domestic Helpers is that they are not permitted to come and go as they please. Foreign Domestic Helpers generally do not have the autonomy to step outside of the home to momentarily take a break as other employees in their places of work are generally allowed or indeed have a right to. The contract does not mention regular breaks to be given in a given workday. Many Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed recalled their employers specifically instructing them to be informed before taking small breaks outside of the apartment. In some extreme cases, six interviewees indicated that their employers have occasionally locked the front door from the outside as they left the apartment, which prevented the Foreign Domestic Helpers from leaving the apartment until the employers returned.

Some Foreign Domestic Helpers have confronted their employers about this and the responses were about it being some kind of protective gesture. Danielle recalled an incident on a Saturday, when the entire family was not at home. In the afternoon, the building's fire alarm sounded and she discovered the metal door beyond the apartment's front door was locked from the outside, preventing her from leaving. In the end, it was a false alarm but she did alert the neighbours and they planned to break open the gate to release her if the situation became dire. Later on, Danielle raised her concerns with her employers, but they dismissed her concerns and told her not to panic about a false alarm and she should not

hassle their neighbours. Danielle's employers claimed that it is for her safety that they lock her inside the home (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> I am able to take care of myself. I take care of them, why can't I take care of myself in the home alone? I was very scared when I could not get out when the alarm was going.

Denying Foreign Domestic Helpers their private space and freedom to take small breaks outside the home during their long working hours is a restrictive and unnecessary measure. Constable (2007, p. 110) notes some extreme circumstances where Foreign Domestic Helpers have been locked inside their employer's home for weeks when the employers went on vacation and food had to be passed to the Foreign Domestic Helper through the gaps of the locked metal gate.

Spatial restrictions within the home curtail the Foreign Domestic Helpers' already minimal mobility and render them invisible and powerless within the home. The employers' homes, which are also the Foreign Domestic Helpers' so-called homes and workplace although they cannot freely come and go, have no private space for Foreign Domestic Helpers and place FHDs constantly under scrutiny and discipline, taking on punitive connotations associated with places of confinement and restraint – prisons.

4.5 Conclusion

When the Foreign Domestic Helpers are legally entitled to leave their workplace every Sunday, their motivation to occupy public space is substantially different to Hong Kong citizens' day off from their work. The difference is due to the spacelessness that Foreign Domestic Helpers experience in the home for six days a week where they are legally prohibited at their employers' discretion from speaking their language, eating their own food and dressing the way they wish. This cultural deprivation is both caused and compounded by the absence of private spaces of their own, the constant discipline of their labour against time and the spatial impositions and contamination of workplace and the home. Furthermore, deregulated work hours depreciate their income and all Foreign Domestic Helpers labour under the potential yet legal threat of joblessness and deportation under the two-week rule. The fragility of their legitimacy exacerbates all aspects of their work and living in Hong Kong. For six days each week, Foreign Domestic Helpers are consistently placed in a disempowered position as sanctioned by their contracts, effectively allowing the

employers to deprive them of social connections, depreciate their economic self-determinism and deny them private space. These restrictions can have detrimental effects on the physical and psychological wellbeing of Foreign Domestic Helpers as exemplified in the case of the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper who leapt to her death in August 2015.

Every Sunday, the appropriation and transformation of public spaces by Foreign Domestic Helpers is a form of spatialised resistance that meets the need of Foreign Domestic Helpers to have space. Their informally demarcated spaces – also a reconstructed domestic interior – enable these migrant women to be themselves as they please and have autonomy over their own affairs, albeit briefly for less than 24 hours. The next chapter considers this spatial phenomenon in operation.

Chapter 5
Sunday: Reclaiming Space

5.1 Introduction

As early as eight o'clock on a Sunday morning, Filipino women emerge from the underground Mass Transit Railway (MTR) in Central, Hong Kong. While the rest of the business district remains unstirred, in World Wide House, a plaza that sits two levels above the underground transport station, Filipino women bustle about, socialising with the Filipino retailers and purchasing homemade Filipino food to share with their friends for the day. Many of them wait for their friends at the intersection of World Wide House and the Central Elevated Walkway before moving to their weekly gathering areas on other parts of the walkway or the surrounding public spaces in Central. On Chater Road, a couple of Hong Kong locals can be seen pulling a trolley of flattened cardboard boxes, delivering them to groups of Filipino women, who will occupy those spaces and use the cardboard pieces to construct temporary home-bases by demarcating public spaces for the day. Every Sunday, groups gather according to the Filipino provinces they come from and return to occupy the same area every week. For more detail on the provincial divisions, see Tillu (2011, p. 43). On Connaught Road Central, some of the Filipino women use the cardboard in a different way to pack goods and gifts in them to make up care packages to send back to their relatives in the Philippines. A freight truck is parked in the loading zone of Connaught Road Central, unloading more flat-packed boxes onto the footpath. As Sunday ensues, these spaces are part of a scene that becomes more chaotic as pedestrians negotiate various public spaces of Central – elevated walkways, footpaths, underpasses, atriums, stairwells, arcades and forecourts. Thousands of Filipino women gather in these spaces constituting a temporary territory that they can claim for themselves.

The weekly assemblies of the Foreign Domestic Helpers disrupt the city-state's hegemonic spaces of financial capital and the regular spatial order of public space. The various urban interior and exterior spaces appropriated and transformed with makeshift cardboard constructions demarcate the Filipino migrant women's temporary inhabitation. The spaces become these women's temporary domestic and social spaces where they operate freely without inhibition.

This chapter explores the socio-spatial construction of the spatial phenomenon – Little Manila – by charting the temporary spaces the Foreign Domestic Helpers create and the

events that occur in these spaces every Sunday.[6] With their limited resources, Foreign Domestic Helpers appear in full force by claiming space to enable the capacity to speak their own language, dress the way they like, eat the food they want and have the choice to be themselves. At first glance, Little Manila might appear to be an odd assortment of migrant women, spaces and objects. Closer analysis reveals migrant women's reconstruction of a domestic interior. Within these spaces, these migrant women invert the spatial condition they experience in their employers' homes – transient, disciplined and truncated spaces – to clearly demarcate spaces that facilitate a temporarily solidified domestic interior of their own. The reduction of space as experienced in their workplace – their so-called home – significantly contributes to the expansion of space that occurs in public space. Every Sunday, the migrant women resist the continuous personal oppression and spatial collapse they experience in their employers' homes by reconstructing their own domestic interior in the public landscape of the city-state.

This chapter explores how this resistance is spatialised in Central Hong Kong, in the form of Little Manila, as a network of augmented spaces where Foreign Domestic Helpers have cultivated a collective culture of solidarity, resistance and resourcefulness. Drawing on the ethnographic field research conducted on site between 2013 and 2015, this chapter uses ethnographic observations, interviews and spatial analysis to illustrate how the Foreign Domestic Helpers are much more than docile subjects of domestic labour, rather they are actors with agency. With this empowered portrait of Foreign Domestic Helpers, a unique urban socio-spatial territory emerges.

The chapter begins with a theoretical discussion on the typology of public spaces that suggests the spatial potential and flexibility in the urban landscape for disenfranchised groups such as Foreign Domestic Helpers to augment and reclaim.

5.2 Urban public spaces: potential for adaptation and inhabitation

As seen in Chapters Three and Four, Foreign Domestic Helpers live in precarious spatial situations in Hong Kong. For six days each week they are limited to the mobile mattresses they sleep on between the children's beds. On Sunday they construct cardboard spaces within

[6] This chapter's foundation is drawn from an article titled "Agency in Appropriation: The Informal Territory of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong", published in the Interior Design/Architecture Educators Association (IDEA) Journal "Urban and Interior" in 2015. The article discussed the socio-political and cultural implications of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' informal inhabitation in public space every Sunday (Kwok 2015, p. 102-117).

public space to temporarily facilitate their need for social connection, personal space and privacy. These units are dismantled at the end of the day, thus their socio-spatial collapse begins again. The momentarily yet repeated spatialised resistance of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Little Manila could become obsolete if the owners and regulators of privately owned public spaces become stricter with controls. Embattled with the potential risks of socio-spatial erasure, Foreign Domestic Helpers insert themselves repeatedly, en masse, in the urban landscape of Hong Kong. They continue to struggle for their right to the city that they contribute to yet continues to exclude them and deny them of their socio-spatial equality. Geographer David Harvey discusses Lefebvre's *The Right to the City* within contemporary contexts of urbanisation, as claiming a right that no longer exists. This right to the city is an empty signifier that depends on who fills it with meaning – by the wealthy and the powerful, as well as the homeless and 'san-papiers' (Harvey 2012, p. 15). The right that Lefebvre asserted in *The Right to the City* was both a cry from the withering crisis and an urgent call for alternative urban engagement that is less alienated and more meaningful (Lefebvre 1996, p. 102-107). Foreign Domestic Helpers do not have equal social, economic, political and spatial entitlements as citizens and other foreigners, yet their agency has led them to seek opportunities in urban public spaces and make their urban engagement a more meaningful one. Apart from Foreign Domestic Helpers' use of public space every Sunday, Hong Kong has had a long history of street hawkers, vendors and transgressive uses of public spaces. Over the last two decades, many street hawkers have either been made illegal or forced to be formalised into shopfronts (Siu 2007). However, transgressive uses of public infrastructure and spaces such as appropriating alleyways, sidewalks, roundabouts and underpasses are parts of Hong Kong's urban landscape. The next three figures on the next two pages will exemplify creative uses of public spaces in Hong Kong.

Figure 14 **Harcourt Road appropriated as camping site for the Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong, 2014,** photograph by Matthew Seo, published with permission.

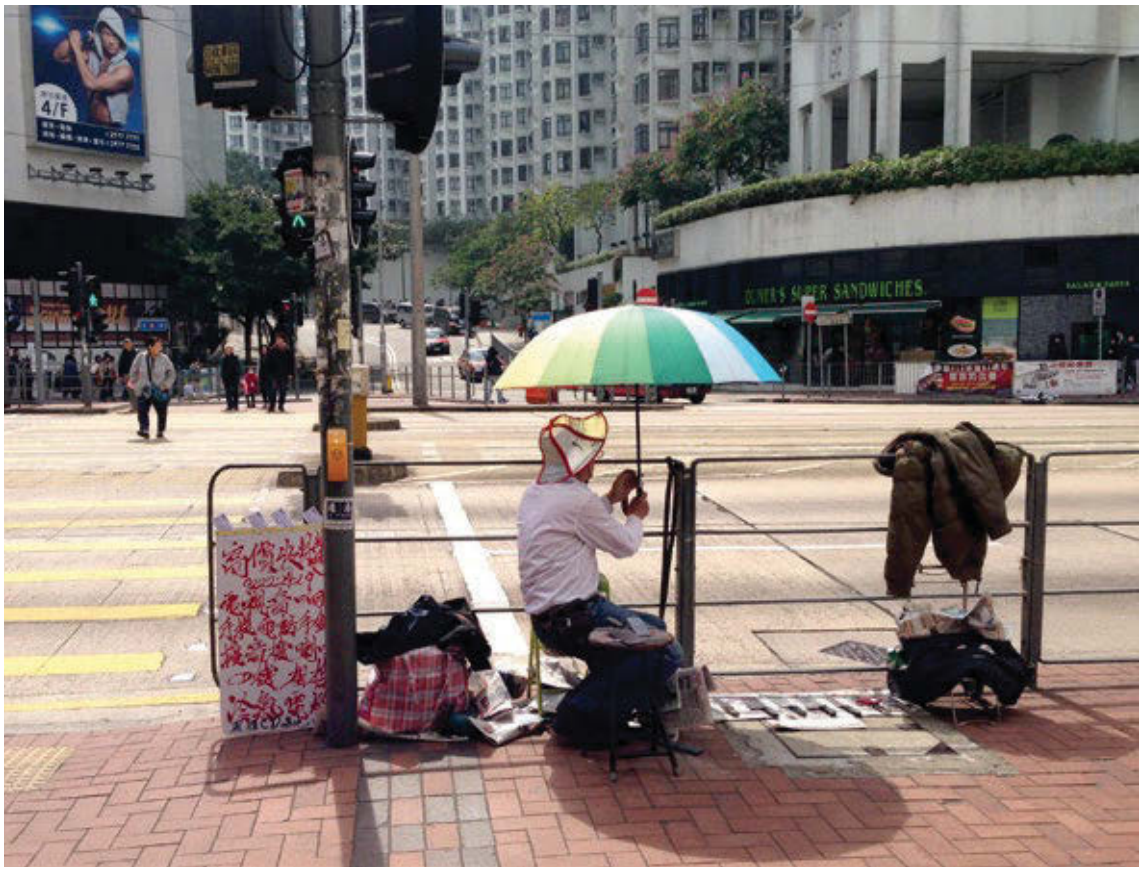


Figure 15 **Public railing at a pedestrian crossing adopted as a temporary retail space in the residential suburb of Tai Koo, Hong Kong, 2015**, photograph by the author.

Figure 16 **Sidewalk of public stairway appropriated as an artist's studio and point of sale on Ladder Street, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong, 2015**, photograph by the author.

Loose space

In many areas in Hong Kong, people engage in activities that the public spaces were not intended for. Architecture Professor Karen A. Franck and Associate Professor in urban design Quentin Stevens use the term "loose space" to describe urban public spaces that afford appropriation emphasising that for a site to become loose, people must not be passive consumers of public space, rather recognise the spatial possibilities and be willing to adapt and take risks. Franck and Stevens (2007, p. 35) note:

> People create loose space through their own actions. Many urban spaces possess physical and social possibilities for looseness, being open to appropriation, but it is people, through their own initiative, who fulfil these possibilities. The emergence of a loose space depends upon: first, people's recognition of the potential within the space and, second, varying degrees of creativity and determination to make use of what it presents, possibly modifying existing elements or bringing in additional ones. In these ways, unlike the passive consumers of prepackaged activities and experiences in themed environments of malls and festival market places, citizens actively fashion public settings to satisfy their own basic needs as well as their desires.

This concept of loose space resonates with Little Manila as Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers recognise the spatial opportunities in the urban public spaces that exist between, under, in front of and surrounding the privately owned public spaces that are still within close access to the public amenities (such as wifi and public bathrooms) that the internal spaces of the privately owned public spaces provide. It can be considered that Foreign Domestic Helpers are not passive consumers, rather they are resourceful and are willing to transgress regulated spatial order to reclaim space for themselves. Franck and Stevens (2007, p. 27-28) suggest that different kinds of public spaces are emerging as something different from the initial intention, where they have the flexibility to be appropriated and transformed. These include leftover spaces that are often located next to spaces with fixed functions such as underpasses (Franck and Stevens 2007, p. 27-28). These spaces exist beyond the boundaries of organised social space with a lack of intended use or appealing features. In this "tightness of programming" Franck and Stevens (2007, p. 29) propose this as the pivotal point where initial intention unravels and other modes of inhabitation can be inserted. The spaces that Foreign Domestic Helpers appropriate every Sunday are such spaces that have copious potential for 'loosening': underpasses, sidewalks, pedestrianised roads, elevated walkways and atriums. Architectural theorist Ignasi de Sola-Morales (1995, p. 105) calls particular urban spaces *terrain vague* as he defines them as:

> Empty, abandoned space in which a series of occurrences have taken place seems to subjugate the eye of the urban photographer. Such urban space, which I will denote by the French expression terrain vague, assumes the status of fascination, the most solvent sign with which to indicate what cities are and what our experiences of them is.

The spaces that Foreign Domestic Helpers occupy are not *terrain vague*, as they are not abandoned or obsolete, rather they are active spaces with a designated purpose. Their looseness emerges when their primary function is temporarily interchangeable and people who are willing to transgress those boundaries take action. During the week, these spaces facilitate pedestrian circulation between buildings and the corporate workers passively abide by the intended purpose. On Sunday, the social and physical possibilities for looseness emerge, with the appearance of Foreign Domestic Helpers and the absence of corporate workers.

Liminal spaces and non-place

In some ways, these leftover or loose spaces that are temporarily appropriated and transformed by Foreign Domestic Helpers can also be perceived as in-between, liminal spaces

or non-places. Anthropologist Marc Auge proposes non-place as a product of super-modernity and states (1995, p. 77-78):

> If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.

Auge (1995) proposes a dichotomy of places and non-places, where the first is never completely erased and the second never completed. This dichotomy has been derived from philosopher Michel de Certeau's opposition of place and space, which sees space as an intersection of moving bodies and place as an assembly of elements co-existing in a certain order (De Certeau 1984). The loose spaces of Central are spaces of transition. They are examples of liminal urban spaces, non-places that only act as a conduit for past and future production (Spurr and Kwok 2014). The term liminal was brought into prominence by the anthropologist Victor Turner to describe the ritual state of in-between (Turner 1967). Derived from the term threshold, it defines moments outside the conventions of everyday existence. In spatial terms these tend toward unprogrammed spaces that are open to diverse activities. Turner (1967, p. 93-111) defines liminality as a transitional event. Auge defines non-places as temporary spaces for passage, undefined and incomplete, yet dedicated to communication and consumption; the motorways seen from car interiors, motorway restaurants/service/petrol stations, large supermarkets, duty-free shops and the passenger transit lounges of world airports (Auge 1995). So too can the elevated walkways, underpasses and corporate atriums be described as spaces singularly dedicated to specific and linear movement rather than the particularities of program. The looseness and liminal nature of the urban public spaces in Central provide opportunities for augmentation.

The method of appropriation and transformation of public spaces is not unique to Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Central Hong Kong. Foreign Domestic Helpers of other nationalities, street hawkers, the homeless and buskers all creatively occupy public spaces in Hong Kong in unconventional ways. In cities around the world, temporary inhabitation of urban public spaces represents the constant challenges against the privatised, regulated and increasingly diminishing freedoms of and within public space. The participants who oppose the passive ways of occupying public space who subvert the conservative boundaries in unconventional methods come from many socio-economic sectors of society and are not limited to the disenfranchised. They also bring with them different objectives and intentions. In Beijing, as the city is rapidly densifying, retired yet active citizens search for accessible and free public space to practise taichi and

yangge, a traditional Chinese dance that celebrates youth and freedom (Chen 2010, p. 21-35). They appropriate flat, long unused public spaces such as underpasses and plaza forecourts, and transform them into public dance halls. In New York City, citizens claimed Zuccotti Park as the protest headquarters of the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 (Shiffman et al. 2012). This triggered a national and global movement of protests that became the precedent for Hong Kong's Occupy Central with Peace and Love, which eventually escalated into the Umbrella Movement in 2014. This event saw tens of thousands of citizens occupy, appropriate and transform Harcourt Road, a six-lane arterial road in Central Hong Kong, into an exclusive community for pro-democratic citizens and activists for two months. In Chung Shan, Taiwan, Filipino migrant workers pluralise the public spaces in the city centre on their day of rest as their community hub, despite some locals' rejection of their legitimacy to occupy the public spaces in the city (Wu 2010, p. 135-146). These instances are not isolated events or limited to geographical location, rather they are part of a global phenomenon of socio-spatial contestation that Little Manila in Hong Kong is also part of. However, the main difference between other examples of public spatial contestations and the spatialised resistance of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Central Hong Kong is the specific socio-spatial inequality the Foreign Domestic Helpers suffer in their place of work that has cultivated their agency to resist. This motivates the Foreign Domestic Helpers to continuously, on a weekly basis, exert their right to public space and reclaim their autonomy in and through space.

5.3 Little Manila: socio-spatial construct

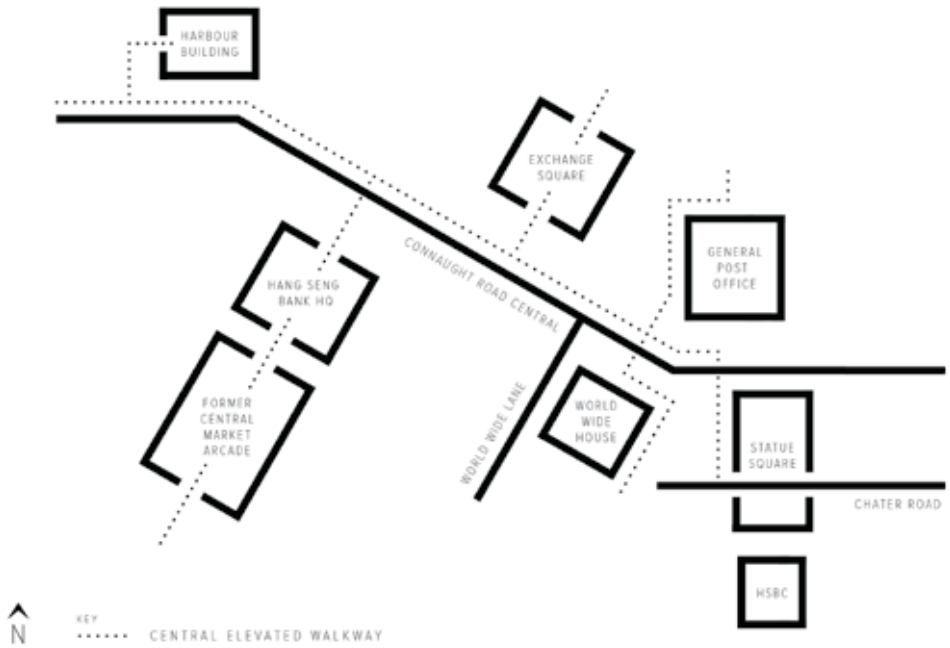


Figure 17 **Map of Little Manila in Central, Hong Kong, 2015**, showing the buildings and public spaces that are appropriated and occupied by Foreign Domestic Helpers every Sunday, forming Little Manila. Original digital image by the author and Blake Jurmann.

Hong Kong's Central district embodies its financial prosperity and colonial history with a landscape of renowned commercial skyscrapers, international fashion houses and historic former British military monuments. It has an image of prestige, consumerism and order. Yet within these formal aspirational spaces of the city it also offers a range of goods and services to the Filipino community. The store World Wide House provides Filipino food, newspapers and magazines, and World Wide Lane sells international phone cards and mobile data. Located between luxury shopping malls, Chater Road is pedestrianised on Sunday, providing open spaces for choreographed dancing and political rallies that are specific to incidents of violation or injustices experienced by Foreign Domestic Helpers. There are three Catholic churches that Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers frequent in Central including St John's Cathedral, which houses the Mission for Migrant Workers group and the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge. Over the course of Sunday, Central's regulated spatial order is overlapped with the construction and infiltration of Little Manila, producing a temporary but repeated socio-spatial system of layered spaces; an ethnic enclave, a site of contention, an urban domestic interior and an ecology of resistance.

As stated in Chapter Two, the Foreign Domestic Helpers' Sunday gathering in Central, known as Little Manila, has often been referred to by various scholars as a "well-known spectacle" and a "carnivalesque gathering" (Hou 2012, p. 89; Tam 2016, p. 119). During the field research between 2013 and 2015, over 70 Sundays were spent observing the spatial operations as well as experiencing Little Manila from within. From a spatial design perspective, I observed the methods by which Foreign Domestic Helpers appropriate and transform unoccupied or seemingly ordinary public spaces into semi-public private spaces that facilitate their socio-spatial expression and autonomy. Drawing upon the ethnographic data collected on site, it became apparent how these acts of temporary transformation are not simply a repeated ethnic spectacle, rather, they are acts that express freedom. This freedom is one that resists the spacelessness and invisibility the Foreign Domestic Helpers endure for six days each week in their employers' homes. Speaking to Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers, many affectionately dubbed their gatherings in Central as "Little Manila", as it is their home away from home.

Beyond the assumption of an ethnic spectacle, Little Manila can perhaps be viewed as a predictable site of contention where the Filipino women workers express themselves outside of their domestic helper status. As such it can be viewed as a site of resistance where the Foreign Domestic Helpers disrupt the district's established public space order. The interviews conducted on site revealed a common perception held by Hong Kong locals that the weekly

gatherings are a disruptive event on the city. Many locals voiced concerns about a lack of cleanliness in public spaces the Foreign Domestic Helpers use to gather in, and fears their appearance might tarnish the prestigious reputation of the financial district. In the past, local media outlets have also made public accusations that the Foreign Domestic Helpers are a disorderly crowd of unruly foreigners with headlines such as 'Congestion eyesore for tourists' (*South China Morning Post* 1998) and 'Must clean up Central' (*South China Morning Post* 1998). Such comments and discussions reflect a degree of prejudice and socio-cultural tensions that underlie the weekly event, making Little Manila a site of contention (Law 2001; 2002). Experiencing Little Manila from within, I came to understand that the Foreign Domestic Helpers' reclamation of space creates the capacity to be themselves. It is more than a contested site; it performs a temporary domesticated home that cultivates solidarity, resistance and resilience for Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers.

The conception of home constantly evolves across new social and cultural settings, particularly for migrants. Home can be an expression of identity, of personalities, and the bedrock of cultural integrity and citizenship (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). For six days each week, the Foreign Domestic Helpers' 'home' does not uphold those values. It is not a place where they can express themselves, rather it is a place of employment under Hong Kong's history of domestic servitude, where legalised methods of discipline and control sanction the erosion of foreign workers' physical and personal space, and deprive them of their social and cultural freedoms. Foreign Domestic Helpers physically and conceptually have no room to be themselves within the domestic interiors of their workplace and are therefore denied the fundamental value and meaning of home. Home becomes an abstract concept realised on Sunday. Their continuously restricted freedom, deprived personalities and cultural integrity, although they live and work in a domestic space, are realised outside the domestic interior in the full vigour Little Manila illustrates.

To describe and analyse the makeup of their Sunday home, I focus on the specific spatial programs that occur within urban interior and exterior spaces in Central. These spaces choreograph the spatial organisation of Little Manila and the analysis reveals a complex network of semi-public private spaces that produce a unique socio-spatial ecology of resistance and reclamation.

World Wide House and World Wide Lane: food store and public karaoke

World Wide House is a corporate building located on Connaught Road Central. Situated within the first three levels of the building is World Wide Plaza, which has an entrance on the second level connected to the Central Elevated Walkway. The retailers within the mall are mostly Filipino vendors, providing Filipino food, newspapers, magazines, and remittance and telecommunication services. Every Sunday from morning till late afternoon, Filipino women fill the ground level, above ground entrances and staircases in and around the building. As World Wide House is situated directly above one of the many underground exits of Central MTR station, the interstitial spaces act as a series of temporary waiting zones and meeting areas. Every Sunday, all pedestrians emerging from the station experience the residency of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers visually and audibly.

Next to World Wide House is World Wide Lane – a narrow pedestrian laneway. Every Sunday, it acts as an extension to the meeting areas of World Wide House. It contains a small Filipino fast food store and a convenience store with long queues that stretch out onto the footpath. As Foreign Domestic Helpers take temporary residency of Central throughout Sunday, large bottles of water, along with bags filled with cans of beer and food, are purchased.

On the corner of World Wide Lane and Des Voeux Road Central, a Filipino telecommunication shop holds karaoke competitions. An example of this weekly event was described in the introduction of Chapter Two (refer to Figure 18). Hosted by a charming Filipino man who addresses the crowd in Tagalog and English, this weekly event attracts an audience of 80 to 100 Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers and tourists. The audience gathers in the small space in the front of the store, and infiltrates the limited spaces under the atrium of World Wide House and adjacent pedestrian footpath. The atrium is cordoned off at a certain point by building management, leaving a small space for circulation in front. This space is shared with another underground entrance to the Central MTR station. Walking in the direction of Victoria Harbour through World Wide Lane, the narrow passageway connects to Connaught Road Central, which facilitates another function of Little Manila.

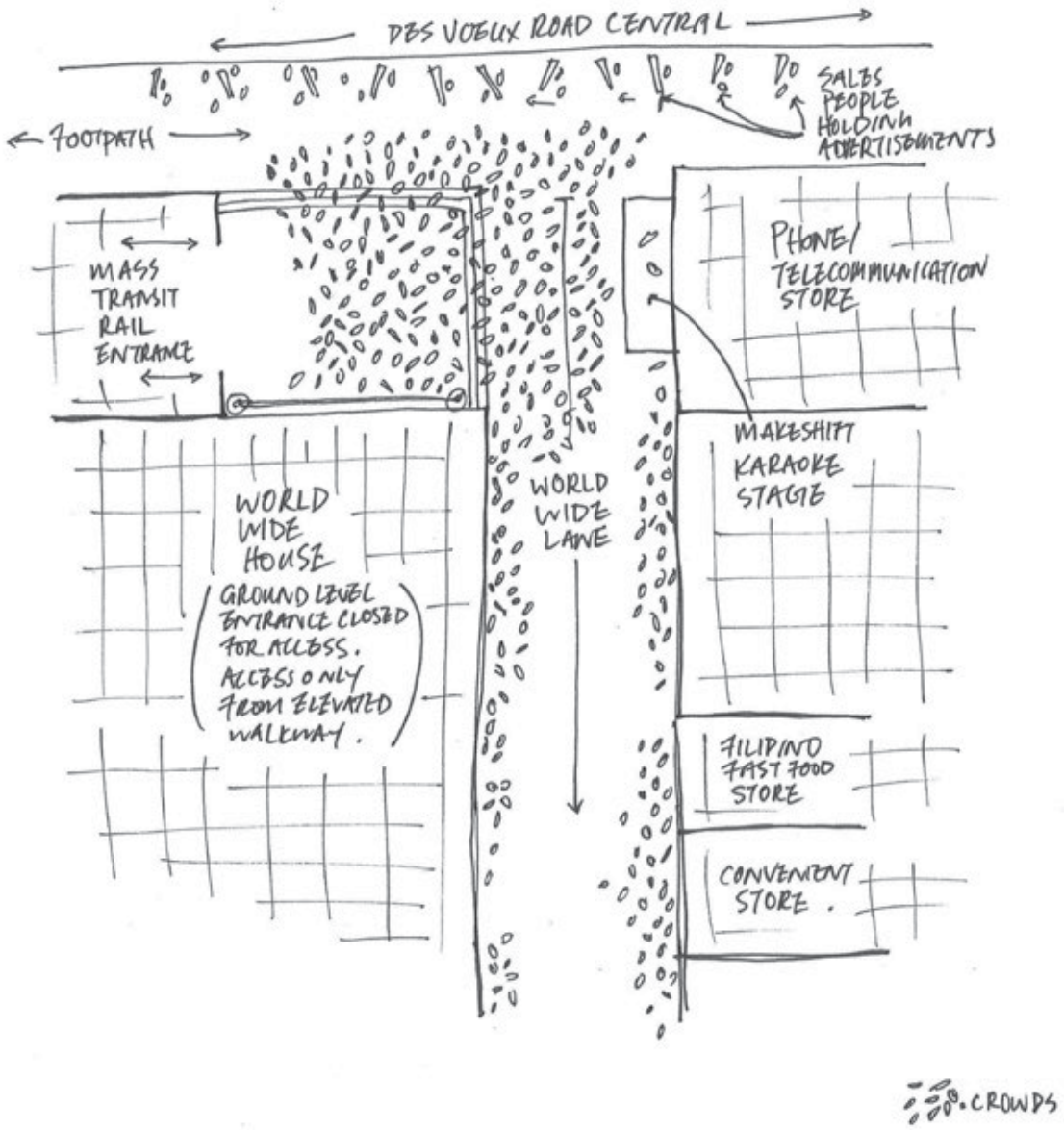


Figure 18 **Diagram of World Wide House and World Wide Lane situating the site and spatial program in Little Manila, Central, Hong Kong, 2015**, original sketch by the author.

Connaught Road Central: postal exchange

Every Sunday, approximately 20 metres of this arterial road is removed from traffic as a loading zone for 'care packages' to be sent directly to the Philippines. For most of the day, the surrounding pedestrian footpath is constantly occupied by groups of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers organising large parcels. The parcels are approximately 800 mm in height and 700 mm in width and length. They are filled with personal hygiene products such as toothpaste, shampoo, washing powder and sometimes clothing and toys. Janet, a Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper who has been working in Hong Kong for 11 years, explained that many Foreign Domestic Helpers send personal care products back home to their families to help ease their expenses (2015, pers. comm., 25 January). Each parcel, sometimes called a "balikbayan box", costs up to HKD$700 for door to door delivery from Hong Kong to the Philippines and takes up to two weeks. Every few months Janet uses the remainder of her wages after remittance to purchase items for her family and friends in the Philippines. She accumulates these items in her room until there are enough items to fill a large parcel. Once she has enough items she carries these in a big nylon bag to Connaught Road Central to pack and send. These red, blue and white nylon bags are cheaply available and synonymous within Hong Kong's local material culture. Janet described a sense of feeling very fortunate about having her own room in her employer's apartment, as many other Foreign Domestic Helpers do not have their own private room or space, which makes the accumulation of items for the care packages more difficult. The purchasing, packing, sealing and writing address labels begins from early morning and continues late into the afternoon. Pedestrians accessing the Central MTR station, the Central Elevated Walkway and surrounding shopping complexes witness this packing process throughout the day as they negotiate their way through this small junction of Connaught Road Central that has become an informal Filipino postal exchange.

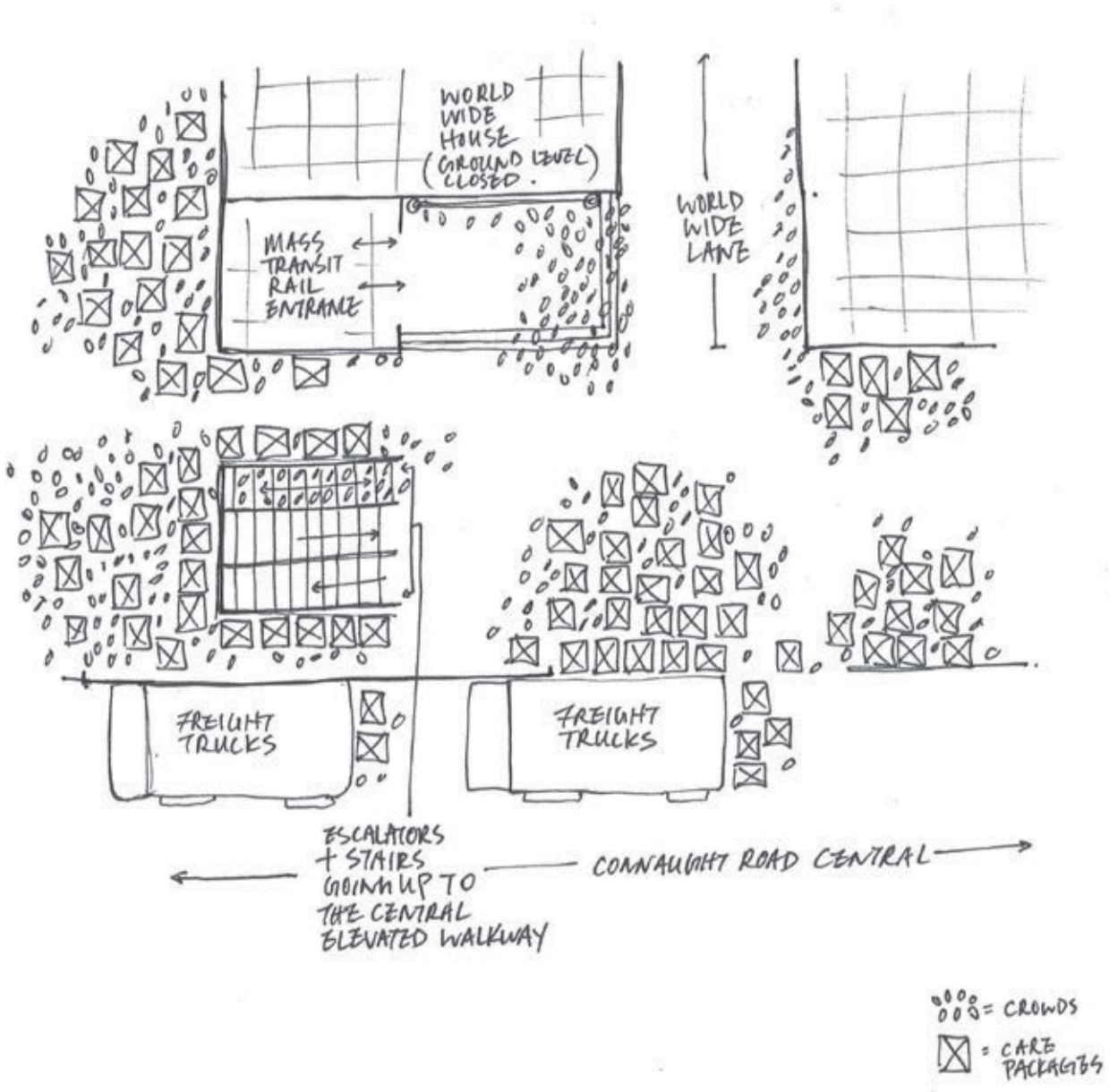


Figure 19 **Diagram of Connaught Road Central situating the postal exchange area in Little Manila, Central, Hong Kong, 2015**, original sketch by the author.

Figure 20 **Freight truck collecting parcels postmarked for the Philippines parked in the 'no parking zone' of Connaught Road Central at the makeshift postal exchange area of Little Manila on Sundays in Central, Hong Kong, 2013**, photograph by the author.

Figure 21 **Packing and sending 'care packages' at the underpass of the Central Elevated Walkway on the corner of Connaught Road Central, Central, Hong Kong, 2013**, photograph by the author

Central Elevated Walkway: domestic units

Figure 22 **A section of the Central Elevated Walkway connecting the Former Central Market Arcade to the Heng Sang Bank tower on a week day when Foreign Domestic Helpers are absent, Central, Hong Kong 2013**, photograph by the author.

The first conduit of the Central Elevated Walkway was built between the Mandarin Oriental Hotel and the second level of a shopping complex within the Prince's Building in 1965. It was designed as a pedestrian connection between the two buildings but consequently increased the rent value of the retail spaces within. In direct contrast to the usual conventions of retail rental, suddenly the value of the mall's second level units became far more valuable than those on the ground level. This opened a new logic of real estate value, but more significantly, it sparked a phenomenon that shifted the way people moved around the city to an above ground circulation. Over the last four decades many commercial buildings in Central (and beyond) were designed to include an air space connection. Entrances and exits of buildings began to proliferate above ground floor, hence creating a labyrinthine network of elevated walkways between buildings, allowing pedestrian flow via many apertures simultaneously. The Central Elevated Walkway has become a network of elevated walkways that interconnect over 25 commercial buildings above ground level in Central. These walkways vary from five to eight

metres in width. Some are enclosed like arcades, while others have various roof structures and balustrades, offering outlooks onto the streets and various degrees of protection from the weather conditions.

Every Sunday, these elevated passageways provide prime spatial opportunities for Foreign Domestic Helpers to reclaim their personal and physical space. This is largely due to the vast amount of accessible space, protection from the elements at various points and access to public amenities and free wireless internet. Throughout the day, hundreds of temporary cardboard units gradually appear on the Central Elevated Walkway, resembling a village of domestic spaces that are situated within public spaces. In some cases, these units occupy both sides of the walkway, shifting pedestrian thoroughfare to the middle. During my field research, as I was analysing these cardboard spaces the Foreign Domestic Helpers construct and observing the activities that occur within such as eating, sleeping, grooming and talking on the phone, I recognised that these makeshift cardboard spaces were their domestic spaces. These weekly spatial appropriations and transformations on the elevated passageways can be understood as a reaction and resistance to the socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation that occur in the domestic interior. These cardboard units facilitate spaces that are inversions of the interior spatial condition the Foreign Domestic Helpers experience in the workplace – the opposite of the physical and personal spacelessness they endure within the employer homes for six days each week.

The majority of cardboard units are erected along the Central Elevated Walkway that circulates Exchange Square, IFC Mall, Hang Seng Bank headquarters, Harbour Building and Central Pier. Some of the units are elaborately constructed like houses with entrances, floors, walls and roofs, protecting the occupants from external weather conditions and separating them from pedestrian traffic. The cardboard floors and walls are reinforced with packing tape and cable ties, while string or rope is used to reinforce vertical rigidity of the walls by connecting the edges of the cardboard to the balustrades of the elevated walkway. Plastic sheets are draped over and above the interior of the units as roofs for extra privacy and umbrellas are used to reinforce the roofs on rainy days. These temporary domestic spaces vary in scale, as some accommodate small groups of three to four people while others can be occupied by up to 20 people. When entering these makeshift spaces, shoes are taken off and left on the exterior edges of the structures resembling the common Asian custom of removing shoes when entering the home.

Figure 23 **Former Central Market Arcade shared by Foreign Domestic Helpers and a temporary exhibition on a Sunday, Central, Hong Kong, 2013**, pedestrians move through the corridor as both sides of the corridor are occupied: with Foreign Domestic Helpers seated on the ground in front of the closed shopfronts and a temporary exhibition erected, photograph by the author.

The Central Elevated Walkway extends into the enclosed arcade of the Former Central Market. Every Sunday, most of the shops in this arcade are closed with their metal shutters down. With an unoccupied space on one side of the arcade that is occasionally used for temporary exhibitions, the arcade is essentially an indoor pedestrian corridor every Sunday making it ideal for Foreign Domestic Helpers to temporarily inhabit. Most Foreign Domestic Helpers use the side of the arcade where the shops are closed and their cardboard units lean against the metal shutters. In this corridor, the units are less elaborate in their construction as they are not exposed to the exterior weather conditions. Many of them have lower or no vertical cardboard partitions between them and the pedestrian thoroughfare. Opened umbrellas are used more often instead as partitions. Sometimes when Foreign Domestic Helpers are sleeping in the cardboard units, opened umbrellas are used to shield them from the light and onlookers' gaze.

The occurrence of cardboard units is not exclusively located on the Central Elevated Walkway. They also appear in some pedestrianised sections directly under the Central Elevated Walkway on street level and proliferate in surrounding spaces in Central such as the footpaths surrounding the General Post Office, the underground pedestrian tunnel connected to Chater Road and the ground floor atrium of the HSBC headquarters building. Every Sunday, pedestrians using the Central Elevated Walkway to access the major shopping area in Central must negotiate their movement through the Foreign Domestic Helpers' demarcated spaces.

Chater Road: demonstrations

Chater Road is a flat, uncovered three-lane street that houses numerous flagship stores of high-end international fashion designers and historical colonial architecture such as the Former Legislative Council Building, Statue Square and the Cenotaph. As the road is closed to traffic every Sunday, it becomes the designated open space for Foreign Domestic Helpers' political demonstrations. A variety of protests take place, motivated by incidents of violation or injustice, such as the court ruling that refused citizenship to a Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper in 2013 (referred to in Chapter Two), which saw over 10,000 people gather on Chater Road. Dancing is also a popular method of political expression amongst Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers. They dance in groups to Filipino pop songs about female empowerment and freedom from oppression.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the Hong Kong Helpers Campaign isolated three regulations within the Standard Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract that have the most negative effects on the Foreign Domestic Helpers: the two-week rule, deregulated working hours and illegal agency fees. These three issues are often the main themes for protests that occur on Chater Road. The live-in rule is also a contentious topic that Foreign Domestic Helpers protest about, especially during times when cases of physical assault of Foreign Domestic Helpers experienced in the homes of their employers are made public. An example of this led to multiple public protests between 2014 and 2016. One such instance that gained international attention was the case of a 21-year-old Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helper who was physically abused by her employer for eight months in Hong Kong. In 2014, Erwiana Sulistyaningsih was abandoned at Hong Kong International Airport by her employers and forced to return to Indonesia when she was publicly seen with multiple injuries all over her body. She had sustained eight months of physical abuse by her employer who beat her, starved her and underpaid her. She returned to Hong Kong to pursue legal action against her former employers after treatment in Indonesia. Throughout the trial, Filipino and Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers and local activists protested on Chater Road and other parts of Hong Kong, focusing on condemnation of the allegedly abusive employer, as well as contesting the live-in rule, which exposes all Foreign Domestic Helpers to potential physical, sexual and psychological abuse within the employers' homes.

In February 2015, Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers organised a gathering on Chater Road in association with the international movement One Billion Rising. Hundreds of Foreign Domestic Helpers participated in large-scale choreographed dancing that occupied most of Chater Road. This event attracted media coverage from local Hong Kong and Filipino reporters and gained support from Foreign Domestic Helpers of all ethnicities, tourists and locals. Erwiana Sulistyaningsih made an appearance on stage to openly discuss her experience, encouraging other Foreign Domestic Helpers to take legal action against abusive employers.

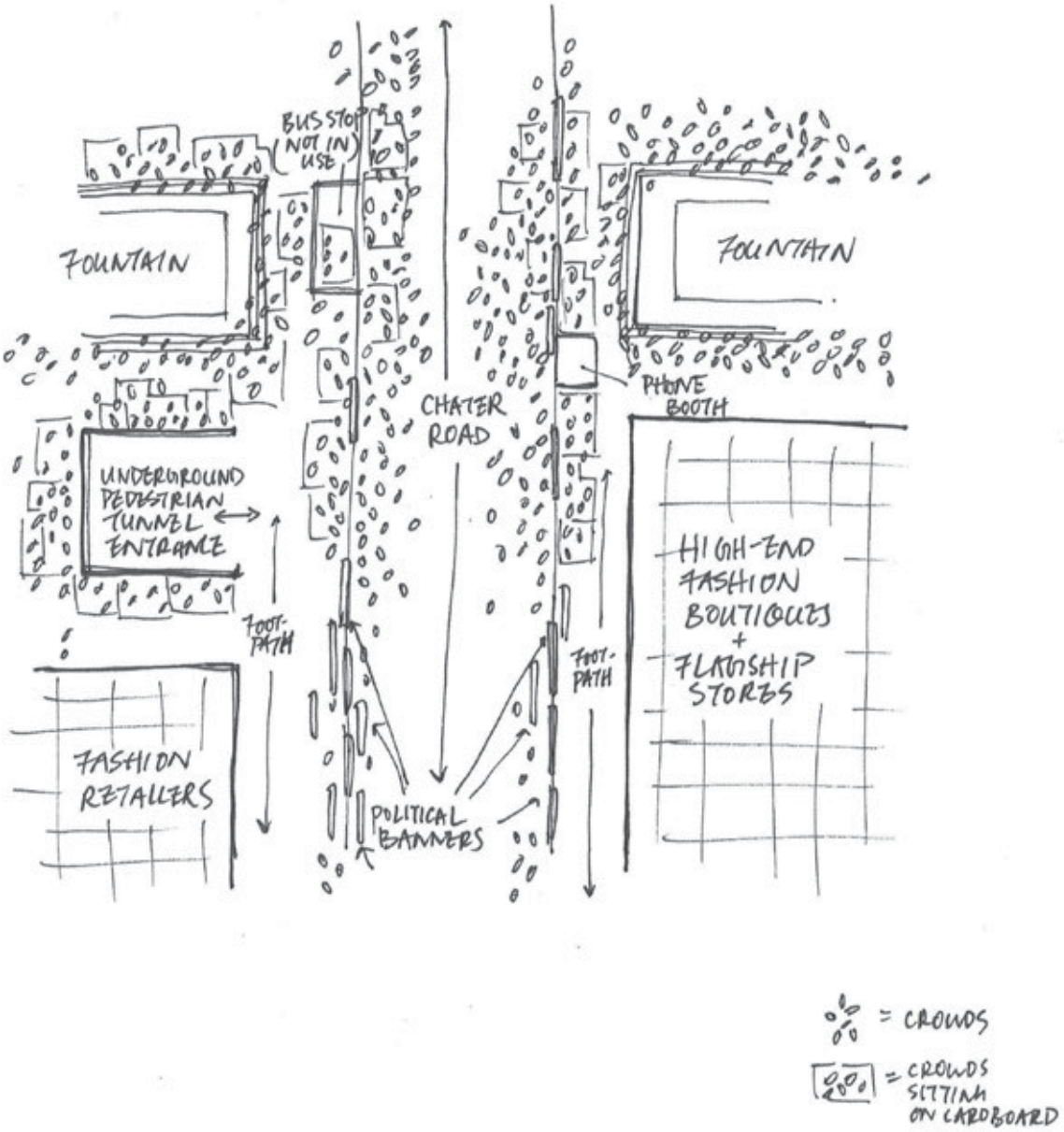


Figure 24 **Diagram of Chater Road on a Sunday in Central, Hong Kong, 2015**, showing the spatial occupation of Foreign Domestic Helpers on Sunday, original sketch by the author.

Figure 25 **Chater Road as protest site for the global campaign 'One Billion Rising' on a Sunday, 2015**, the road transforms as hundreds of Foreign Domestic Helpers gather to participate in choreographed dancing as part of the campaign on a Sunday, photograph by author.

Figure 26 **Erwiana Sulistyaningsih (center) at the 'One Billion Rising' rally on Chater Road on a Sunday, 2015**, (pictured in the middle) accompanied by supporters, photograph by author.

Figure 27 **Political banners on Chater Road on Sunday 2015**, signifying the Foreign Domestic Helpers' occupation of Chater Road for political rallies, photograph by author.

On other occasions when there are no organised protests, political messages advocating for the rights of Foreign Domestic Helpers can be seen printed on posters and banners. These banners, erected alongside groups of Foreign Domestic Helpers dancing to songs about female empowerment ,are temporarily juxtaposed with Chater Road's landscape of LED-lit facades of high-end fashion retailers and their consumers.

HSBC atrium: corporate cavern

The HSBC headquarters building spans one block of land between Des Voeux Road Central and Queens Road Central, which run parallel to Chater Road. This location is historically significant as it housed the first City Hall of Hong Kong (1869–1933). The building underwent several developments between 1935 and 1985 with the current and final development completed in 1985. Designed by British architect Norman Foster, the core of the project, apart from developing an iconic monument representing the global financial capital of Hong Kong, was an attempt to create a public area. As there was little public space at street level the construction strategy aim was to extend the number of levels in the building as the incorporation of a public space gave the allowance for additional floors. Completed in 1986 and with a height of 180 metres above ground, the 47-floor building is accessed via a set of escalators that extends from ground level to the lobby, a 40-metre high open atrium. From Monday to Friday, this open atrium serves as a busy pedestrian thoroughfare for HSBC workers and other corporate workers in the Central district. However, on Sunday this unique piece of privatised public space is an opportunity for Foreign Domestic Helpers to appropriate and transform.

Filipino women gather in clusters towards the centre of the atrium, leaving circulation space for pedestrians on the periphery. Varying from the rectangular geometry of the elevated walkways where the Foreign Domestic Helpers gather on the edges leaving space for pedestrian thoroughfare in the centre, the square formation of the HSBC atrium allows for the maximum use of space in the centre. Foreign Domestic Helpers here often sit on flat cardboard boxes without vertical dividers. In this area, Foreign Domestic Helpers can be seen sharing food, chatting in Tagalog to each other, sleeping, attending to self-care or administering beauty routines to other Foreign Domestic Helpers. Some also stand near the edges of the atrium away from the crowds, speaking to their families in the Philippines using various digital devices. Due to the cavernous shape and the hard materials of concrete and steel of this atrium, it can become very noisy when the number of people occupying that space increases.

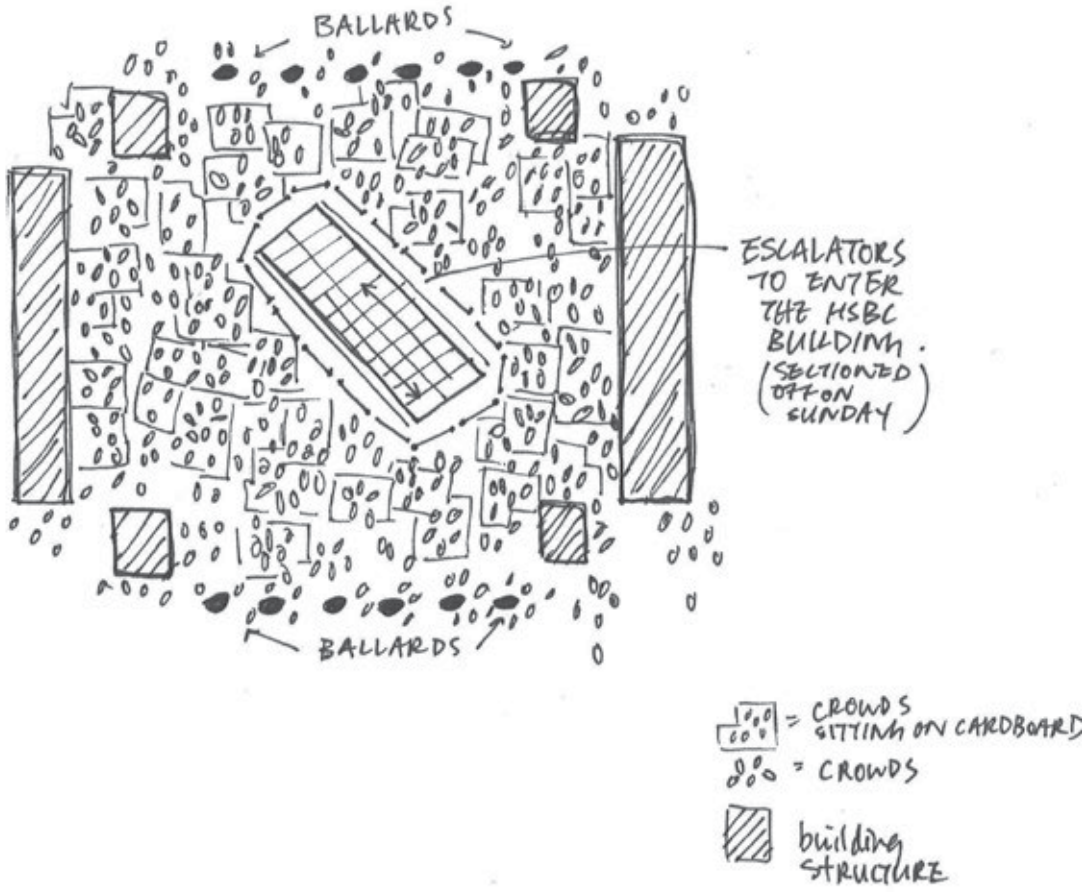


Figure 28 **Diagram of HSBC headquarters atrium, situating the Foreign Domestic Helpers' inhabitation on Sunday, 2015**, original sketch by the author.

Little Manila's cardboard economy: role reversal

Figure 29 **Cardboard collectors retrieving cardboard on Chater Road as Foreign Domestic Helpers disperse on a Sunday evening, 2015**, photograph by author.

The disused cardboard boxes that are the main materials used for the Foreign Domestic Helpers' makeshift units are part of an informal and illegal economy. Generally, disused cardboard can be found from shops or supermarkets that have discarded it. However, as many

Foreign Domestic Helpers do not have their own bedroom in the employer's home for storage or have time during their hours of work to collect cardboard, they instead purchase cardboard from a few enterprising Hong Kong locals in the area who collect and resell cardboard. It is a common sight throughout Hong Kong, where locals, ranging from the middle age to the elderly, collect cardboard from retailers and transport it around in push carts and trolleys. Many of these locals do not have a formal occupation and rely on collecting cardboard and other recyclable and reusable materials to resell and make a living. Every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers participate in an informal economy that has been created as a result of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' demand. In Central, Foreign Domestic Helpers purchase cardboard pieces from a couple of Hong Kong locals who deliver cardboard boxes to their designated areas every Sunday. These illegal distributors have knowledge of each group's regular spaces and how many pieces of cardboard they require. Each piece of cardboard is charged at HKD$2. The cardboard is delivered early in the morning, and the amount owed is collected throughout the day. The distributors return in the evening to pick up the cardboard pieces and sometimes they can be reused or are discarded. The cardboard boxes were temporarily significant as they transported commercial goods (that are not affordable to Foreign Domestic Helpers) to the retailers in Central. Once they were no longer required, they were discarded from Hong Kong's formal economy. Every Sunday, these discarded elements are reincarnated as affordable 'commodity' to engender privacy and private space for one of the lowest socio-economic sectors of Hong Kong. This weekly informal economy, motivated by the Foreign Domestic Helpers' demand for cardboard, symbolises an interesting reversal of supply and demand between Hong Kong and the Foreign Domestic Helpers.

From the analysis of the spatial construction of Little Manila, it is evident that the network of spaces provides a sense of comfort and refuge from the control, spacelessness and invisibility experienced within the labour routine of Foreign Domestic Helpers in the homes of their employers. In these domesticised spaces, the Foreign Domestic Helpers resist discipline and reclaim space and autonomy to speak their own language, share experiences, enjoy food reminiscent of home and attend to tasks for themselves, not for their employers. Anthropologist Lisa Law (2001, p. 266) suggests that:

> Little Manila is where domestic workers recover from more subtle forms of sensory reculturation that occur in Chinese homes, and in the process they create new ways of engaging with city life. It is also a place where Filipino women express a creative subjective capacity with the potential to displace hegemonic images that describe their lives and work – if only for a week.

5.4 Little Manila: site of contention

Little Manila is a term that is not exclusively used in Hong Kong. It is used internationally – alongside 'Filipinotown' – to describe any place outside of the Philippines where there are enclaves of people of Filipino origin. Currently there are approximately 13 million Filipinos working overseas of which 5 million are migrants (The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs 2011). In the United States where there are over three million Filipinos, nearly half reside in California. Locations such as Greater Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, San Francisco Bay Area and San Diego County have often been referred to as Little Manila or Filipinotown (US Census Bureau 2010).

Little Manila in Hong Kong is different from the Filipino enclaves located in other cities because it is not physically built as part of the city-state. The majority of Filipinos in Hong Kong are Foreign Domestic Helpers, who are temporary residents, not citizens. Foreign Domestic Helpers make up approximately 4% of Hong Kong's population and, as there is an equal split of Foreign Domestic Helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia, it can be estimated that Filipinos are 2% of Hong Kong's population (Hong Kong SAR Government 2016). They do not have the rights to eventual citizenship and therefore are permanently denied resources to establish households of their own, own property or land or construct other types of permanent socio-cultural spaces in Hong Kong. As such, similar to the weekly collective appearance of Foreign Domestic Helpers in public spaces, Little Manila in Hong Kong is a fleeting occurrence.

Despite the impermanence of Little Manila in Hong Kong, its repeated appearance is significant to Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers who create it and participate in it on Sundays. It can also be argued that this weekly occurrence has become a culturally significant part of Central, and Hong Kong as a whole, as it represents the city's tolerance (whether sanctioned or tolerated) for cultural diversity and migrant minority groups. Hong Kong based Chinese cultural theorist Xiaojiang Yu argues that the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers' use of public space has shaped the cultural landscape of Hong Kong and the influence of particular intrinsic cultures of the migrants are significant driving forces of their use of public space (Yu 2009). Through ethnographic research conducted in various suburbs in Hong Kong, Yu determined if and how the configuration of the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers' religions, family ties, languages and modes of social interactions inscribe the cultural landscape of Hong Kong. Furthermore, Yu compares the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers' Sunday gatherings in Hong Kong with their cultural practices in the Philippines and argues

that their outdoor gatherings every Sunday in Hong Kong are intrinsically part of Filipino culture as he concludes (2009, p. 104):

> Based on exploration of both literature studies and interviews, it is reasonable to conclude that their outdoor gathering and enjoyment of the natural environment might be rooted in their innate religious beliefs and practices.

While the interviewees said that Little Manila is reminiscent of home because they can socialise with other Foreign Domestic Helpers from the same Filipino provinces and "can be the way we are at home, like with our family" (2015, pers. comm., 1 February), drawing out from the collection of spatial data and photographs reveals their agency beyond Filipino cultural and social rituals.

Throughout the field research, I observed the numerous activities the Foreign Domestic Helpers undertake on Sundays. Apart from communal activities such as eating, dancing, protesting, playing card games and general chatting, many Foreign Domestic Helpers engage in activities that are not shared or considered social. Within the various spaces in Little Manila, many Foreign Domestic Helpers can be seen talking on their phones and using other digital devices to connect with their families back home, self-grooming (such as painting nails or plaiting hair), reading magazines and sleeping. As described in the previous section of this chapter, many cardboard units as well as opened umbrellas and overhead sheets of fabric or plastic are assembled to construct variable private spaces. These devices as barriers enable privacy and private activities, signifying the Foreign Domestic Helpers' desire for personal space away from pedestrians and also as spatial separations from other groups of Foreign Domestic Helpers.

In the Philippines, more than 80% of the population is of Roman Catholic faith (Yu 2009, p. 102). The research conducted by Yu (2009) shows that attending church is the most important activity for Sunday gatherings in Hong Kong. While the interviewees also attended church service on Sunday which can be understood to be central to their Sunday schedule, church is not the main motivation for their weekly appearance in public space. Fieldwork showed that Sunday is not just about socialising and connecting with Foreign Domestic Helper peers in Hong Kong, it is also about having the time, resources and freedom to connect virtually with their children, husbands and other family members back home for uninterrupted periods of time without the scrutiny of their employers. Reconnecting with their family and sending care packages are activities that are unique

to their socio-spatial condition in Hong Kong because not only are they absent from their families, but they do not have domestic spaces of their own to construct a personal and private space that can be their home. Little Manila is significant because its formation is the opposite of the spatial condition that Foreign Domestic Helpers experience in their employers' homes. At home, their physical and personal space is transient, disciplined and truncated, limited to the mobile mattresses they sleep on, which remain hidden throughout the day with their belongings. The reduction of space experienced in their workplace – their so-called home – significantly contributes to the expansion of space that occurs in public space. Every Sunday, invisibility and spacelessness of Foreign Domestic Helpers is temporarily suspended when they take up residency in the urban public spaces of Hong Kong. As such, Little Manila emerges as spatialised resistance from the socio-spatial and cultural oppression that is inscribed in the Foreign Domestic Helpers' labour.

While my research concurs with Yu that the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers' use of public space – Little Manila – has formed part of the cultural landscape of Hong Kong, I further argue that the Foreign Domestic Helpers' habitual reclaiming of spaces is absorbed into the memory of Central and to a greater extent, Hong Kong. During the week, when their makeshift domestic interior is not present in the various urban spaces, they are embedded into Hong Kong's spatial narrative and spatial memory. Philosopher Dylan Trigg describes the effect of memory in relation to a specific time and place in *Memory of Place* (2012). Trigg focuses on episodic memory to understand the role the material environment plays in shaping, defining and constituting our sense of self and the world (2012, p. xvi). The Foreign Domestic Helpers' weekly episodic occurrence in public space has not only formed new spatialities and histories, but also has become part of the memory of the urban landscape of the city-state.

Lisa Law proposed that the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers have "breathed new life into Central on Sundays" and suggested that they are using the public spaces as the urban planners would have intended (Law 2002, p. 1636). She also notes that the public spaces that are temporarily activated every Sunday, such as Statue Square, are a spectacle of modern life in Hong Kong that has been unexpectedly facilitated by one of the property developers in Hong Kong (Law 2002, p. 1637). Hong Kong Land, who is one of the major property developers in Hong Kong, was the first to propose the development of the first elevated walkway, one level above the street level entrance to increase consumer circulation. Simultaneously the company proposed that Chater Road be closed to traffic on Sunday for the purpose of attracting more consumers to the area in an attempt to make Central a more

attractive shopping destination beyond its function as a corporate financial centre from Monday to Friday (Law 2002). At first, the pedestrianised Chater Road did not attract shoppers and tourists, instead the number of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers who gathered in Statue Square began to increase and the crowds saturated the square and the road. This was not well-received by the locals at first, but the road progressively attracted more retailers and has since evolved into its current popular shopping destination for locals and tourists, and continues to be a thriving part of Little Manila.

Subtle tactics: cordons and security guards

The pedestrianisation of Chater Road is an example of the influence that owners of privately owned public spaces have on the public spaces in Hong Kong. The more affluent the suburb, the more public spaces are privatised and regulated. The infiltration of Little Manila in Central has attracted various subtle forms of resistance from the building management of the privately owned public spaces that tolerate the weekly spatialisation.

Privately owned public spaces are regulated by authorities who have the power to request the removal of group gatherings at any point. However, their power is usually exercised discretely and not to the full extent. From the peaceful reoccurrence of Little Manila it can be ascertained that the events are not an attempt to permanently assert ownership over such public spaces, rather a temporary sharing of spaces. It also reflects an unspoken negotiation between the authorities and the temporary users, where both parties are flexible to a degree and open to spatial compromise. This flexibility allows many public spaces to become 'inhabitable'. With the majority of public spaces in Hong Kong being privately owned public spaces such as shopping malls, cafes and informal dining areas, spatial opportunities for group gatherings are minimal for city users like Foreign Domestic Helpers with limited income. In *Beyond Zuccotti Park: Freedom of Assembly and the Occupation of Public Space* (2012), privately owned public spaces is a term that was used widely to refer to a category of public space which is legally required to be accessible to the public under the city's public space regulations despite being privately owned (Shiffman et al. 2012). Unable to afford monetary admission into commercial public spaces, Foreign Domestic Helpers seek opportunities in Central's privately owned public spaces to fulfil their desire to temporarily reclaim personal and physical space.

When I first conducted fieldwork in the area in 2012, I came across Hong Kong citizens who disagreed with allowing the Foreign Domestic Helpers' congregations in Central and avoided

coming to Central on Sunday for that reason. According to Lisa Law, Filipino communities in Hong Kong and some retailers in the area who benefited from the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers' gatherings supported the sharing of public spaces in the area (Law 2002). Law observed that there were 'inhibiting streamers' around the ledges that surrounded the fountain in Statue Square similar to what I have seen during my field research in other public spaces in Central on Sundays.

On one Sunday in 2015, I noticed a large section of the HSBC atrium where many Foreign Domestic Helpers would usually gather was cordoned off with a notice for construction, however without any construction work in sight. On that day, Foreign Domestic Helpers occupied the periphery of the atrium and many groups relocated onto the uncovered walkway nearby. I spoke to two security guards patrolling the area and asked what the construction work was despite the lack of visible construction activity. They responded that there was going to be construction work later and the area was cordoned off for safety reasons. There were several cleaners present in the area and I inquired if they were there to clean up after the supposed construction. One security guard said the cleaners were there for the 'Filipino women' and there will be more cleaners later in the evening as the crowd dispersed (2015, pers. comm., 8 February). No construction could be seen for the remainder of that Sunday and when I returned to the building the next day, the atrium had reverted to its original state without the cordons or any visible construction changes. The area was cordoned off again the following Sunday, without any visible construction work during that day or in the following day.

Similarly, I also observed other parts of Little Manila being cordoned off, such as certain parts of the elevated walkways, the ledge of the fountain area in front of Exchange Square, the ledges of shop windows on Chater Road and others, to prevent people from accessing and gathering in those spaces. As I returned to the same sites on the next day and witnessed the lack of cordons and barriers, it could be assumed that there was no real construction scheduled to occur, rather it was a subtle tactic to discourage the Foreign Domestic Helpers from gathering there.

Figure 30 **A section of the Central Elevated Walkway that was cordoned off by the police without explanation, Hong Kong, 2015**, a pedestrian looked at Foreign Domestic Helpers sitting in cardboard units as he was standing in the cordoned off area, photograph by the author.

Aside from the use of cordons to discourage gathering in certain spaces, the increasing presence of security guards patrolling the area suggests that the Foreign Domestic Helpers' appropriation and transformation of parts of Central is a contested matter. In *Defying Disappearance: Cosmopolitan Public Spaces in Hong Kong* (2002), Lisa Law recorded that there were hawker control teams present in Central specifically preventing any Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers from illegally selling home-cooked foods or imported goods from the Philippines (Law 2002, p. 1637-1638). Between 2012 and 2015 when I was conducting fieldwork in Central on various Sundays, no hawker control staff were present in the area but there were security guards on patrol and cleaners who emptied public rubbish bins every few hours. In the last five to ten years, rubbish bins have been installed in certain areas in Central, such as on the Central Elevated Walkways, which the Foreign Domestic Helpers are known to populate every Sunday. As these spaces are mainly transient spaces Monday to Friday it can be assumed that the presence of cleaners and the addition of bins are a gesture specific to the increase of Foreign Domestic Helpers who gather there every Sunday. See also Rotmeyer (2010). There were no longer any Foreign Domestic Helpers selling food or other products, however in their place were enterprising locals (different from those selling cardboard pieces) who sold replica designer handbags and items of clothing. They walked in and through the seated crowds of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers enticing them with their products.

Some women ignored the hawkers' propositions, while some were absorbed in the products on offer. Without the presence of the hawker control authorities in these areas, every Sunday these illegal hawkers continue to circulate Little Manila to continue their business.

Figure 31 **Cleaners on frequent duty on the Central Elevated Walkway near the International Finance Centre shopping complex, Hong Kong, 2013**, photograph by the author.

With the increase of security guards, cleaners, rubbish bins and unexplained cordons in Little Manila, it is clear that the managing authorities of the associated privately owned public spaces are invested in keeping the area clean and regulated. Throughout my field research in Hong Kong, I noticed the gradual progression of these subversive strategies, especially as the areas with cordons have expanded in size and numbers throughout Central. These occurrences reflect the subtle yet growing resistance from the owners of the privately owned public spaces that Little Manila is constructed within. Their exercise of power in spatial limitation and exclusion is partly supported by prejudiced shop owners and locals lodging complaints about the potential degradation of their businesses and the prestigious reputation of the area (Law 2001; 2002). These gestures could also be speculated to be part of a gradual movement to retaliate against the infiltration of Little Manila as the number of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers continues to increase.

5.5 Conclusion: circuit breaker

What can be learned from the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatialised resistance in the formation of Little Manila? Through appropriation and transformation of loose, interstitial, liminal and non-places in the urbanity of Central, Foreign Domestic Helpers, as a disenfranchised contingent, have generated new spaces that transgress the formal and commercial boundaries of the city. Using their bodies and locally sourced materials such as disused cardboard, their temporary inhabitation of public space demonstrates a subtle yet specific form of agency. Beyond the socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation that result from the sanctioned discipline and control that are practised in the homes by the employers, Foreign Domestic Helpers appear in public space every Sunday to assert their resistance to being docile, domestic workers. They refuse to be quiet, migrant women who live their lives six days each week as obedient subjects of servitude. Every Sunday, they reclaim space, both physical and personal, to act as they desire with little inhibitions. Accompanying this reclamation of space are two significant actions that indicate the continual agility of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong: the recovery of autonomy and the cultivation of solidarity and resilience. Every Sunday, Little Manila acts as circuit breaker in Central's dedicated program of consumption (Spurr and Kwok 2014). It subverts the district's regulated spatial order and boldly displays the spatial potentiality for flexible inhabitation in unexpected spaces by groups of migrant workers.

What might appear as an odd assortment of spaces, objects and activities in the urban interiority of Central is in fact a systematic construction of informal domesticised spaces, routinised activities, organised settlements and informal economy. As such, Little Manila is fundamentally a spatial phenomenon that is reflective of and part of the cultural politics of global labour migration and socio-spatial inequality. The weekly construction, infiltration, and eventual deconstruction demonstrate the capacity of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers to dwell within a mutable spatial zone, somewhere between the private and public sphere. Despite being invisible and spaceless with little control over their livelihood for the majority of their residency in Hong Kong, every Sunday, Foreign Domestic Helpers reclaim space, autonomy and integrity. For as long as their workforce, along with the contamination of the home and workplace, exists in the city-state, this urban domestic interior will continue to indicate the agility of these migrant women, their recovery of autonomy and the cultivation of their collective resilience. The Foreign Domestic Helpers will continue to create new spatialities and histories in the cityscape of Hong Kong.

Chapter 6
Sunday: A Visual Essay

6.1 Introduction

Every Sunday, a majority of the nearly 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong have their day off work. Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers make their way to Causeway Bay to gather in Victoria Park and percolate through to other public spaces nearby. Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers come together in Central where they saturate the elevated walkways, underpasses, atriums, public stairways and forecourts. Areas are delineated by various functions and programs as well as the Filipino provinces they come from. On Sunday, Central Hong Kong's commercial landscape of glittering shopping malls, prestigious hotels and international corporate towers becomes a backdrop for the emergence of Little Manila.

This chapter provides a visual narrative of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' spatial occupation. The photographs were taken during the field research in Hong Kong between 2013 and 2015. They have been selected to show the spatial condition of Little Manila, highlighting the events that occur within. The narrative moves through different areas in Central which Foreign Domestic Helpers inhabit. As such, this photographic account displays, in full visual vigour, the reclamation of space that disrupts the city-state's hegemonic spaces every Sunday.

All photographs have been taken on Sundays in Hong Kong between November 2013 and February 2015. All images within the visual essay are numbered consecutively from the list of figures in the thesis. They are numbered from Fig.32 – 95.

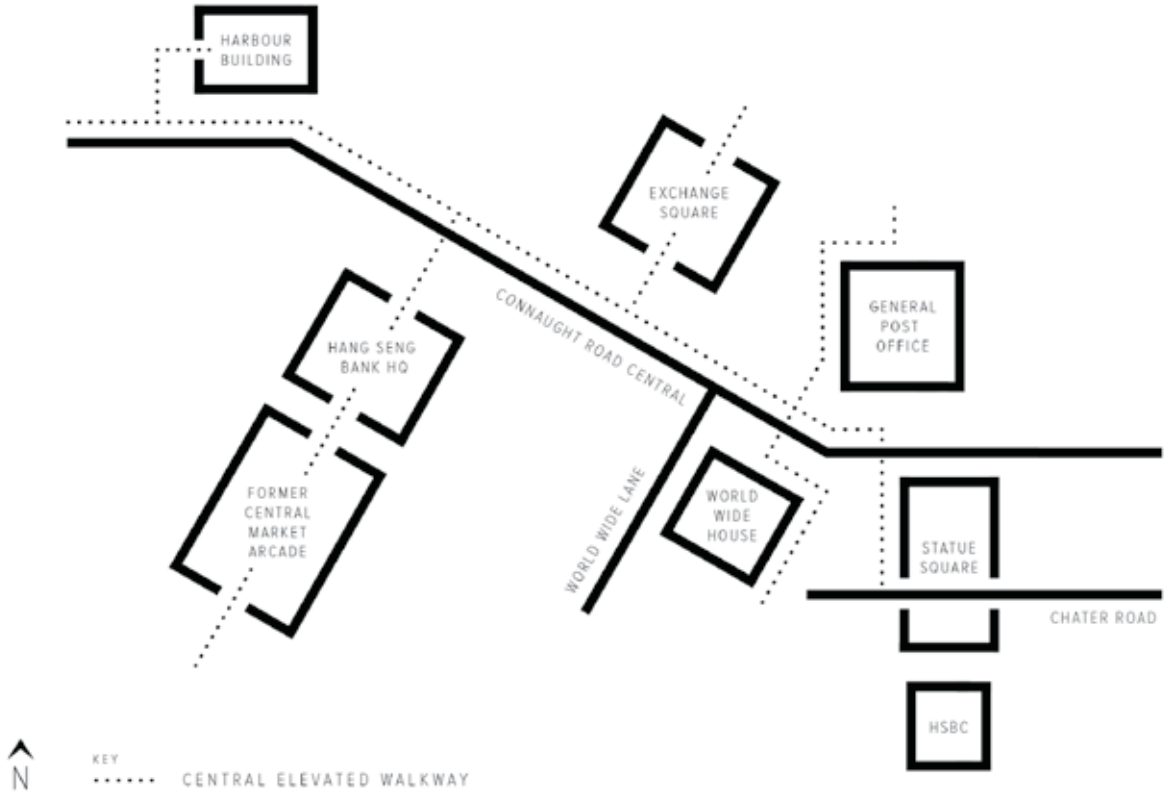
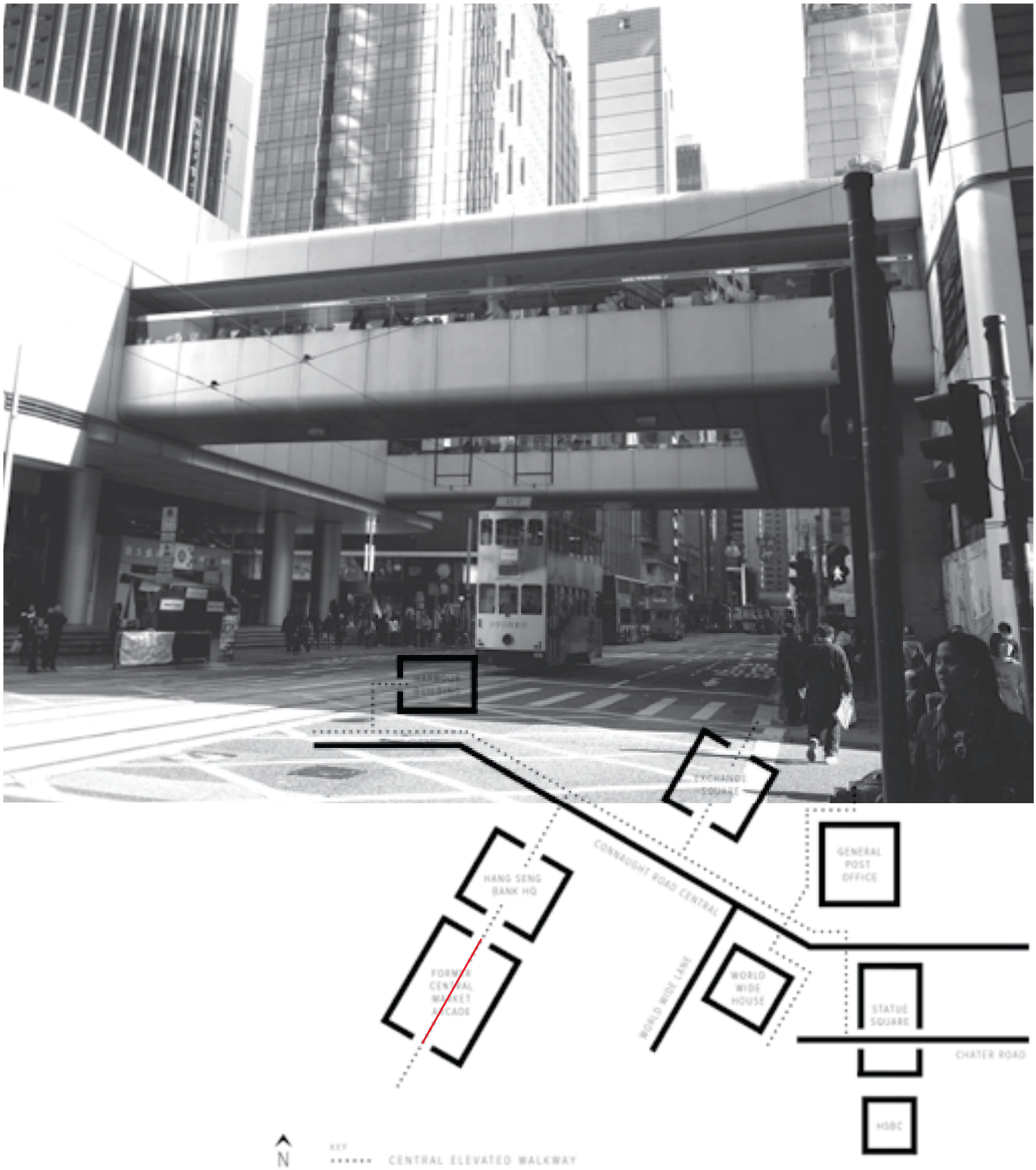


Figure 32 **Map of Little Manila in Central, Hong Kong, 2015**, original digital image by the author and Blake Jurmann

Former Central Market Arcade



(*Previous Page:* Fig.33 & 34)
This visual essay begins at the Former Central Market Arcade, which is the building connected to the right of the elevated walkways as pictured. From the street level where this photo was taken, the temporary occupancy of the FDH can already be seen by the number of women sitting against the glass balustrade.

Inside the arcade, groups of FDHs set up their temporary residency against the shutter gates of the closed retailers. Shoes are placed on the edges of the cardboard and bags, potentially containing food, or goods for exchange or postage, are a common feature within their demarcated spaces. (Fig. 35)

FDHs can be seen engaged in different activities; grooming (pictured on the far left with the woman sitting on the stool), chatting and playing card games. (Fig. 36)

Sometimes their temporary settings look like regular private domestic situations. The scene captured here looks like the end of a dinner party around the dinner table with leftover food and wine. Some guests are still conversing while others recline to take a rest. (Fig. 37)

Open umbrellas are popular objects used to separate the footpath as well as to shield the FDHs from the gaze of pedestrians. Here we can see most the group is resting underneath the umbrellas while one is energized by the presence of a persistent photographer. This group is seated next to one of the few shops in this arcade that operated on Sunday. (Fig. 38)

The groups return to use the same spaces every Sunday. Sometimes they socialize with their neighbors, at other times they may just want to rest or sit quietly. (Fig. 39)

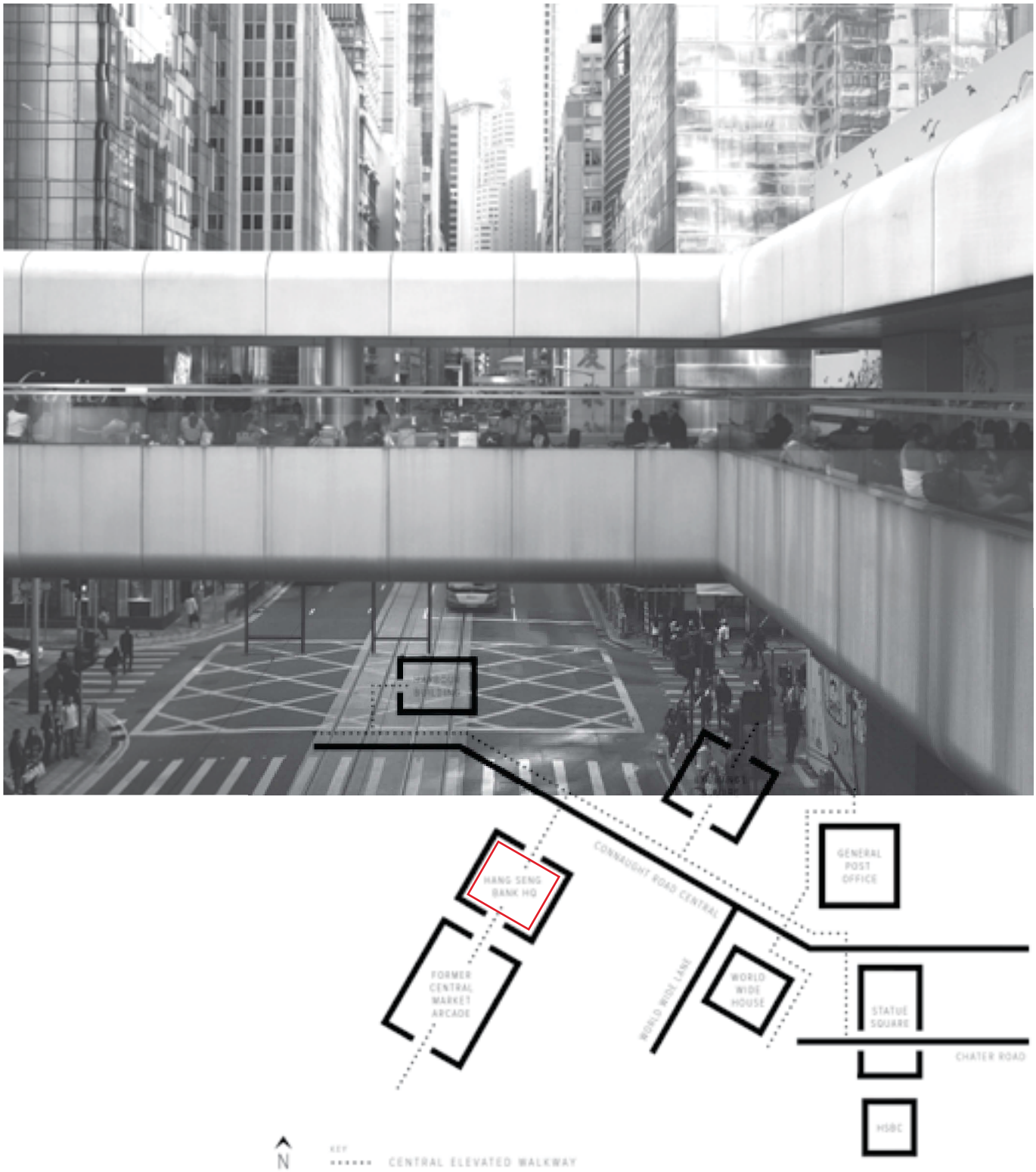
For seven days a week, pedestrians use this arcade as a convenient, off-the-ground corridor that connects shopping, work and transport. For some Foreign Domestic Helpers, this space provides a temporary home away from home. (Fig. 40)

Left: As they only have one opportunity every week to socialize with each other and to engage in things they enjoy, playing card games can be a satisfying treat. (Fig. 41)

Here, their demarcated space is at full capacity. This may be the preferred condition compared to their employment routine where they are isolated from their friends and family. (Fig. 42)

The elevated walkway as pictured here connects the enclosed interior of the Former Central Market Arcade to the Heng Sang Bank tower. This elevated walkway is shaped like a 'U' and offers direct sensorial connection to the street below. (Fig.43 & 44)

Hang Seng Bank



Left: Pedestrians walk along the middle of the footpath as Foreign Domestic Helpers use cardboard to demarcate space on both sides of the conduit. On Sunday, it is a common sight to see Foreign Domestic Helpers sleeping in these spaces, (often just on cardboard) as pictured. (Fig.45)

The glass balustrade that surrounds this elevated walkway offer an unobstructed view of the cityscape that many Foreign Domestic Helpers and even their employers do not get to enjoy in their high-rise apartments. (Fig.46)

As their personal resources are scarce, many Foreign Domestic Helpers may come across clothing that their employers intend to discard that they may see fit for their children or their friend's children back home. They often collect them and show to their friends before sending them as gifts back home to the Philippines. (Fig.47)

Right: Although the sight of flattened cardboard pieces laid on the ground usually signify a 'claimed' space, some groups prefer to have a couple of people sitting in the space and guarding it while others are running their errands throughout the day. (Fig.48)

Lee Chi-ching
李志清

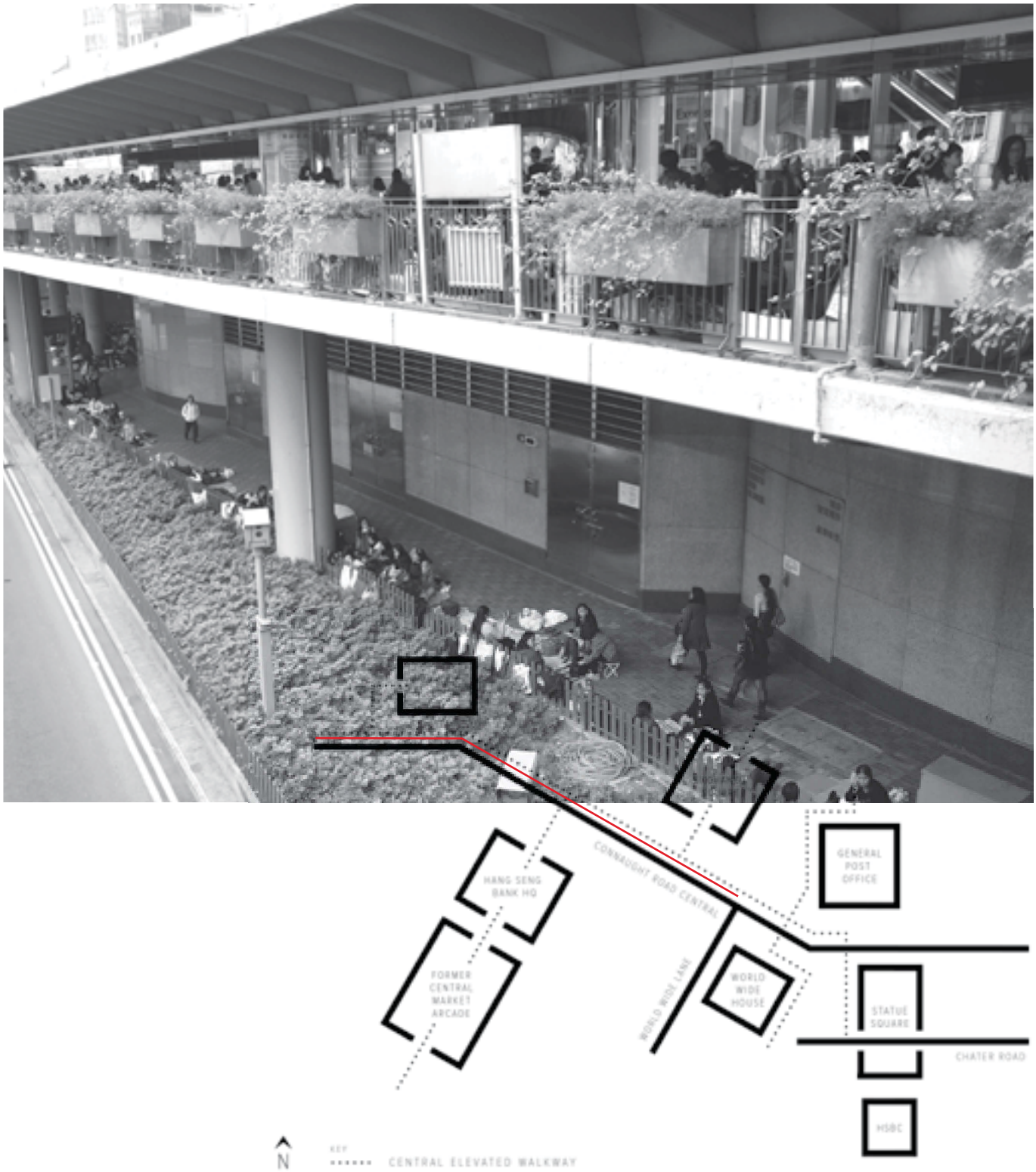

Theresa, Lee Wai-chun
Theresa, Lee Wai-chun
Lee Chi-shing

Previous: The footpath along this wall is one of less pedestrian traffic. Here the Foreign Domestic Helpers can lean against the wall, stretch their legs out and watch the shoppers and tourists pass by. (Fig.49)

Many locals have complained that Central becomes too overcrowded, noisy and dirty due to the infiltration of Little Manila. In reality, Foreign Domestic Helpers keep their belongings, food and rubbish, etc all in plastic bags for easy access and removal. They also keep within the spatial boundaries marked by their cardboard pieces. (Fig.50)

The Central Elevated Walkway that connect to the Exchange Square and International Finance Centre Mall is the most populated by Foreign Domestic Helpers on Sunday. Notice how the elevated walkway and the pedestrian underpass it provides are both inhabited by groups of migrant women. (Fig.51 & 52)

Exchange Square



Here, Foreign Domestic Helpers occupy both sides of the walkway with their cardboard units, pushing pedestrian thoroughfare into the center. (Fig.53)

Next page: Setting up their Sunday spaces in this part of the Central Elevated Walkway can be convenient as it is close to the public amenities of the International Finance Centre Mall. However, despite sitting in the sun, the inhabitants are not protected from the cold temperatures of the Hong Kong winter. Notice here how many of them are wearing thick parkas and have their hoods over their heads. (Fig.54)


→ 交易廣場第三座
↑ 機場快線
→ Three
↑ Airpo

On footpaths like this one, Foreign Domestic Helpers like to establish more robust structures to separate their space from the pedestrian's foot traffic. As pictured here, the structure has walls reinforced with cable ties, extra cardboard pieces against the balustrade for weather protection and comfort, and the handrails along the balustrade have been put to good use as coat and bag holders. With the shoes along the outside of the cardboard wall, this structure particularly resembles a 'real' private gathering space for Foreign Domestic Helpers. (Fig.55)

Right: Cardboard might be needed throughout the day to reinforce structures or to share with other groups who missed the opportunity to buy or collect their own pieces. Here, the cardboard pieces are stacked inside a group's space as a prized resource. (Fig.56)

Faith
NETOP
STYLE NO.
C/NO.


STALLION RED HORSE
CLUB 65
FRAGILE

Left: Their desire for privacy is evident by some group's preference to establish dividers higher than themselves (when seated) and also to create a makeshift roof by a piece of fabric that is tied to the handrails and the upright pieces of cardboard. (Fig.57)

Some groups build structures that resemble fortresses, protecting them from onlookers' gaze, the weather, and sometimes even from their own neighbors. (Fig.58)

Each group varies in number of people, therefore their cardboard structures are also built accordingly. Many spaces established on this section of the Central Elevated Walkway can be seen housing ten or more people at a time. (Fig.59)

Even in the middle of winter, footwear is not always weather appropriate as many Foreign Domestic Helpers take off their shoes and leave them outside their cardboard units for most of Sunday. (Fig.60)


EXCHANGE SQUARE

Left: Many Foreign Domestic Helpers have little choice in the food they are asked to prepare by the employers throughout the week. On Sunday, having the autonomy to eat the food they wish, in the company of like-minded people they enjoy socialising with can be a simple, yet joyful occasion, even if they are sitting on cardboard pieces along a public footpath while curious locals watch on. (Fig.61)

For six days a week as Foreign Domestic Helpers care for their employers' children and the elderly, they often do not have the time to look after themselves. Painting one's toenails or getting other self-grooming procedures can be luxurious rewards they can only afford due to the kindness and understanding of other Foreign Domestic Helpers. (Fig.62)

Many cardboard boxes are sourced directly from nearby supermarkets and food outlets. As pictured here, some cardboard pieces still have attached to them the prices of the merchandise that it once housed. (Fig.63)

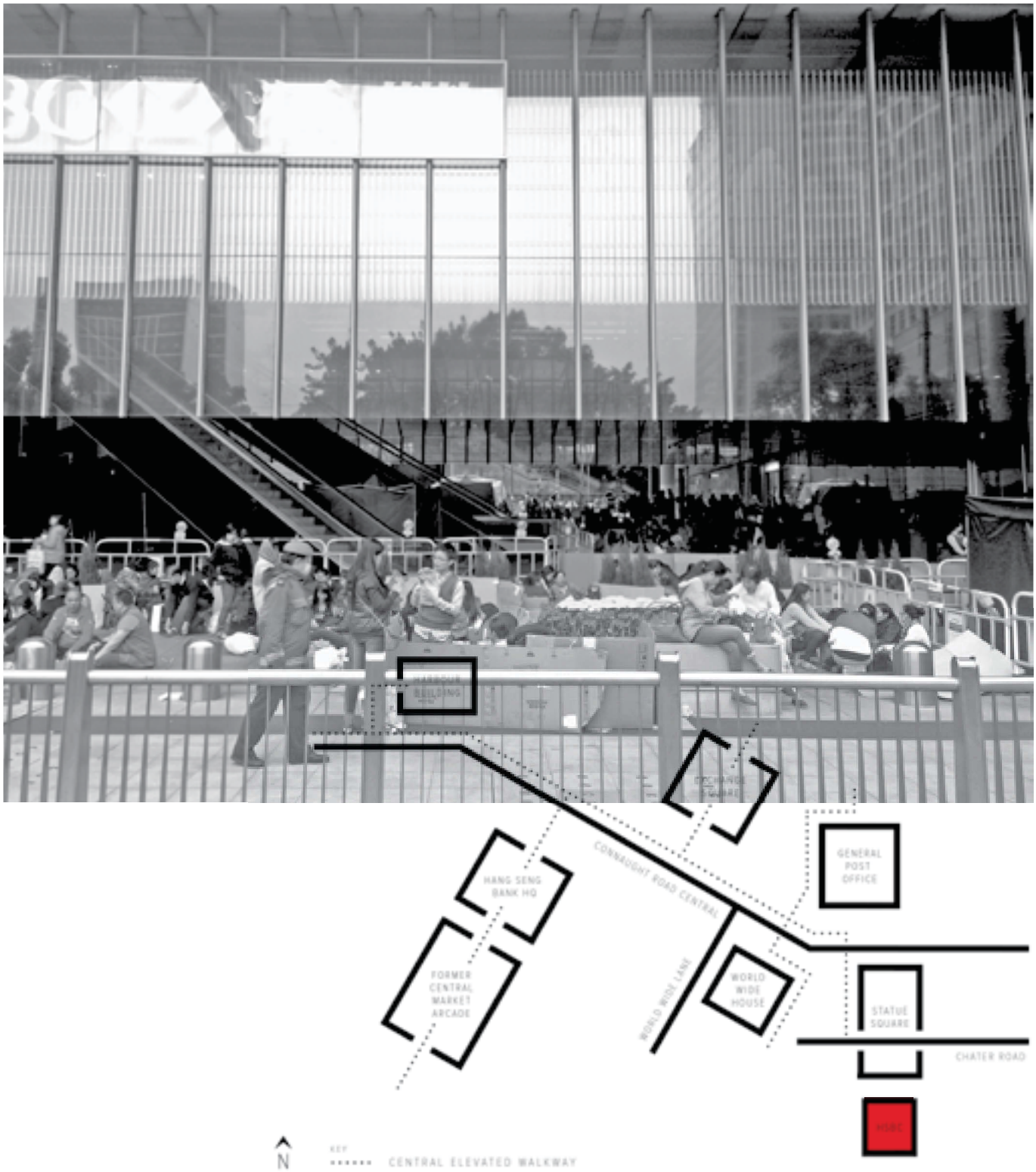
Some cardboard structures can be vacant at various times of the day when the occupants are running errands nearby. Many of them rely on the kindness of their neighbours to keep a watchful eye on their items and spaces. (Fig.64)


PACIFIC COFFEE

On this section of the Central Elevated Walkway, hundreds of cardboard units of all shapes, sizes, capacity and building techniques can be seen appearing, disappearing and reappearing every Sunday, signalling the temporary home away from home for many Foreign Domestic Helpers. (Fig.65 & 66)

The Hong Kong Shanghai Bank Corporation building was designed by architect Norman Foster that completed in 1986. The entrance to the building is via escalators that ascend a three-level high atrium intended to be used as a public space. This atrium has become synonymous with the Foreign Domestic Helpers' gathering every Sunday. In this photograph, groups of migrant women and locals are gathering on the periphery of the atrium as the interior of the atrium can was barricaded off for construction. (Fig.67 & 68)

HSBC Atrium


HARBOUR BUILDING
HANG SENG BANK HQ
FORMER CENTRAL MARKET ARCADE
CONNAUGHT ROAD CENTRAL
WORLD WIDE LINK
WORLD WIDE HOUSE
GENERAL POST OFFICE
STATUE SQUARE
CHATER ROAD
HSBC
N
KEY
CENTRAL ELEVATED WALKWAY

Left: On most Sundays, the entire atrium is accessible apart from the escalators into the building. As pictured here, groups of migrant women bring along their belongings and claim temporary space for themselves using cardboard and umbrellas much like the temporary inhabitations in other parts of Little Manila. (Fig.69)

Due to the uneven floor and the open boundaries that surround the square-shaped atrium, during winter days, many groups huddle close together and gather towards the centre of the atrium. The space can become quite crowded on Sundays. (Fig.70)

Types of Cardboard Constructions













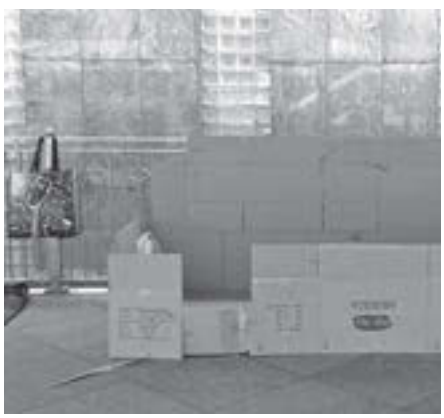












These photographs document the variety of cardboard structures and how the occupants maximise the spaces created on the inside and outside. Throughout the course of Sunday, these units are home bases for Foreign Domestic Helpers to seek refuge, socialise, and to have a space of their own between activities. (Fig.71-94)


Queen's Road Central
1-37 皇后大道中 39-93
for "SME" * Company Re
ral / Causeway Bay

On Sunday evenings, as groups of migrant women dismantle their temporary home bases to return to their employers' homes, local cardboard collectors like the one pictured can be seen throughout Central recollecting the cardboard pieces. Some might sell the pieces to recycling companies. Others might store them away to be re-sold to other locals, or to Foreign Domestic Helpers on the following Sunday. (Fig.95)

Chapter 7
Migrant Domestic Labour: Global Disempowerment and Exploitation

7.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the situation of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong and how their repeated act of spatialised resistance is a reclamation of space on Sundays. Their agency to reclaim space comes from resisting the systematic socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation they experience in their employers' homes. It is important to illustrate the origins of this spatial phenomenon as not an isolated circumstance of disempowerment. When Little Manila emerges every Sunday in Hong Kong, it reflects power relations and spatial contestations that result from the economic, political and socio-spatial inequality inscribed in the global operation of migrant domestic labour. This chapter outlines the global practice of migrant domestic labour focusing on commodification, feminisation and dislocation.

From the outset, the nearly 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong operate in a disadvantaged position where they are socially, economically, culturally, politically and spatially oppressed. Their dislocated experience is staged from the top down, where the affective dimensions of migration policies and the commodification of domestic labour influence the denial of their socio-spatial equality, offering instead power and control to their employers. As anthropologists Sara L. Friedman and Pardis Mahdavi (2015, p. 3) claim, "the migrants engage in a productive and at times perverse dance with the state actors as they shift between intimate settings and relationships within their homes and host nations".

As such, this chapter also exhibits the global context in which Foreign Domestic Helpers' disenfranchisement in Hong Kong originates and the network of disempowerment that is the method of functioning of global migrant domestic labour.

7.2 Diana's story

> "I want my children to grow up with more than I had. I hope they can understand that I moved away only to give them more, so they can go to university and get a better job, a good life. It has been very difficult for me to be here without them. I think about them every minute." (2015, pers. comm., 1 February)

Diana first came to Hong Kong in 2007, leaving her children at the ages of two and five. Before working in Hong Kong, Diana was studying a degree in nursing but discontinued in the second year because she needed to help provide for the family. She initially worked in a food factory for five to six days a week, earning a monthly wage of 7000 peso (approximately USD$147). Her husband worked as a courier in a freight company that required working long hours and his earnings were double her income. The couple relied on the help of her mother and aunt in taking care of their children and some domestic chores while they were at work. Diana first discussed working abroad as a domestic worker with her family several months after giving birth to their first child. Her husband strongly objected to this suggestion at the time. A few years later, her husband had an accident, which led to a recovery period that heavily reduced his income. Diana took the step by acknowledging the best way to earn more money for the family and to afford better education for the children was to work abroad. After careful consideration and discussions, the couple and their families agreed that Diana would go to work in Hong Kong for a period of time.

Diana's first Foreign Domestic Helper employment contract in Hong Kong began in March 2007, earning her a monthly wage of HKD$3800[7] (approximately USD$489). Each month, she saved HKD$500 for herself and the remainder HKD$3300 (approximately USD$425) was sent back to her family. This monthly remittance from Hong Kong was almost three times that of her income in the Philippines. Although this new employment made significant contributions to the family's operations, her husband, before and during her time abroad, asked for her return after two contracts (four years). At the time of the interview in 2015, Diana was working in Hong Kong for the eighth consecutive year and earning HKD$5000 each month (approximately USD$643). She had not foreseen spending almost a decade in Hong Kong (2015, pers. comm., 1 February):

> I wanted to go home after two contracts, but it is very difficult to return home because I can help so much with my wages here. My children can go to a better school outside the village. My husband can work less. It would be impossible in the Philippines to have the same pay. But it is very sad to come back to Hong Kong after going home. Very sad. I cry for two weeks after every visit. When I first left the Philippines my children were so small, now my son is starting to have little hairs on his face!

[7] In 2007, the legal minimum allowable wage for Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong was raised from HKD$3270 to $3480, as publicised by a Hong Kong government press release, http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200706/05/P200706050169.htm

Despite the pain of family separation and her family's plea for her return to the Philippines, Diana saw time spent with her children as a necessary sacrifice in providing money for them. This 'decision' of money earnt at the expense of time is not one made out of free will, rather it is a forced decision between two difficult options that have resulted from the Philippines' extended participation in the global migrant labour force.

Filipino labourers have migrated for work around the world over the course of the last century; to Los Angeles in the 1920s (Ong and Azores 1994), to Rome in the 1980s (Parrenas 2001), to Hong Kong since the 1970s (Constable 2007), to the United Arab Emirates in the 1990s (Lindio-McGovern 2013), and various developed cities in Asia such as Singapore and Taiwan in the 1980s (Lindio-McGovern 2009; 2013; Parrenas 2001). According to a report released by the Philippines Statistic Authority in April 2016, the number of Overseas Filipino Workers who worked abroad at anytime during the period April to September 2015 was estimated at 2.4 million. Overseas Contract Workers or those with existing work contracts comprised 97.1% of the total Overseas Filipino Workers during this period. The report outlined the proportion of female Overseas Filipino Workers (51.1%) was slightly higher than male counterparts (48.9%) and that more than half of the female Overseas Filipino Workers participated in unskilled labour.[8] Diana is part of a consistent migratory labour force of women who cannot find work in the Philippines. Sociologist Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, whose work focuses on migrant Filipino domestic workers in various parts of the world, sets the context of her book (2001, p. 1) by stating "The outflow of women from the Philippines and their entrance into domestic service in more than 130 countries represents one of the largest and widest flows of contemporary female migration."

Diana shares a similar experience with many other female Overseas Filipino Workers, which reflects the standardised narrative of female labour migration from the Philippines – a narrative of dislocation, transnational family separation and inflexible career path (Constable 2007; Lindio-McGovern 2013; Parrenas 2001; Yeates 2009). For all of the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed, providing for the family is the primary, sometimes the only, motivation for their migration. These women, together with their families, make the decision to migrate as domestic workers with the main goal of improving the livelihood and prospects of their family. Most of these women embark on their journeys with the intention of returning after two or three contracts. In reality, this is usually not the case. In Diana's

[8] For more details please see https://psa.gov.ph/content/total-number-ofws-estimated-24-million-results-2015-survey-overseas-filipinos#sthash.ZhuadWqN.dpuf

case, she and her family realised how much her income provides for the support of the family despite their separation, and she continues to participate in the semi-permanent employment of the Foreign Domestic Helper contract.

Semi-permanent is the term sociologist Nigaya Lindio-McGovern (2013) uses to describe the nature of migrant domestic labour. She explains that although migrant domestic workers operate on short-term contracts, which technically classify them as temporary workers, the feminisation of the Philippines' labour export policy contradicts the temporary nature as it is tailored to the import policies of labour in the receiving countries. This results in a steady supply of a cheap, female domestic labour force, which has become a permanent investment for the labour-sending country (Lindio-McGovern 2013). On the other hand, the labour-receiving country may perceive it simply as a continuous supply of cheap labour where individual labourers are readily available, thus they also become easily replaceable. Compounding the fleeting nature of migrant labour, this perception shapes all aspects of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' labour conditions in Hong Kong evident by their sanctioned and practised socio-spatial inequality.

7.3 Reproductive labour: domestic and care work

Unskilled labour is a sector of the workforce associated with low skill levels characterised by low education requirements and minimal wages (Choudry and Hlatshwayo 2016, p. 1-7). Unskilled labour often refers to low-level construction work and reproductive labour. The Foreign Domestic Helpers participate in domestic work, which is also known as care work or reproductive labour.

Reproductive labour is defined as work that relates to the maintenance of households involving domestic chores such as cleaning and cooking as well as taking care of children and the elderly (Asis, Huang and Yeoh 2004). Within the context of domestic work, care work is considered as social reproductive labour (Yeats 2009).

Sociologist Nicola Yeates describes social reproductive labour as a particular form of labour that creates and sustains human life as distinct from commodities (2009). Reproductive labour contains different categories such as biological production of human beings, the maintenance of individuals throughout their life cycle and systemic reproduction of knowledge, social bonds and values. She refers to the importance of care labour as it supports the people as physical, social and cultural beings (Yeates 2009, p. 5-7). Social reproduction

involves both biological reproduction and socialisation processes; it is a broad field that incorporates sexual and physical reproduction alongside activities as diverse as housework, childcare and education (Yeats 2001; 2009).

Migrant domestic workers participate in social reproductive labour. The research director of Oxford University's Centre of Migration, Policy and Society Bridget Anderson argues that paid domestic workers themselves are inescapably means of reproduction as the engagement of the whole person in the act is an essential factor of reproductive labour (Anderson and Ruhs 2010). Domestic work involves an "array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Lindio-McGovern 2013, p. 28). Contrary to its societal impact is the categorisation of reproductive labour as mainly unskilled labour that does not contribute to the economy directly. Negating its societal value and only attributing it to direct economic input continues to reinforce the subordinate position of domestic workers (who are mainly women) in the global labour market as well as the subordinate position of the labour-sending nations (Gutierrez-Rodriguez 2010; Parrenas 2008; Yeats 2009). Sociologist Encarnacion Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010, p. 88-98) discusses the value of reproductive labour and the feminisation of labour through a Marxist framework.

7.4 Migrant domestic labour: the global market

Globally there are approximately 150 million international migrant workers. According to the International Labour Organisation's global estimates of migrant workers, there are 11.5 million migrant workers contracted to domestic work (ILO 2013).

The challenges that migrant workers face, including the dynamics of gender and race, immigration status and inequality, result from the affective dimensions of migration policies, the political economy of migration and the roles of various sections of the global migrant workforce in labour practices. They are never a localised, isolated contestation but a small fragment within the interconnected web of capitalist globalisation. Historian Justin Akers Chacon and urban theorist Mike Davis believe global migrant labour is produced and influenced by structural adjustments imposed in the Global South by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other financial institutions (Akers Chacon and Davis 2006). Akers Chacon and Davis define neoliberal immigration as "displacement accompanied by disenfranchisement and often internal segregation in host countries" (2006, p. 90). This occurs as the negative effect of free market capitalist policies forcing people out of their local communities and submitting to precarious and semi-permanent positions as migrant

labourers in other countries. The categorisation of migrant workers and the creation of various temporary labourers with different sets of rights attached to their immigration status is a standard policy feature. It is also a capitalist strategy which is fundamental to the functioning of many capitalist economies, facilitating the reduced costs of labour for employers (Akers Chacon and Davis, p. 3-5). The labour markets of global cities often demand a pool of cheap labour to satisfy the need for unskilled labour (Sassen 1990). The relationship between the host countries and labour-sending countries is an abstract bi-folding of supply and demand.

Many host countries are post-industrial nations that maintain a high level of employment within the formal economy by importing unskilled labour. These countries' border control protocols manage the rapid flows of migrant workers like a rotating-door labour market (Choudry and Hlatshwayo 2016, p. 10-11). This steady in and out supply of workers intensifies the commodification of labour, which results in greater exploitation of workers. Consequently, these labourers are traded as commodities in the market for a lower price and employers gain greater profit (Harvey 2007, p. 166-69). David Harvey argues that the current state of the labour market has "transformed the position of labour workers, of women, and of indigenous groups in the social order by emphasising that human labour is a commodity like any other" (2007 p. 171).

The exploitative effects of the commodification of migrant labour and individual host nations' sanctioning of social, political, economic and spatial limitations begin through systemic stipulations such as direct sponsorship by employers and restricted work permits. The migrant labourers' legitimacy to remain in the job and the country is solely controlled by their employer, which makes resistance to and the reporting of abuse difficult if not impossible. Employers hire migrant labourers via short term contracts that are one to two years at a time. This temporary commitment maximises flexibility, strips away the protective measures for labour and creates a global trend of a cheap, disposable workforce (Lindio-McGovern 2013). As such, in the case of Hong Kong, the migration policies that dictate the parameters around the living and working conditions of Foreign Domestic Helpers are sanctioned schemes of exploitation. Political writer Arun Kundnani (2007 p. 145) explains that within the historical context of British immigration post-Second World War:

> The new post-industrial migrant workforce was characterised by several distinct streams – reserve regiments of labour – each adapted to specific needs of different sectors of the economy. The intricacies of the system would be kept subject to constant review and adjustment, so that the

> numbers, characters and entitlements of workers entering the economy under different schemes could be changed as necessary. Each of these various routes provided employers with a different package of exploitation.

Sociologist Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, whose work expands Asian American studies and labour migration, notes the disenfranchisement that inevitably occurs to the migrant workers (2010 p. 55):

> The migration-as-development approach promoted by the World Bank, the International Organisation for Migration and the Global Forum on Migration and Development through temporary labour migration programmes allows employers to exploit foreign workers, absolve developing states from introducing truly redistributive development policies and relieves states from extending the full benefits of citizenship to immigrants.

The Foreign Domestic Helpers I met in Hong Kong only provide a small window into the lives of the global contingent of migrant domestic labourers who journey into a global market where they are commodified as domestic labourers who are systematically exploited. Currently, the nearly 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers working in Hong Kong make up 4% of the population (Hong Kong SAR Government 2016). Statistics from the Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department (2015) show that as of February 2015, there were a total of 178,000 Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong. Political scientist Saskia Sassen (1990) notes that within globalisation, the lifestyle of the professional labour force in the formal sector of global cities is maintained by the low-wage service workers such as domestic workers. Women in Hong Kong progressively moved into the formal labour sector because the Hong Kong government continued to import Foreign Domestic Helpers over the last few decades. Without the nearly 350,000 Foreign Domestic Helpers, the same number of Hong Kong women could be housewives or working part time to share the load of domestic duties. Drawing upon cultural theorist Daisy Tam's (2016) concept of the parasitic paradigm where the Foreign Domestic Helpers and Hong Kong are interdependent, co-existing rather than operating in a one-sided parasitic dependency, the relationship between the host nation and labour-sending countries should be understood and practised as one of interconnection and collective benefit. Foreign Domestic Helpers legitimately contribute to Hong Kong society. It is unproductive to view the dynamics simply within a hierarchy where the migrant workers (the Foreign Domestic Helpers) are parasitic guests

because such perceptions will continue the prejudice and exploitation of Foreign Domestic Helpers and the global migrant domestic labour force.

7.5 Feminisation of migrant domestic labour

The Philippines' export

Filipino migrant domestic labourers seek work in host nations in the Global South such as Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the Global North destination countries include the United Kingdom, France, Greece, Italy, Canada, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The economy of post-industrial nations demands low-wage migrant workers to expand their pool of cheap labour and in particular, female workers to perform low-wage service work in global cities. Sassen (1991) refers to global cities as leading financial capitals in the world such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo, New York, San Francisco and Dubai, which are in many of the popular host nations of foreign domestic workers.

Migrant workers from the Philippines are synonymous with globalisation and capitalism. With nearly 5 million of its citizens working around the world and 3.25 million of which are migrant domestic workers in more than 160 countries, "Filipino women are the domestic workers par excellence of globalisation" (Parrenas 2008, p. 3). In a visit to the United States in 2003, then president of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal Arroyo referred to herself as the "CEO of a global Philippine enterprise of millions of Filipinos who work abroad" (Rodriguez 2010, p. 5). In *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labour to the World* (2010), Rodriguez calls the Philippine government a labour brokerage state that actively prepares, mobilises and regulates its citizens for labour migration. The redefinition of nationalism normalises labour migration within the Philippines. Those who leave the country feel the responsibility of supporting the family with their remitted wages and are treated as national heroes (Rodriguez 2002; 2010).

Sociologist Rhacel Salazar Parrenas states in her book *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (2001, p.11):

> The contemporary outmigration of Filipinos and their entrance into domestic work is a product of globalisation; it is patterned under the role of the Philippines as an export-based economy in globalisation; and it is embedded in the specific historical phase of global restructuring.

Consequently and by default, the female migrant domestic workers join the informal labour sector of global cities, where sociologists such as Rhacel Salazar Parrenas and Nigaya Lindio-McGovern refer to migrant domestic workers from the Philippines as the "global servants of late capitalism" (Lindio-McGovern and Walliman 2009) and "servants of globalisation" (Parrenas 2001).

'Migration has a woman's face'

The feminisation of labour generally refers to the increasing majority of women participating in a particular workforce. This applies to migrant domestic labour where women constitute 73.4% (8.5 million) of all migrant domestic labourers in the world (ILO 2013). This is problematic as the majority of labourers who participate in the informal labour sector of global cities are women, which demonstrates the globally entrenched inequality between men and women, socially, politically and economically. Men are more likely to have employment opportunities in their home country, before seeking jobs overseas as they have higher education and more employable skills beyond unskilled labour than women. Furthermore, as previously highlighted in this chapter, the Philippines Statistic Authority (2015) demonstrated that not only is the number of women migrant workers higher than men, but more than half of the female Overseas Filipino Workers are participating in unskilled labour. These statistics indicate that an overwhelming number of women leave the Philippines to earn income by working as domestic labourers. These statistics also highlight the feminisation of the Philippines' export labour and more specifically its feminisation of migrant domestic labour.

'Migration has a woman's face' reads an educational poster released by the United Nations (Parrenas 2008, p. 1). The poster states that nearly 70% of migrants from the Philippines and Indonesia, and half of the labour migration worldwide, are women. Yeates (2009) argues that the feminisation of migration has been largely due to women in developing countries holding less land and their inability to secure long-term employment in the agricultural sector. As a result, many women from developing countries respond to the global demand for care workers in positions varying between nurses and domestic workers (Yeates 2009). From this emerges a global reception of domestic work; women from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean migrate for work in households in the United States and Canada; Indonesian and Filipino women move to developed nations in Asia and the Middle East; Sri Lankan women go to Greece and the Middle East, and Polish women migrate to Germany and Italy (Yeates 2009). Various host nations, including Canada, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Japan, Singapore, Greece and Taiwan, have sanctioned the opening of their borders to foreign care workers and

have designed their own migration policies designed for such entries similar to the Foreign Domestic Helper Visa in Hong Kong.

The International Labour Organisation released a report in 2013 that included statistics of the global distribution of female migrant domestic workers according to the destination regions. Over 2 million female migrant domestic workers (24%) are in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (ILO 2013):

Region	**Percent**
South-East Asia and the Pacific	24%
North, South and Western Europe	22.1%
Arab States	19.0%
East Asia	11.7%
Latin America	8.1%
North America	6.9%
Sub-Sahara Africa	3.6%
Central and Western Asia	2.1%
South Asia	1.2%
Eastern Europe	0.7%
North Africa	0.6%
Total	100%

Figure 96 **Destination regions for female migrant workers 2013 according to the ILO 2013**

In Hong Kong, between 1993 and 2005, the number of Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong increased steadily from 105,400 to 118,030 and Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers increased from 6100 to 96,900 in the same period (Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department 2005). Although Indonesian Foreign Domestic Helpers have increased at a faster rate, Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers still make up the majority (52%) of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong (Hong Kong SAR Government 2016).

The Philippines is in a secondary position as a labour-sending nation due to a condition Lindio-McGovern describes as the "brain-drain", which has resulted from its large labour export (2013, p. 37-39). This refers to the significant number of migrant domestic workers who have higher education or college degree qualifications leaving the country to be domestic workers overseas due to the lack of employment opportunities and government support schemes (Lindio-McGovern 2013). While the Philippines invests in their nursing and education sector, it is the host countries which the Filipino workers migrate to work to

as domestic workers that benefit but not to the extent of the potential of the migrants. The less educated remain within the Philippines while the educated women become a cheap, disposable reproductive labour force that raises children and cleans houses in host countries (Lindio-McGovern 2013). Lindio-McGovern (2013, p. 39) emphasises that:

> Another outcome that is detrimental to the labour-sending country is the brain drain, with what I call "brain waste". A significant number of migrant domestic workers have college educations and higher, such as in nursing and in education, but their education is wasted.

Lindio-McGovern (2013) continues to describe the effects of the 'brain drain' in relation to the disproportion and imbalance that have direct effects on a national level, where hospitals and schools in the Philippines experience a shortage of qualified nurses and teachers. Contradictory to the intention of exporting labour, the continuous outpour of skilled migrant workers spurs the development of the Philippines rather than contributing to pay off its international debt and propelling the economy forward (Lindio-McGovern 2013, p. 39-41; Rosca 1995, p. 522-27).

There is an impression that the remittances received from the migrant domestic workers are helping the Philippines' economy. Statistics show that remittances from overseas Filipinos have grown steadily between 2000 and 2015, consistently marginally close to or above 10% of the country's GDP (World Bank 2016). Lindio-McGovern argues that the foreign reserve gained through remittance is largely used to pay foreign debt and corrupt government officials have allegedly used this money for election campaigns rather than investing into local job opportunities to ease unemployment (2013, p. 39-41). Despite the steady remittances flowing into the country the unemployment rate remains high in the Philippines and the impression that the remittances are essential in assisting the national economy by paying off foreign debt is untrue (Lindio-McGovern 2013). Lindio-McGovern (2013, p. 37) points out the negative effects of the continuation of outward migration of skilled workers participating in domestic service abroad: "It reinforces the subordinate position of the Philippines within the global economy as well as positioning Filipino women in a subordinate position in the global political economy".

Labour-receiving countries, such as Hong Kong, benefit from having over-qualified domestic helpers 'doing the dirty work' which maximises opportunities for its citizens to participate in the formal labour sector (Anderson 2000). As the Filipino women participate in a semi-permanent state of migrant domestic labour, they gain financially at the expense of their

own transnational families and employment immobility. Their immobility is enforced by the migration policies that hold them within the sector of domestic work in the host countries and if they return to the Philippines, they will not have access to jobs that pay the same amount without requiring other qualifications and previous experience in a different field.

Foreign Domestic Helpers are exploited for their care and generosity in supporting the family and the nation, at the expense of family separation and a stagnant career path in domestic work. Yasmine, introduced in Chapter One and featured in Chapter Three, was earning slightly above the Foreign Domestic Helper Minimum Allowable Wage. Her main motivation to work in Hong Kong is to support her family, especially her sister who became a widow two years ago and has two children of her own. Throughout our conversations Yasmine acknowledged that she never predicted this career and migration path. She was working in a garment factory before she moved to Hong Kong. Growing up amongst a family of garment workers, Yasmine aspired to be a fashion designer and worked as a seamstress after completing high school studies. When asked about her future and what she wants to do when she returns to the Philippines, she laughs and admits that she does not know when she will be back (2013, pers. comm., 1 December):

> I am needed here, so I can help Jacinta [her sister]. Maybe she comes here too one day, but her children are too small right now. It would be too much work for them [mother and aunt] to look after all our children. House work is not the best thing to do but I know I am happy here most of the time. Hong Kong is better than other places. It's close to the Philippines. I always tell them I am only two hours [duration of flight] away.

Yasmine introduced me to her friend Rachel. When I met Rachel in 2013 she was 33 years old and had been working in Hong Kong as a Foreign Domestic Helper for about five years. She had completed her bachelors degree in nursing in the Philippines in 2005 and was contracted part-time in a local hospital near her home. Not long after, she fell pregnant and due to some health complications she could not work for the duration of her pregnancy. Three months after the birth of her child she tried to reapply for her position but was refused. She spent the next year searching for jobs in other hospitals, clinics and nursing homes but the best that she was offered was a part-time position that offered a lower wage than her previous job. When her child was two years old, Rachel and her family decided that seeking a job abroad could secure a more permanent income. Reflecting on her career path thus far, Rachel sounded hopeful but was realistic about her future (2015, pers. comm., 1 February):

> I know I can go home soon, maybe in two years. When I go back, I can still look for a job in a hospital. Maybe I will start at the bottom first, maybe not as a nurse. But I have the skills I just need to work hard to be a nurse again. I have been away from my family for too long now. I want to go home and try again.

When asked whether she will come back to Hong Kong as a Foreign Domestic Helper if she could not secure a permanent job in the Philippines, she replied (2015, pers. comm., 1 February):

> I will try hard, my best, to get back into the hospital. I hope I don't have to come back again. My husband wants me to go home quicker (sooner). My family needs me and I want to be with them.

7.6 Global dislocations and parallel lives

The Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed throughout the field research come from different parts of the Philippines. They have been in Hong Kong for varying lengths of time, between two to 11 years, and worked for employers in different districts of Hong Kong. What they have in common are their gender, motivations, future outlooks and migratory experiences. They experience dislocations that all Filipino domestic workers face in global labour migration: firstly, they share the experience of being in subordinate positions in the host countries as unskilled labourers who are cheaply available; secondly, as temporary residents in the host nation, they have scarce social resources and limited legal protections; and thirdly, the Philippines, as the labour sending country, has little capacity to ensure the protection of its citizens abroad (Parrenas 2001). This means the incorporation of Overseas Foreign Workers into the host society relies strongly on the reciprocity of the host country. In the case of Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers labour under limited rights and are exposed to various degrees of discipline and exploitation in the employers' homes, which have resulted in their socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation. Underpaid and overworked, the Foreign Domestic Helpers remain disempowered as a disenfranchised sector in Hong Kong society.

The Philippines' forfeit of power in exchange for the perceived acceptance of its migrants abroad frames the migratory experience of its citizens and exposes them to inequalities and exploitation. Through the analysis of migratory processes, the social settings for the subjection of individuals and the structural formation of migrant domestic labour within globalisation, Parrenas (2001) outlines the four key dislocations that Filipino migrant workers

experience in global migration: partial citizenship, contradictory class mobility, the pain of family separation and non-belonging. Within the context of cultural identity and diaspora, cultural theorist Stuart Hall attributes dislocations, or 'narratives of displacement', as the conjunctures or specific positioning of subjects in social processes (Hall 1997).

Partial citizenship

Partial citizenship is especially harmful to the migratory experience for Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong. As evident in the case of Vallejos v. Commissioner of Registration in 2013 (discussed in Chapter Two), Foreign Domestic Helpers are excluded from eventual citizenship that is eligible to other foreign nationals living in Hong Kong. This has direct impact on the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong as many Foreign Domestic Helpers continue to work in Hong Kong on a contractual basis and the denial of citizenship contradicts the permanency of their role and their significant contribution to Hong Kong society. From the interviewees and secondary resources, it can be assumed that the nature of domestic labour migration is not a temporary situation for the migrant but a continuous and conscious career path that allows for consistent employment, financial support to the families back home and possibilities for upward migration.

In Los Angeles, with its history of Filipino migrant workers since the 1920s, migrant workers from the Philippines can eventually qualify for permanent residency (Ong and Azores 1994). This presents an opportunity for migrant workers to integrate into the community and participate in the formal economy. This eventual qualification for citizenship for migrant workers is going to change, due to the new immigration policies introduced by the current president of the United States, Donald Trump. Rome is another popular host city of Filipino migrant workers, but as a labour-receiving state, Italy is more restrictive than the United States. With its three-tiered 'flows decree' system which caps the number of migrants each year, residence contracts are solely guaranteed by the employers and migrants whose labour contracts have finished or terminated are expelled (Al-Azar 2006). Migrant workers will generally not be granted permanent residency and are confined to domestic work. However, they are granted access to health services and rights to family reunification (Al-Azar 2006).

In comparison, Hong Kong's exclusive Foreign Domestic Helper Visa is more restrictive than the domestic labour migration policies of Italy and the United States as it does not allow for eventual permanent residency, nor offer social benefits and rights to family reunification in the host nation. Hong Kong's legislation permanently reinforce Foreign Domestic Helpers'

disenfranchised position within society. Furthermore, on a global stage, Overseas Foreign Workers who work as Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong have limited future prospects compared to other nations who grant eventual citizenship.

Many Foreign Domestic Helpers interviewed have been living in Hong Kong for over six years and are working under their third or fourth visa. The 2013 court ruling which rejected the eligibility for a Foreign Domestic Helper to apply for citizenship was not simply rejecting one Foreign Domestic Helper's possible permanent residency rather it was symbolic of the refusal of acceptance, legitimisation and integration of all Foreign Domestic Helpers into the socio-political and cultural fabric of Hong Kong. Consequently, this leads to the socio-spatial inequality Foreign Domestic Helpers suffer as they are permanently disciplined, temporary residents living in other people's domestic interiors, with little autonomy or spaces to construct a home of their own away from home. It also places them within a state of permanent impermanence, which excludes them from being accepted as a legitimate part of society, despite their ongoing, valuable contribution; something Giorgio Agamben (2005) refers to as a "state of exception", where they perpetually dwell in a "zone of indifference" where the boundaries of legitimacy and illegitimacy do not mutually exclude, rather contaminate and blur with each other. This continuous in-between state exposes Foreign Domestic Helpers to neither the benefits and protection of citizenship nor the socio-economic mobility of other foreigners.

Contradictory class mobility

As stated, the Philippines suffers from the "brain-drain" due to the outpour of educated citizens. The Filipino women who are qualified beyond unskilled labour, yet migrate abroad to participate in domestic work, results in the dislocation of contradictory class mobility. Participating in domestic work abroad involves a simultaneous increase and decrease in their labour market status. Their status increases as they earn more than they would in the Philippines, as in the example of Diana who earned nearly three times her Philippines salary in her first employment contract as a Foreign Domestic Helper in Hong Kong. However, their status decreases as they are earning more at the expense of not gaining experiences and other skills that will allow them to find work other than domestic work. Parrenas describes this as contradictory class mobility, which stagnates the workers' labour market potential and illustrates their immobility within the work that they do, even though their work relies on their physical mobility (Parrenas 2001, p. 151-96). The interviewees mostly described the nature of their work as boring and repetitive, and they usually dislike the work or feel indifferent toward the role.

Belle, a 37-year-old Foreign Domestic Helper from the Philippines, shared her sentiment towards her job as a Foreign Domestic Helper in Hong Kong of seven years (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> Everyday I do the same thing. It is not easy, it is not hard. The hardest thing is the feeling that I am not doing better or worst. I am just doing. I know that my children are growing and going to school so they will do better and better. But me, no, I'm here. That's my job.

Some interviewees used the Tagalog term, *nakakabobo*, to describe their work as a process that they feel gradually makes them unintelligent.[9] Many labour migration researchers have noted that migrant domestic workers are hardly ever the least educated nor poorest of the poor (Constable 2007; Parrenas 2001; 2008; Rodriguez 2002; Yeates 2009). For many of their families, to have the ability to migrate for work abroad is seen as an achievement, therefore they can be perceived as more respectable members of their community. Their status at home contrasts against the status they have in the host countries. In Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers exist in the continuous list of domestic tasks and the mattresses they sleep on in the employers' homes. For six days each week they are socio-spatially invisible and culturally deprived as they are prohibited from being themselves beyond the expected demeanour of obedience and subservience. Within their employers' homes, they continue to be subjects of servitude, labouring in the lowest socio-economic sector with restricted mobility.

Non-belonging and transnational households

Non-belonging and alienation is part of the migratory experiences of many migrant domestic workers (Parrenas 2001, p. 190-202). Difference in ethnicity and socio-economic status creates a gap between the citizens of host countries and the migrant domestic workers. The subordinate position of the labour-sending country to the host nation also reinforces the class difference between the people within the two counterparts and the secondary position of individual domestic workers to their employers. Paige, a 32-year-old Filipino Foreign Domestic Helper (who was introduced in Chapter Three), has worked in Hong Kong for seven years. She describes the feelings of non-belonging as fuelled by cultural and linguistic barriers as well as one of power and discipline (2015, pers. comm., 8 February):

> When I first arrived, I was given a list of rules in English, about what I cannot do in the house. I followed all of them even after I relaxed after

[9] This was also mentioned in Parrenas's work as she also encountered Filipino migrant domestic workers using that term to describe their work (Parrenas 2001, p. 245).

> the first year. I speak English with them but they speak to each other in Cantonese, I understand very little. One of the rules was that I am not allowed to eat in the dining room with them. I am ok with that. But it is very lonely and I feel like a stranger that is not part of their family. Now it is sometimes different. Mum [how she addresses her female employer] sometimes has afternoon tea with me and we have a nice time. Even after seven years I still feel like a stranger in their home. Every Sunday when I can see my friends we speak Tagalog, that is the only time I feel like I am accepted as one of them. I know I do not belong in Hong Kong. I am different. At home [her employer's home] I also do not belong.

The globalisation of capital is heightened by its penetration into the intimacies of family life (Lindio-McGovern 2013; Parrenas 2001; 2008). Separation from their families for sustained periods of time produces the dislocated condition of the transnational household. In the case of Diana, despite the pain of family separation and her husband's plea for her return, she made the necessary sacrifice of spending time with her children to provide monetary support for them. Parrenas (2001) argues that the formation of the transnational household cannot stem solely from economic restructuring in globalisation but also relies on the conscious and unconscious reworking of priorities and values in the families of the migrant domestic workers. Parrenas also claims that "capitalism's determination of personal relationships in the migrant communities underscores their (the migrants) similar experiences" (Parrenas 2001, p. 245).

7.7 Conclusion: the cyclic return

That Diana, Paige, Belle, Yasmine, Rachel and the majority of the Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong and migrant domestic labourers around the world have made the necessary sacrifice to work abroad aggravates the pain of family separation and reinforces the transnational household by prioritising their family. The effects of the transnational household do not simply circulate within one family, the effects also extend to other women and other families they belong to. The Global Care Chain, or as Parrenas also calls 'the chain of love', demonstrates this negative, cyclic effect where women of all households that participate in the chain of migrant domestic labour are in a perpetual cycle of domestic labour (Hochschild 2000; Parrenas 2001; Yeats 2009). The chain begins in the undeveloped villages in the Philippines, where women who are not skilled work for families whose mothers work abroad. Within those families with members abroad, apart from hiring domestic help, the grandmothers, aunties and female relatives often assist in raising the

family. The mother who works abroad is working to allow her employers (especially the mother of that household) to obtain work in the formal economy. Despite not attending to the domestic tasks, the female employer within the household is not absolved from being responsible for the hiring process, thus also being responsible for the delegation of domestic tasks to the domestic worker who is now attending to the tasks she used to do. Within this cyclic chain of duty and command, whether the role is to command or enact duties, the roles are all completed by women, no matter their socio-economic status. As such, the so-called chain of love continues, and women in all households across labour-sending and labour-receiving nations participate in a continuous chain of domestic servitude.

Chapter 8
Conclusion:
A Matter of the Disenfranchised, Space and Socio-spatial Inequality

The modern age is defined by the movement of people. All around the world, people overcome geographic, spatial and cultural barriers to seek comfort zones where they can have stability – economically, socially, politically or religiously. Migrants inscribe traces, invisible or real, on the places they inhabit, generating cultural, social and spatial contaminations, consequently creating new histories and spatialities. Migration – temporary or permanent – creates a network of paths and spaces followed and inhabited by others. These traces illustrate a movement of global intensification that reconfigures the ways of living and being in the world. These global changes have also led to the reconstruction of the domestic interior. The interior is no longer confined within the dichotomies of public or private sphere, it is now composed of the spaces and relations in between.

What can be learned from the Foreign Domestic Helpers' radical insertion of the domestic interior into public space? Through appropriation and transformation of interstitial spaces in Central Hong Kong, the migrant women, as a disenfranchised contingent, have inscribed a new interior; one that habitually disappears and reappears. It is an interior that appears with the full force of freedom, agency and action, and its dissolution leaves behind the memory of its occupants and spaces. This interior is a reconstruction of the home that Foreign Domestic Helpers do not have in Hong Kong, and a spatial performance of the socio-spatial inequality endured within the confines of the private domestic spaces. For six days a week, the migrant women do not have an interior where they have stability, equality, privacy or the capacity to be themselves. Within the makeshift interior on Sundays, they disobey and reinterpret regular social and spatial practices, seeking refuge and community in public space. Using their bodies and accessible materials, their temporary reconstruction of the domestic interior demonstrates a specific form of agency. Beyond the socio-spatial and cultural oppression experienced in the homes of their employers, Foreign Domestic Helpers appear in public space as a collective once a week to resist from being apparently docile, domestic workers. They refuse to be quiet, migrant women who live their lives six days each week as obedient subjects of servitude. As such, their urban domestic interior is a spatial phenomenon that reflects and is part of the cultural politics of global labour migration and socio-spatial inequality.

Despite having little control over most elements of their residency in Hong Kong, this weekly makeshift interior allows these disenfranchised migrant women to reclaim space, autonomy

and integrity. For as long as the workforce of Foreign Domestic Helpers – along with the contamination of the home and workplace – exists in Hong Kong, this urban domestic interior indicates the continuous agility of the migrant women, their recovery of autonomy and the cultivation of collective resilience.

The research has drawn on the socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation that the Foreign Domestic Helpers experience to articulate how this disenfranchised contingent has continued to disrupt Hong Kong's current political and increasingly problematic structures by creating new spatialities and histories through their collective disruptions to the city-state's hegemonic spaces. In the homes of their employers, Foreign Domestic Helpers are subjected to various kinds of bodily discipline by controlling the women's use of time, appearance, food consumption and space, by employers who consciously or subconsciously impose on them views from bygone Chinese traditions and practices of domestic servitude. Compounded by the lack of specificity in the contemporary employment contract that contains hidden leniencies awarded to the employers at the expense of protection for the Foreign Domestic Helpers, the bodily discipline extends to the control of the Foreign Domestic Helpers' time, and the limitation of their physical and personal space. As such, within the private, domestic spaces of Hong Kong, Foreign Domestic Helpers endure a socio-spatial depletion and cultural deprivation. This oppression continues for six days each week and is temporarily suspended on their only day off work when Foreign Domestic Helpers emerge from the controlled spaces of their so-called home into the regulated, yet flexible open spaces of the public cityscape. Within these public spaces, Foreign Domestic Helpers exercise their agency by reclaiming space to regain what is continuously absent and denied: space, autonomy and integrity. Every Sunday, their demarcation of public space for the reconstruction of their domestic territory can be viewed as spatialised resistance.

The impact of the spatial phenomenon that occurs weekly in Central Hong Kong, known as Little Manila, is significant. This ritualised reconstruction of a domestic territory demonstrates how space, as a tool of resistance, gives the Filipino Foreign Domestic Helpers the opportunity to realise their agency. By transforming Central into Little Manila, these migrant women have challenged the spatial order that proliferates the city state's public domain. Although their spatial appropriations are limited by the hard boundaries of public spaces – avoiding the interior spaces of shopping malls and other cordoned off spaces - and any apparent transgression of the law will jeopardise their residency in Hong Kong, the Foreign Domestic Helpers' need for space of their own persists. Their agency propels their resistance – beyond internalised, personal defiance – into a spatial formation that has become synonymous with Central's public urbanity. Despite not having the economic resources to participate in the consumerist economy

of Central, the continuous appearance, disappearance and reappearance of Foreign Domestic Helpers' temporary spaces every week for 12 hours or less is absorbed into the memory of Central. Even when the Foreign Domestic Helpers are not there, they are embedded into Hong Kong's spatial narrative and spatial memory.

Literature across multiple disciplines of sociology, anthropology, urban studies, architecture and landscape architecture that focuses on Hong Kong includes the Foreign Domestic Helpers and their occupation of public space on Sundays even when it is not specifically focusing on the particularities of this spatial phenomenon. Akbar Abbas's seminal book *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997, p. 87) discusses how the usually banal Statue Square in Central is activated:

> On Sundays, the migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, almost entirely female, congregate around the square, taking it over and turning it into something like a festive space.

Abbas (1997) contends that Statue Square on Sundays may be an example of the diversion of a space of power into a space of pleasure. Architect Jonathan Solomon collaborated with Hong Kong based architectural researchers to develop a series of maps that illustrated Hong Kong's extensive networks of elevated walkways and underground passages (Frampton, Solomon and Wong 2012). In *Cities Without Ground: A Hong Kong Guidebook* (2012), the Foreign Domestic Helpers' congregations are included on several maps that feature the Central Elevated Walkway and other areas within Central that facilitate parts of Little Manila (Frampton, Solomon and Wong 2012, p. 38-43). The spatial conditions of some spaces are described as ideal for Foreign Domestic Helpers to access (Frampton, Solomon and Wong 2012, p. 101). In *Hong Kong: Migrant Lives, Landscapes and Journeys* (2009), sociologists Caroline Knowles and Douglas Harper provide a postcolonial portrait of the intersections between migrants of diverse origins who reside in Hong Kong. Foreign Domestic Helpers are discussed in the chapter 'Serving-class Migrants' (2009, p. 154-177), where their lives inside and outside of their employers' homes are explored, as Knowles and Harper (2009, p. 156) note:

> Beyond the domestic spaces of their employment, maids establish distinctive relationships with places in the city and routes connecting them. Their use of space and rhythms of movement distinguish them from other migrants and from locals.

The above examples demonstrate that not only are Foreign Domestic Helpers a migrant workforce in Hong Kong, they are also part of the spatial language used to describe Hong Kong's urban landscape. The Central Elevated Walkway, HSBC atrium, Chater Road and the surrounding areas that Little Manila overlaps hold memories that are specific to the inhabitation of Foreign Domestic Helpers. Every week, as these spatialities fluctuate, their memories continue to form as something different occurs; holding a different protest or no protest on Chater Road; creating a more chaotic scene in the HSBC atrium as Foreign Domestic Helpers cluster in to avoid the rain; varying the cardboard constructions by groups on the elevated walkways; eating different foods; or playing card games instead of sleeping. All of these fluctuating fragments constitute Little Manila and Central.

Foreign Domestic Helpers acknowledge their gatherings in Central as Little Manila as it is like a home away from the Philippines, which they only visit every two years at the end of their visas. For Hong Kong's pedestrians, city users and tourists, Little Manila is embodied within the spatial formation and memory of Central. Through their habitual reclamation of space, Foreign Domestic Helpers resist invisibility and spacelessness inscribed in their labour that is exercised in their workplace and their domestic environment. Since their arrival in Hong Kong, they have become a continuous, living spatiality, history and memory of Central's public spaces, sitting side by side the growing consumerist fanfare, financial prestige and international glamour. As the Foreign Domestic Helpers retreat into the private, domestic spaces of their employers on Sunday evenings, they leave behind a trace, an immaterial one, that is constantly at the state of becoming a living memory.

The research connects to and further expands the existing literature that exemplifies the social, political and economic disenfranchisement of migrant domestic workers on a national scale and within the global labour market (Anderson 2010; Constable 2007; Gutierrez-Rodriguez 2010; Hochschild 1976; Lindio-McGovern 2013; Parrenas 2001; Yeates 2009). Parrenas's work explores the conditions of Filipino migrant domestic workers within the global framework of reproductive labour. Her work created a foundation in which to understand the multiple dislocations that are experienced by migrant women across different labour-receiving nations: partial citizenship, family separation, alienation and downward class mobility. Constable's body of research on Foreign Domestic Helpers and the complex relations between women, sexuality and the domestic realm of Hong Kong is a significant contribution to the field of transnational migration studies, gender studies and the cultural history of Hong Kong. Her work shaped the way ethnographic research was conducted in this thesis and made transparent the less visible power that is entrenched within the everyday existence of Foreign Domestic Helpers – agency

and resistance. Parrenas and Constable set for this research the global and national stages on which disenfranchisement of Foreign Domestic Helpers occurs, through demonstrations of the systematic dysfunctions that have enabled and will continue to circulate with global migrant domestic labour. Alongside these two scholars, other scholars within the broad field of migrant labour hold a clear objective: furthering the discourse on the rights of migrant domestic workers. This thesis is motivated by this important objective, however, it provides another understanding of this issue from the discipline of spatial design.

Using ethnographic fieldwork, spatial analysis and spatial observations, the research has analysed and interpreted the precise processes which have led to the near-absolute reduction and denial of space to Foreign Domestic Helpers in the domestic environment and the absolute expansion of space that occurs in public spaces. On Sundays, Foreign Domestic Helpers reconstruct and recreate their own domestic environment where they have the capacity to establish their own spaces: communal spaces for leisure activities and packaging of goods; political spaces for protesting and holding public discussions for injustices; and private spaces for resting and connecting with their families digitally. The seemingly chaotic assemblage that is Little Manila is a personal construction of autonomy in space. It is a unique expression of resistance where its objective is not to violently retaliate with the aim to dismantle the power structure that has reinforced their disenfranchisement, rather it is about a continuous reconstruction and expansion of their personal autonomy and humanity via space. As such, this thesis is a spatial research that incorporates interrelated socio-political conditions as a way to understand Foreign Domestic Helpers' disenfranchisement through their strength in their spatial practices on Sundays.

In the current global migrant domestic labour market, victimisation will occur and unscrupulous employers will continue to operate above the law where the laws are designed to protect the benefits of labour-receiving nations above the migrant worker. This is due to the reality of the stagnant status of the migrant domestic worker. What is seen in Hong Kong is a consistent and evolving expression of agency and resistance realised by the contingent of Foreign Domestic Helpers in public space. However, the question remains – what is the future of the migrant worker, and furthermore, what is the value of a person in exchange for cheap labour?

What occurs in Hong Kong is not an isolated incident, rather a small demonstration of a much larger global issue of the devaluing of human labour by economic, social, political and spatial deprivation. In other words, it is the economic advantage of the labour-receiving nations at the expense of continuous exploitation and oppression of the individual workers from labour-sending countries. In an article published by Human Rights Watch in June 2017, researcher

Rothna Begum (2017) discusses the slow improvements of the rights of migrant domestic workers employed in the Gulf States. Begum (2017) reported that a majority of the estimated 2.4 million migrant domestic workers currently in the Gulf States are treated unfairly:

> their employers forced them to work up to 21 or 22 hours a day with no rest breaks or days off, confiscated their passport, provided little or spoiled food, restricted their communication, and physically or sexually abused them.

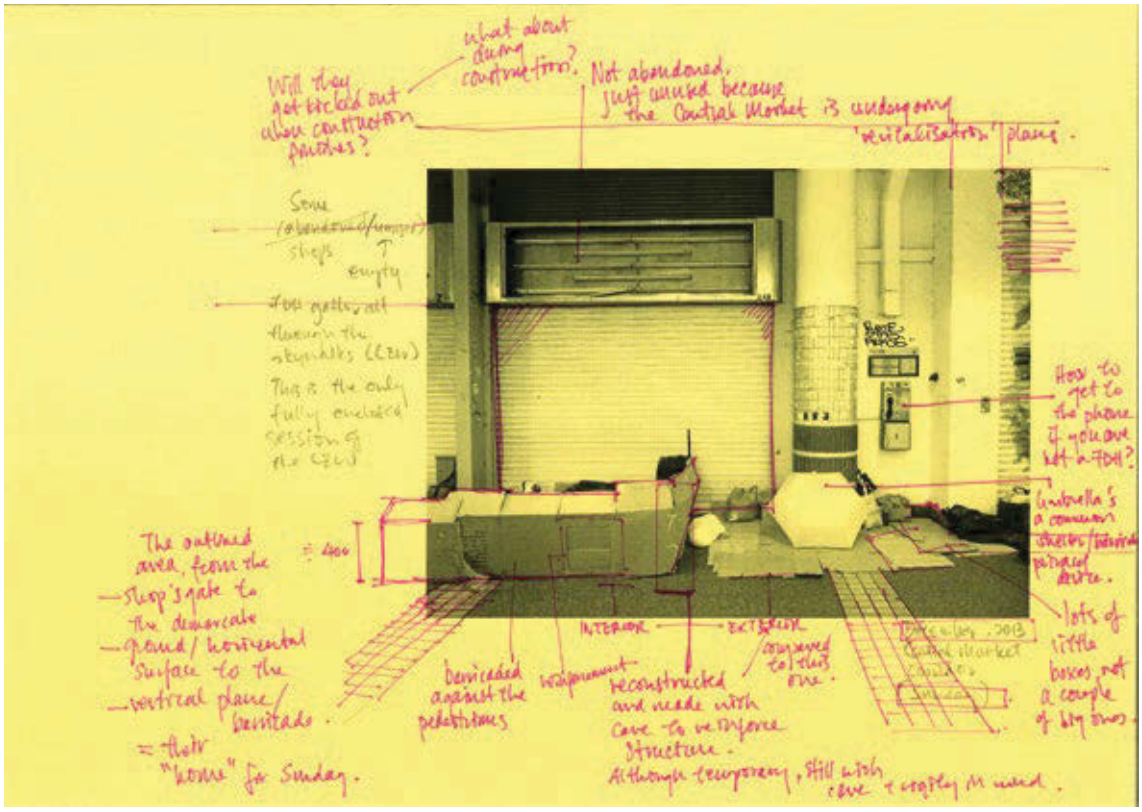
Violations like these have been recorded across the Gulf States by Human Rights Watch for over a decade. In the Gulf States, migrant domestic workers operate under the *kafala* visa sponsorship system, which restricts them economically and spatially to their employers and has much harsher legal consequences than Hong Kong's two-week rule. If the migrant domestic workers wish to change employers without permission from the employers, they could face fines, imprisonment and deportation.

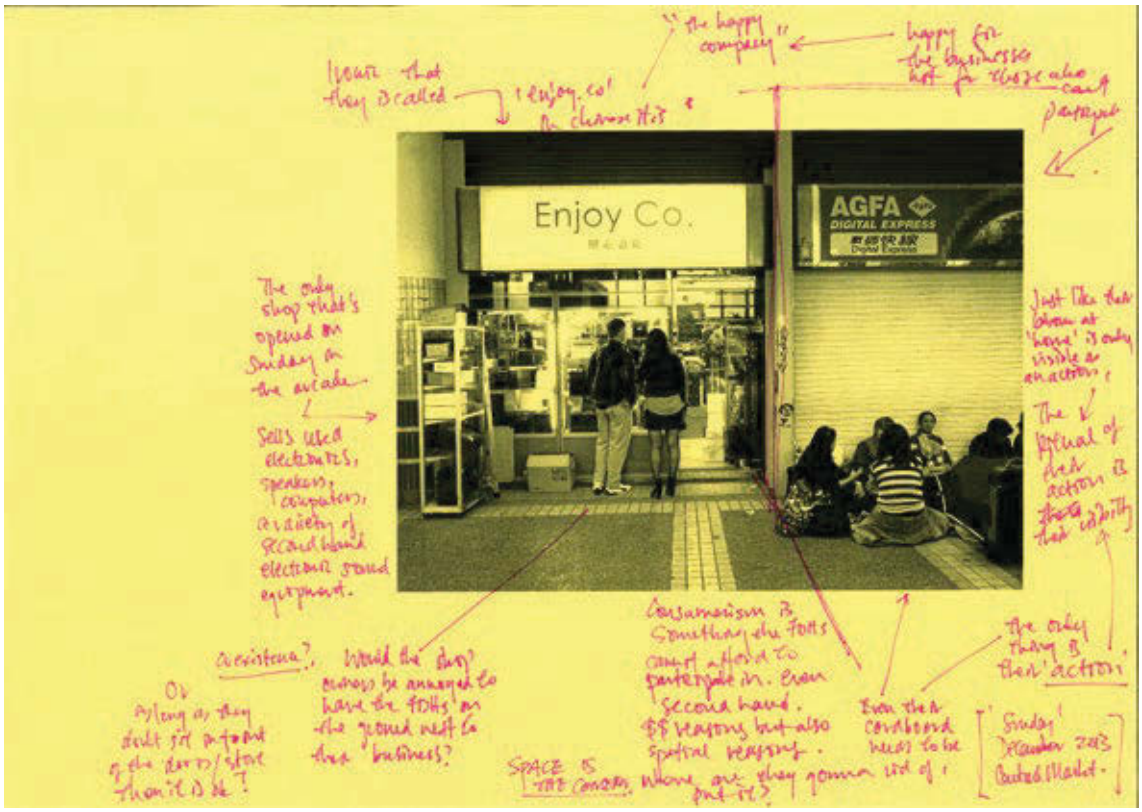
In the first six months of 2017, the United Arab Emirates' Federal National Council and Qatar adopted bills on domestic workers that guarantee a weekly rest day, daily standardised working hours and paid leave (Begum 2017). While these bills seem an improvement towards equitable treatment of migrant domestic workers, the protections are still less than those for other workers who are citizens or those who participate in the formal labour sector under the country's labour laws. This reflects the consideration of migrant domestic workers as less worthy than other workers. Governments are reluctant to value migrant domestic workers at the expense of profit and protection of their own citizens. In Hong Kong, the government continues to hide behind the guise of democracy such as allowing the Foreign Domestic Helpers to occupy, appropriate and create their own temporary spaces every Sunday by not formally prohibiting their use of space. However, the government will not grant the women access to permanently have space of their own beyond their workplace because that would require a reassessment of their temporary status leading to the potential of their legitimate integration into the social and cultural fabric of Hong Kong, and would ultimately empower Foreign Domestic Helpers by granting them space and autonomy.

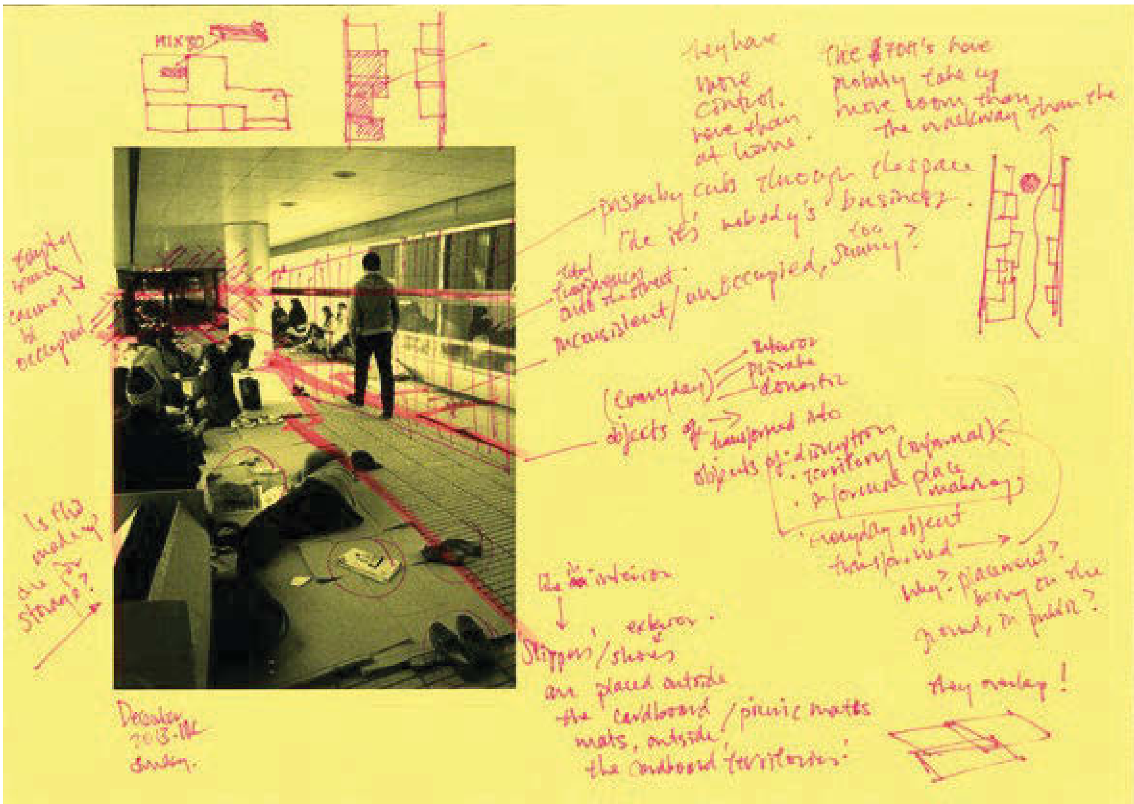
Formalising bills and increasing protections for migrant domestic workers globally might reduce occurrences of exploitation, yet host nations will continue to benefit from the cheap labour provided by the labour-sending nations as long as the contribution of migrant domestic workers to a society continues to be devalued. The future of migrant domestic workers – and the migrant workers of other informal labour sectors – rests on the host nations' practical reinforcement of equitable and ethical labour operations. In other words, how will governments act on caring for the wellbeing of the individuals who care for their citizens?

Appendices 1–4:

1. Fieldwork Process Work: spatial analysis






they have more control here than at home.
passerby cuts through the space like it's nobody's business.
inconsistent/unoccupied, too sunny?
objects of transformed into objects of disruption
· territory (informal)
· informal place making
everyday object transported
why? placement? being on the ground, in public?
slippers/shoes are placed outside the cardboard/picnic mattes mats, outside the cardboard 'territories'
they overlap!
December 2013. the Sunday.

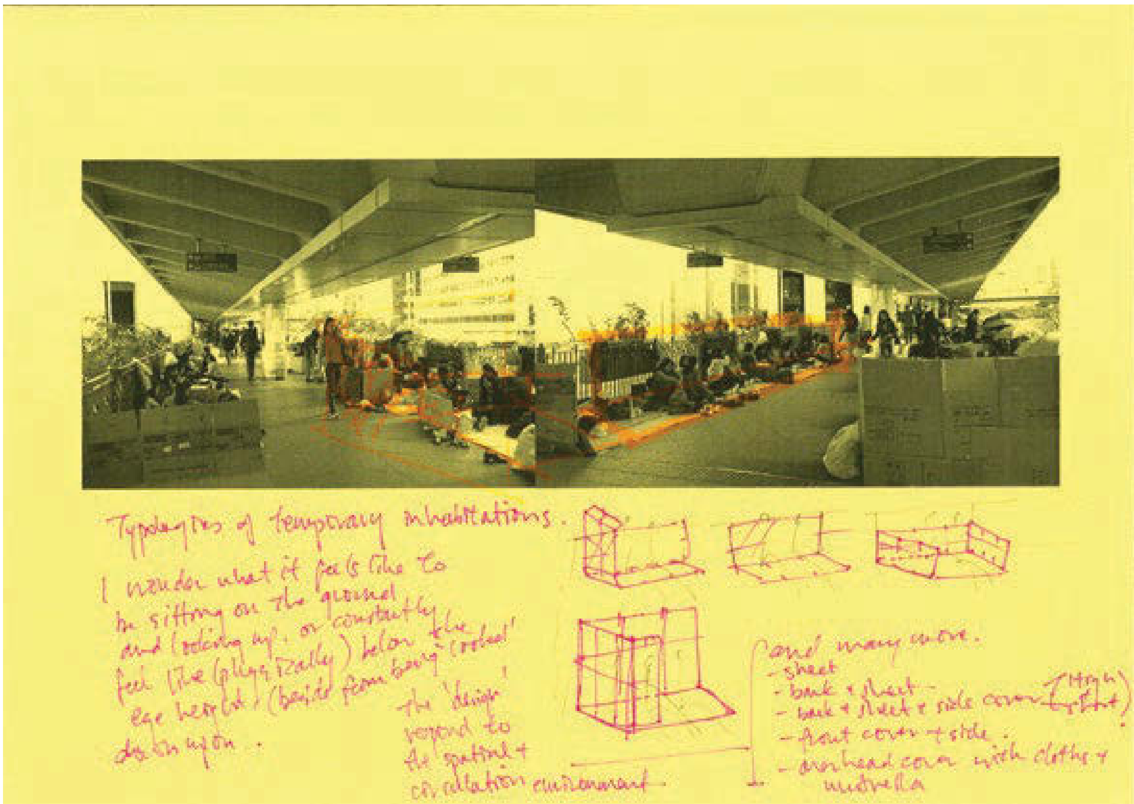

emphasises on their construction of privacy, their own space! Distinctive construction of barrier.
higher barricade.
They want privacy! they only have it once a week, away from their employers, complete away from being controlled.
overhead cover
SUNDAY = They have control over their own actions + spatial behaviour.


labour = unfreedom
present. constructed. away strong/collective
empty. deconstructed single/deflated.
Construction of identity through task
Hannah Arendt's labour
labour strips them of identity + integrity
Their identity re/constructed through these "found" materials and in a manner,
"found" space.
Their identity + integrity has been "found" again.
Once a week.
Space has been made
Occupied structures vs. abandoned.
integrity (structural + spatial emotional?)
closed, private
occupiable
scraps. rubbish dropped.
opened/exposed

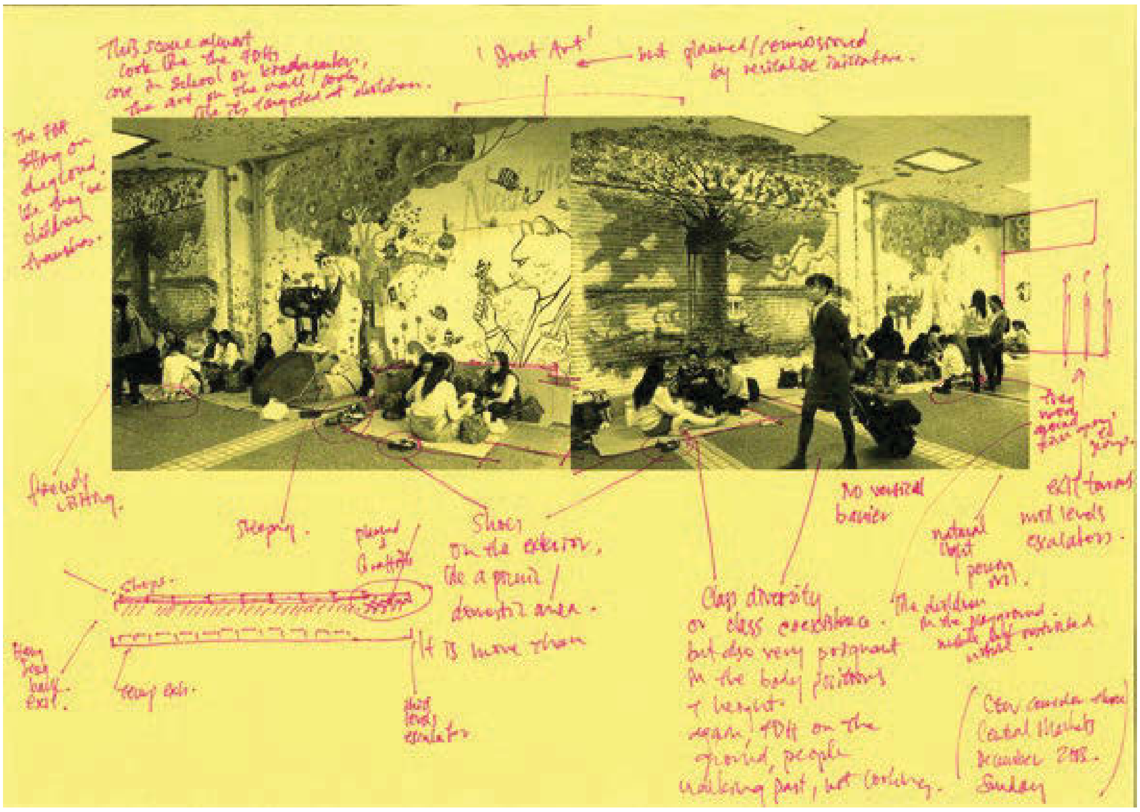

spatial negotiation → allowed visibility + stable exposure
NGE SQUARE
How is this one (part of the walkway) different to others?
very busy foot traffic.
negotiated space.
They've boarded up the back so they face inwards
mobile movement


Not FDHs.
Not sure.
Handmade leather goods.
unused
ULTIMATE
rubbish
Difference in height/posture/position between the citizens and the FDHs.
Interesting how people look at me pointing a camera (and not at them) but at the FDHs.
December 2013.
(Cen) Central Market


Careful of their handbags
Close friendships and intimate connection
No vertical barrier but umbrellas do the trick.
Sunday Dec 2013
'Free space' between the bank + Central market


Typologies of temporary inhabitations.
I wonder what it feels like to be sitting on the ground and looking up, or constantly feel like (physically) below the eye height (beside from being 'looked' down upon.
the 'design' respond to the spatial + circulation environment.
and many more.
- sheet
- back + sheet
- back + sheet + side cover
- front cover + side.
- overhead cover with cloths + umbrella


window (natural light)
people distracted by temp. exhibition.
Hang Seng bank side
make use of space.
Casual shoes.
Central Market 2013 Dec. Sunday.
rather large bags
chatting, eating, playing with phones.


'Street Art'
Sleeping.
Shoes on the exterior, like a private / domestic area.
Class diversity or class coexistence.
No vertical barrier
Exit towards mid levels escalators.


Central Market corridor, semi-used/occupied by shops, but undergoing development changes.
The only section of the corridor that is an "interior arcade."
Free public space.
Concept of free space
'graffiti' by organisers to revitalise this corridor.
Niche
- jeweller.
- tailor
- camera repairs.
2000mm
at least 3000mm
photoprinting booth / shop.
probably from pre-1997.
December is HK design month (annual event)
Central Market


Leans on pillar for vertical support
pillar becomes vertical support.
Different to the space in the exterior / less covered areas of the CBW
(no need to make their own back support).
food containers
Outside IFC.
Activities: sleeping, resting, playing cards, eating.
Objects: cardboard matts, handbags, shoes, bags of things, food containers (eaten or full), umbrellas, playing cards
They are: dressed normally (appropriately) (conservatively)
Mostly women but one man.
Central Market December 2013 Sunday

2. Fieldwork Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION
Project Title: The spatial occupation of the elevated walkways of Central, Hong Kong

My name is Evelyn Kwok and I am a PhD student at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. I am conducting research into the spatial occupation of the elevated walkways of Central, Hong Kong, and I welcome your assistance.

The research will involve one audio interview with me, which will be recorded on a digital sound recorder, transcribed, and may be used as quotable material for my PhD thesis, which I intend to complete in 2016. Interviews will take various amounts of your time, and can be brief, depending on your needs.

As a participant, you can be provided with a digital interview transcript of the interview, if desired, and you will be informed of the completion of my thesis, and given an electronic copy, if desired. The digital sound files will be stored on a hard drive in a secure location. The transcript will be stored in a personal computer, password protected and only managed by me.

You are under no obligation to participate in this research. Please be advised that if you wish to participate, **your identity will remain confidential** in transcripts and further written records. Please be advised you can withdraw from the research at any time and without explanation. Should that occur I will thank you for your time so far and will not contact you about this research again.

This study has been approved by the UTS Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you can contact the Ethics Committee (Tel: 612 9514 9772, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

I am very grateful for your time and help with this research.

With sincere thanks

Evelyn Kwok
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Room 6.41, Peter Johnson Building UTS 702-730 Harris St, Ultimo NSW 2007
Tel: 612 9514 8817
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Independent local contact:
Piers Kuan
Mobile: 9676 7246
Email: kuanpiers@gmail.com

3. Fieldwork Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

Researcher: Evelyn Kwok
Project: The spatial occupation of the elevated walkways of Central, Hong Kong.
School: School of Design
Faculty: Design Architecture & Building, UTS
Address: Room 6.41, Peter Johnson Building UTS, 702-730 Harris St, Ultimo NSW 2007, Australia
Telephone: 612 9514 8817

This research has been approved by UTS, under reference no. HREC xxxxxxxx

I, _____ give consent to my participation in the research project

I understand my participation involves one interview, of no more than 30 minutes, which will be recorded on a digital sound recorder, transcribed, and may be used as quotable material for Evelyn Kwok's PhD thesis on the spatial occupation of the elevated walkways of Central, Hong Kong, which she intends to complete in 2016.

I am aware that I can contact Evelyn, or her supervisor, Professor Benedict Anderson (612 9514 8903), if I have any concerns. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without consequences, and without giving a reason.
I have read the information sheet providing more information about this project.

I understand that my identity will remain confidential in transcripts and further written records.

I have indicated my wishes in the confidentiality option below: (please tick one)

☐ My name should be withheld from the public record
☐ I consent to my first name being included in this researcher's findings
☐ I consent to be recorded on a digital sound recorder.
☐ I consent to be recorded on a digital video recorder without my face being identified.
☐ I consent to be recorded in photographs where details of my face will not be disclosed.

_____ ____/____/____
Signature (participant)

_____ ____/____/____
Signature (witness)

Independent local contact:
Piers Kuan
Mobile: 9676 7246
Email: kuanpiers@gmail.com

Notes:

_____

_____

4. Sample Foreign Domestic Helper Employment Contract and Schedule of Accommodation

D. H. Contract No. M

EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT
(For A Domestic Helper recruited from abroad)

This contract is made between ..... ("the Employer") and ..... ("the Helper") on ..... and has the following terms:

1. The Helper's place of origin for the purpose of this contract is .....
.....
.....

2. (A)† The Helper shall be employed by the Employer as a domestic helper for a period of two years commencing on the date on which the Helper arrives in Hong Kong.

(B)† The Helper shall be employed by the Employer as a domestic helper for a period of two years commencing on ....., which is the date following the expiry of D.H. Contract No. ..... for employment with the same employer.

(C)† The Helper shall be employed by the Employer as a domestic helper for a period of two years commencing on the date on which the Director of Immigration grants the Helper permission to remain in Hong Kong to begin employment under this contract.

3. The Helper shall work and reside in the Employer's residence at .....
.....

4. (*a*) The Helper shall only perform domestic duties as per the attached Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties for the Employer.

(*b*) The Helper shall not take up, and shall not be required by the Employer to take up, any other employment with any other person.

(*c*) The Employer and the Helper hereby acknowledge that Clause 4 (*a*) and (*b*) will form part of the conditions of stay to be imposed on the Helper by the Immigration Department upon the Helper's admission to work in Hong Kong under this contract. A breach of one or both of the said conditions of stay will render the Helper and/or any aider and abettor liable to criminal prosecution.

5. (*a*) The Employer shall pay the Helper wages of HK$ ..... per month. The amount of wages shall not be less than the minimum allowable wage announced by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and prevailing at the date of this contract. An employer who fails to pay the wages due under this employment contract shall be liable to criminal prosecution.

(*b*) The Employer shall provide the Helper with suitable and furnished accommodation as per the attached Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties and food free of charge. If no food is provided, a food allowance of HK$ ..... a month shall be paid to the Helper.

(*c*) The Employer shall provide a receipt for payment of wages and food allowance and the Helper shall acknowledge receipt of the amount under his/her* signature.

6. The Helper shall be entitled to all rest days, statutory holidays, and paid annual leave as specified in the Employment Ordinance, Chapter 57.

7. (*a*) The Employer shall provide the Helper with free passage from his/her* place of origin to Hong Kong and on termination or expiry of this contract, free return passage to his/her* place of origin.

(*b*) A daily food and travelling allowance of HK$100 per day shall be paid to the Helper from the date of his/her* departure from his/her* place of origin until the date of his/her* arrival at Hong Kong if the travelling is by the most direct route. The same payment shall be made when the Helper returns to his/her* place of origin upon expiry or termination of this contract.

8. The Employer shall be responsible for the following fees and expenses (if any) for the departure of the Helper from his/her place of origin and entry into Hong Kong:—

(i) medical examination fees;
(ii) authentication fees by the relevant Consulate;
(iii) visa fee;
(iv) insurance fee;
(v) administration fee or fee such as the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration fee, or other fees of similar nature imposed by the relevant government authorities; and
(vi) others: .....

In the event that the Helper has paid the above costs or fees, the Employer shall fully reimburse the Helper forthwith the amount so paid by the Helper upon demand and production of the corresponding receipts or documentary evidence of payment.

* Delete where inappropriate.
† Use either Clause 2A, 2B or 2C whichever is appropriate.

9. (*a*) In the event that the Helper is ill or suffers personal injury during the period of employment specified in Clause 2, except for the period during which the Helper leaves Hong Kong of his/her* own volition and for his/her* own personal purposes, the Employer shall provide free medical treatment to the Helper. Free medical treatment includes medical consultation, maintenance in hospital and emergency dental treatment. The Helper shall accept medical treatment provided by any registered medical practitioner.

(*b*) If the Helper suffers injury by accident or occupational disease arising out of and in the course of employment, the Employer shall make payment of compensation in accordance with the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, Chapter 282.

(*c*) In the event of a medical practitioner certifying that the Helper is unfit for further service, the Employer may subject to the statutory provisions of the relevant Ordinances terminate the employment and shall immediately take steps to repatriate the Helper to his/her* place of origin in accordance with Clause 7.

10. Either party may terminate this contract by giving one month's notice in writing or one month's wages in lieu of notice.

11. Notwithstanding Clause 10, either party may in writing terminate this contract without notice or payment in lieu in the circumstances permitted by the Employment Ordinance, Chapter 57.

12. In the event of termination of this contract, both the Employer and the Helper shall give the Director of Immigration notice in writing within seven days of the date of termination. A copy of the other party's written acknowledgement of the termination shall also be forwarded to the Director of Immigration.

13. Should both parties agree to enter into new contract upon expiry of the existing contract, the Helper shall, before any such further period commences and at the expense of the Employer, return to his/her* place of origin for a paid/unpaid* vacation of not less than seven days, unless prior approval for extension of stay in Hong Kong is given by the Director of Immigration.

14. In the event of the death of the Helper, the Employer shall pay the cost of transporting the Helper's remains and personal property from Hong Kong to his/her* place of origin.

15. Save for the following variations, any variation or addition to the terms of this contract (including the annexed Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties) during its duration shall be void unless made with the prior consent of the Commissioner for Labour:

(*a*) a variation of the period of employment stated in Clause 2 through an extension of the said period of not more than one month by mutual agreement and with prior approval obtained from the Director of Immigration;

(*b*) a variation of the Employer's residential address stated in Clause 3 upon notification in writing being given to the Director of Immigration, provided that the Helper shall continue to work and reside in the Employer's new residential address;

(*c*) a variation in the Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties made in such manner as prescribed under item 7 of the Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties; and

(*d*) a variation of item 4 of the Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties in respect of driving of a motor vehicle, whether or not the vehicle belongs to the Employer, by the helper by mutual agreement in the form of an Addendum to the Schedule and with permission in writing given by the Director of Immigration for the Helper to perform the driving duties.

16. The above terms do not preclude the Helper from other entitlements under the Employment Ordinance, Chapter 57, the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, Chapter 282 and any other relevant Ordinances.

17. The Parties hereby declare that the Helper has been medically examined as to his/her fitness for employment as a domestic helper and his/her medical certificate has been produced for inspection by the Employer.

Signed by the Employer _____
(Signature of Employer)

in the presence of _____ _____
(Name of Witness) (Signature of Witness)

Signed by the Helper _____
(Signature of Helper)

in the presence of _____ _____
(Name of Witness) (Signature of Witness)

* Delete where inappropriate.

SCHEDULE OF ACCOMMODATION AND DOMESTIC DUTIES

1. Both the Employer and the Helper should sign to acknowledge that they have read and agreed to the contents of this Schedule, and to confirm their consent for the Immigration Department and other relevant government authorities to collect and use the information contained in this Schedule in accordance with the provisions of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.

2. Employer's residence and number of persons to be served

   A. Approximate size of flat/house ..... square feet/square metres*

   B. State below the number of persons in the household to be served on a regular basis:

   ..... adult ..... minors (aged between 5 to 18) ..... minors (aged below 5) ..... expecting babies.

   ..... persons in the household requiring constant care or attention (excluding infants).

   (Note: Number of Helpers currently employed by the Employer to serve the household .....)

3. Accommodation and facilities to be provided to the Helper

   A. Accommodation to the Helper

   While the average flat size in Hong Kong is relatively small and the availability of separate servant room is not common, the Employer should provide the Helper suitable accommodation and with reasonable privacy. Examples of unsuitable accommodation are: The Helper having to sleep on made-do beds in the corridor with little privacy and sharing a room with an adult/teenager of the opposite sex.

   ☐ Yes. Estimated size of the servant room ..... square feet/square metres*

   ☐ No. Sleeping arrangement for the Helper:

   ☐ Share a room with ..... child/children aged .....

   ☐ Separate partitioned area of ..... square feet/square metres*

   ☐ Others. Please describe .....

   .....

   .....

   B. Facilities to be provided to the Helper:

   (Note: Application for entry visa will normally not be approved if the essential facilities from item (*a*) to (*f*) are not provided free.)

(*a*)	Light and water supply	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*b*)	Toilet and bathing facilities	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*c*)	Bed	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*d*)	Blankets or quilt	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*e*)	Pillows	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*f*)	Wardrobe	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*g*)	Refrigerator	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*h*)	Desk	☐	Yes	☐ No
(*i*)	Other facilities (Please specify)			

4. The Helper should only perform domestic duties at the Employer's residence. Domestic duties to be performed by the Helper under this contract exclude driving of a motor vehicle of any description for whatever purposes, whether or not the vehicle belongs to the Employer.

5. Domestic duties include the duties listed below.

Major portion of domestic duties:—

1. Household chores
2. Cooking
3. Looking after aged persons in the household (constant care or attention is required/not required*)
4. Baby-sitting
5. Child-minding
6. Others (please specify)

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. When requiring the Helper to clean the outside of any window which is not located on the ground level or adjacent to a balcony (on which it must be reasonably safe for the Helper to work) or common corridor ("exterior window cleaning"), the exterior window cleaning must be performed under the following conditions:—

(i) the window being cleaned is fitted with a grille which is locked or secured in a manner that prevents the grille from being opened; and

(ii) no part of the Helper's body extends beyond the window ledge except the arms.

7. The Employer shall inform the Helper and the Director of Immigration of any substantial changes in items 2, 3 and 5 by serving a copy of the Revised Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties (ID 407G) signed by both the Employer and the Helper to the Director of Immigration for record.

Employer's name and signature	Date	Helper's name and signature	Date

* delete where inappropriate

☐ tick as appropriate

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