

The Use of Public Space by Foreign Female Domestic Workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur

By

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Abstract

In globalizing cities around the world, middle class women are departing from their traditional domestic roles in child rearing and home management. This activity change creates a large influx of young, single and lower income female workers from developing nations such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia and others into Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to serve as domestic workers. Because most female domestic foreign workers reside in the employers' homes, they seek a space elsewhere to meet their needs for privacy, familiarity and companionship on non-working days. As a result, there is an emerging phenomenon where large numbers of female foreign domestic workers gather in public spaces around the city to socialize and to enjoy a brief moment of privacy away from their employers. In these spaces, domestic workers form ephemeral cities. They transform public spaces by assigning areas for food consumption and production, areas to conduct recreational activities such as dancing and singing, places to exchange currencies to send back to their homes abroad and other spaces to fulfill their needs in a foreign city. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is often seen by local citizens as a form of nuisance, inconvenience or even threat, thus causing tension and sometimes conflict between locals and foreign workers. In this thesis, I carried out observation studies on FDW gathering sites in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Through this observation study, I found similar and different physical spatial characteristics across all three cities. Stakeholders also play varying roles in influencing the FDW gathering spaces in these cities. From this comparative study, I learned that the accommodation of FDWs in public spaces varies depending on various factors such as culture, demographics and city branding in each city. With the current exponential growth of transnational foreign domestic labor in the region and world, I hope that this study will inform sustainable humanitarian strategies in accommodating female foreign domestic workers around the world.

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Tunney Lee

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♡ K and family.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“These are places where we can find our family. It is our community. It has historical, psychological and sentimental factors, ” Eman Villanueva (Law, 2005)

In globalizing cities around the world, middle class women are departing from their traditional domestic roles in child rearing and home management. This activity change creates a large influx of young, single and lower income female workers from developing nations such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia and others into Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to serve as domestic workers. Because most female domestic foreign workers reside in the employers' homes, they seek a space elsewhere to meet their needs for privacy, familiarity and companionship on non-working days. As a result, there is an emerging phenomenon where large numbers of female foreign domestic workers gather in public spaces around the city to socialize and to enjoy a brief moment of privacy away from their employers. In these spaces, domestic workers form ephemeral cities. They transform public spaces by assigning areas for food consumption and production, areas to conduct recreational activities such as dancing and singing, places to exchange currencies to send back to their homes abroad and other spaces to fulfill their needs in a foreign city. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is often seen by local citizens as a form of nuisance, inconvenience or even threat, thus causing

tension and sometimes conflict between locals and foreign workers. In this thesis, I will perform a comparative study between the public spaces occupied by female foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. I hope to uncover the similarities and differences in the foreign female domestic workers' need for and behavior in public spaces through detailed data analyses and observation studies.

1.1 Economic Landscape: Regional Push and Pull of Domestic Labor

Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur are all cities that underwent rapid urbanization and industrialization in the post World War II period. In the 1950s, Hong Kong had already established a promising manufacturing industry due to Britain's laissez-faire approach in developing Hong Kong's economy and the large influx of entrepreneurs to the island during the Red Revolution. From as early as 1964, manufactured goods already made up 75% of Hong Kong's exports (Salaff, 1981)(Constable, 2007). At this time, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur which had just gained independence from the British, were preoccupied with internal politics and had yet to develop cohesive strategies to develop their economies. Both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur only began their export-orientated industrializing schemes in the early 1970s.

It is in this economic climate that we see the rapid increase in Female Labor Participation Rate (FLPR) from 1960 to 2005 in all three cities. Figure 1.1 shows that in the 1960s, the FLPR in Hong Kong was already close to 40% and significantly higher than FLPR rates in Malaysia and Singapore. Hong Kong women in the 1960s were attracted to manufacturing work because it offered an independent lifestyle and higher social status than that found in domestic work (Armstrong, 1990).¹ The large number of young and middle-aged women

¹85% of working women in Hong Kong worked in the textile, plastic and electronic industries (Salaff, 1974)

entering the manufacturing industry created a significant shift in the social dynamics of the city. Firstly, the majority of single women entering the manufacturing sector has created a shortage of local domestic workers in the city. Secondly, the increasing population density and space limitations in Hong Kong discouraged extended families from living together, making it impossible for other family members such as the maternal mother or the mother-in-law to take over child rearing and housework in the family. Lastly, the patriarchal family structure of Chinese families relinquishes male's responsibility in the domestic realm, leaving women to fend for themselves in this new social configuration. It is in this shifting social environment that large numbers of FDWs began entering the Hong Kong workforce in the 1970s.

Singapore did not begin its rapid industrialization scheme until after its independence in 1965. The impact of this political shift on the economy is clearly reflected in the FLPR of Singapore shown in Figure 1.1, where a large percentages of female workers only began entering the workforce in 1970s. As the country's economy shifted from manufacturing and personal services to finance and communications in the 1980s, the demand for educated female workers drastically increased. This drove Singapore's FLPR to surpass that of Malaysia and reach the levels that are comparable to those seen in Hong Kong. Due to the country's strict policy against migrant workers, few married women entered the workforce before the 1980s. However, the increasing demand for the educated female population in the formal workplace created a vacuum in the domestic home. Eventually, the increasing domestic labor shortages forced the government to begin allowing a limited number of foreign domestic workers into the country in 1978 (Yeoh and Huang, 1998). Today, one in six families in Singapore seeks the help of FDWs in their homes. The causes that demanded for increasing FDWs in Singapore are mostly similar to those of Hong Kong, namely the higher education of Singaporean women in the post-World War II era that may have been more productive in the formal service industry, the 'nuclear household' revolution and the unchanging patri-

archal family structure despite the rapid modernization.

Unlike Hong Kong women in the 1970s, Malaysia's women of the same period preferred to stay at home as compared to working in the formal workforce (Ariffin, 2001). This initial trend is reflected in the small increase in FLPR as shown in Figure 1.1. However, in the 1980s, Malaysian women became increasingly educated and began joining the male youths in the massive rural-urban migration to Kuala Lumpur. These changes resulted in domestic labor shortages similar to those seen in Hong Kong and Singapore. The rural-urban migration effectively broke down the Malaysian extended family structure, separating women from familial support to ease their domestic responsibilities. Coupling this factor with the lack of organized childcare and patriarchal structure in Malaysia, women were forced to seek alternatives to fulfill these domestic responsibilities. Initially, lower educated rural women acted as effective substitutes to domestic worker shortages but as these women too began preferring to work in factories, the demand for FDWs began to increase dramatically.

Clearly, the demand for FDWs in all these cities is related to the shifting roles of local women in the industrializing economies. Here, we saw that the shift is largely caused by the unchanging patriarchal structure, the lack of extended family support and the shortage of local domestic workers in these cities. Meeting these increasing demands for domestic work are large numbers of female workers from the Phillipines and Indonesia, who chose to migrate to Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to escape the troubled economy and high unemployment back home.

Unlike Singapore and Malaysia, the 1970s were a bleak period in the Philippines' economic history. Followed by a brief period of industrialization from 1952 to 1969, the Philipines entered an era of political instability and economic turmoil from the 1970s to the 1980s (Constable, 2007). In addition to rebellion and anti communist movements in the country, the economy took a big hit due to the oil price crisis in 1972, increases in international loan payment as well as the global recession from 1980 to 1982 (Constable, 2007)(Leahy, 1990).

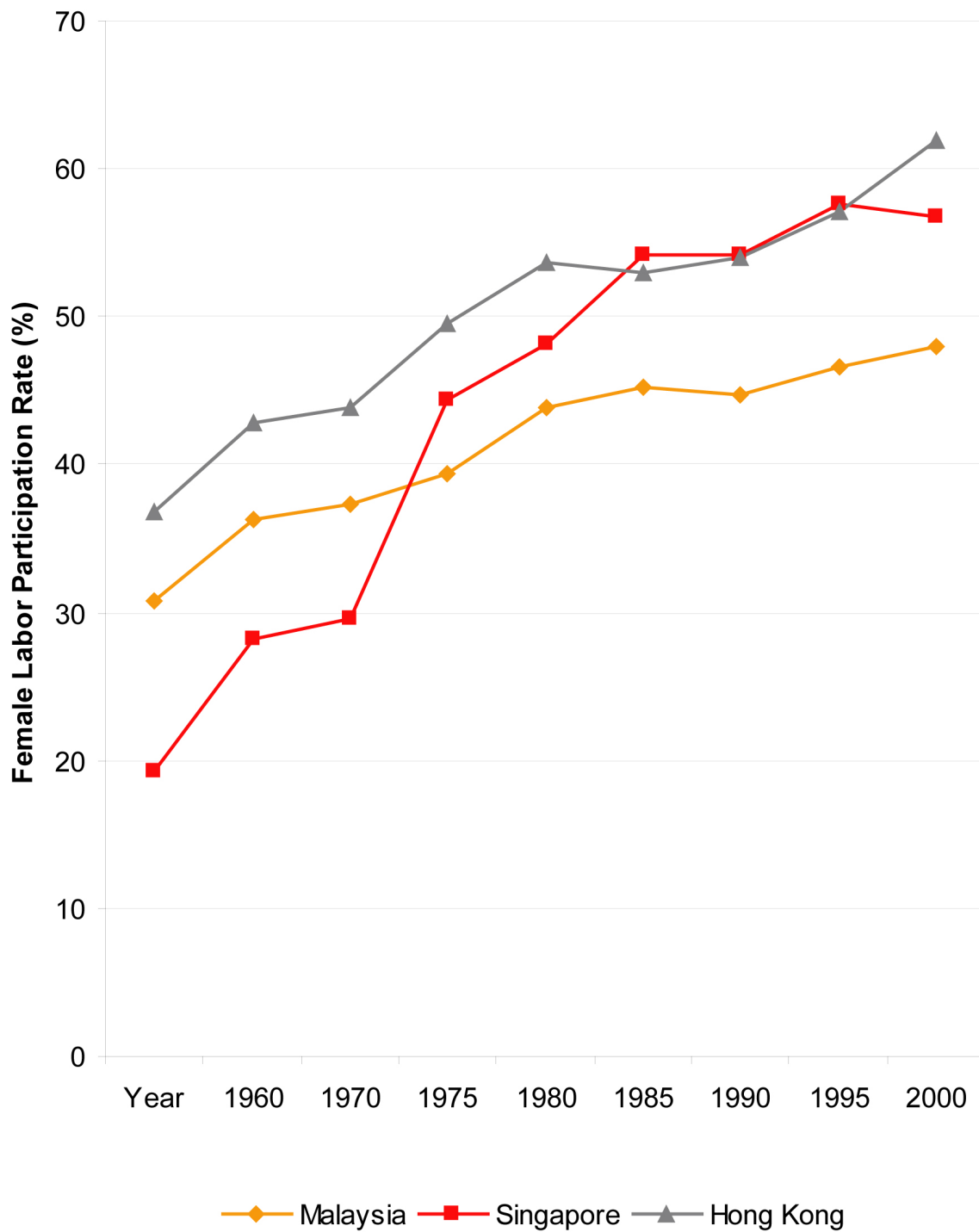


Figure 1.1: Female Labor Participation Rate (FLPR) in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia from 1960 to 2005 (Source: (Ahmad, 1998) (UN data, 2009) (Census and Statistics Department, 2009)(Singapore, 2009)(Vimolwan and Benson, 2006)(Lee, 1991)

As a result, the unemployment rate was 25% in 1974 and two-thirds of the population lived under the poverty line in the 1980s (Andrez, 1984). To lower the unemployment rate and reverse the foreign exchange crisis, the president at the time, President Marcos, aggressively promoted the ‘labor export policy’ as a ‘temporary measure’ to help the ailing economy (Constable, 2007).

However, the measure was anything but ‘temporary’. In 2008, there were approximately nine million Filipino Overseas Workers, approximately 10% of its population (Lema, 2009). The remittance by migrant workers, which amounted to USD 16.4 billion in 2008, continues to provide essential support to the economy and FDWs’ families back in the Philippines (Republic of The Philippines, 2009). It is approximated that every migrant worker supports five persons back in the Philippines (Ng, 2005). Despite these astounding remittances, 40% of the country is still living below the poverty line and the unemployment rate remains high at 13.3% in 2005 (AMC, 2005b). In addition to the unchanging economic outlook, the Philippines is also facing a brain drain phenomenon as more college graduates and qualified teachers prefer to work as foreign domestic workers (FDWs) abroad due to the higher salary that the work offers (AMC, 2005b). While the economic situation continues to push Filipino workers to the regional labor market, Indonesia is fast becoming a strong competitor in this growing labor trade.

Due to its slow economic progress, Indonesia is a country with a high labor surplus where only 68% of its 10.8 million population participates in the labor force (Hugo, 2002). Learning from the Philippine’s experience, the Indonesian government decided to export its labor surplus to Saudi Arabia and Malaysia to lower its high unemployment rate in the 1990s. From the labor migration scheme in the 1990s, the number of migrant workers grew from 5624 in the 1970s to 1.5 million in the 1990s, later reaching the 2.2 million seen today (Hugo, 2002). Of the workers, 76% are women and 94% of the women are working as live-in domestic workers (AMC, 2004). This labor force is fast becoming a major contributor to

the Indonesian economy. In 2006, amounts as high as USD 2 billion were remitted back to the country (AMC, 2004). In industries that do not require higher level education such as domestic work, Indonesian FDWs are fast substituting Filipino women in the region. From Figure 1.2, we see the drastic growth of Indonesian FDWs in Hong Kong and the decreasing number of Filipino FDWs in Kuala Lumpur. Other reasons for the increasing preference for Indonesian FDWs include the rapidly aging population in these spaces. The elderly population prefers Cantonese or Malay speaking Indonesian caregivers who are willing to perform unpleasant tasks instead of English-speaking Filipinos who are more suited for child caring and educational purposes (Lau, 2007). These shifts are reflected in the observation of the public spaces occupied by the respective groups of FDWs in each city.

1.2 FDWs' Spatial Needs: 'A Home Away from Home'

Foreign Domestic Workers' (FDWs) experiences as migrant workers are distinctly different from other international laborers in the region. While other migrant workers such as factory girls and construction men face issues of underpayment and discrimination, they enjoy a commodity that is denied to FDWs: personal space. Even though the living conditions of dormitories are far from ideal, these residences serve as valuable alternatives to the workplace that allow factory girls and construction men to assume identities and behavior of that other than the 'worker'. On the other hand, FDWs are mostly live-in domestic helpers who reside in the employers' homes. Therefore, their 'personal space' is often assumed to be accommodated as a subset of their workplace. In reality, it is rare for FDWs to be assigned their own room in the employers' homes due to the small size of residential units in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Instead, they are often expected to either share a room with the children or sleep in the living area or kitchen of the house. In the employer's home,

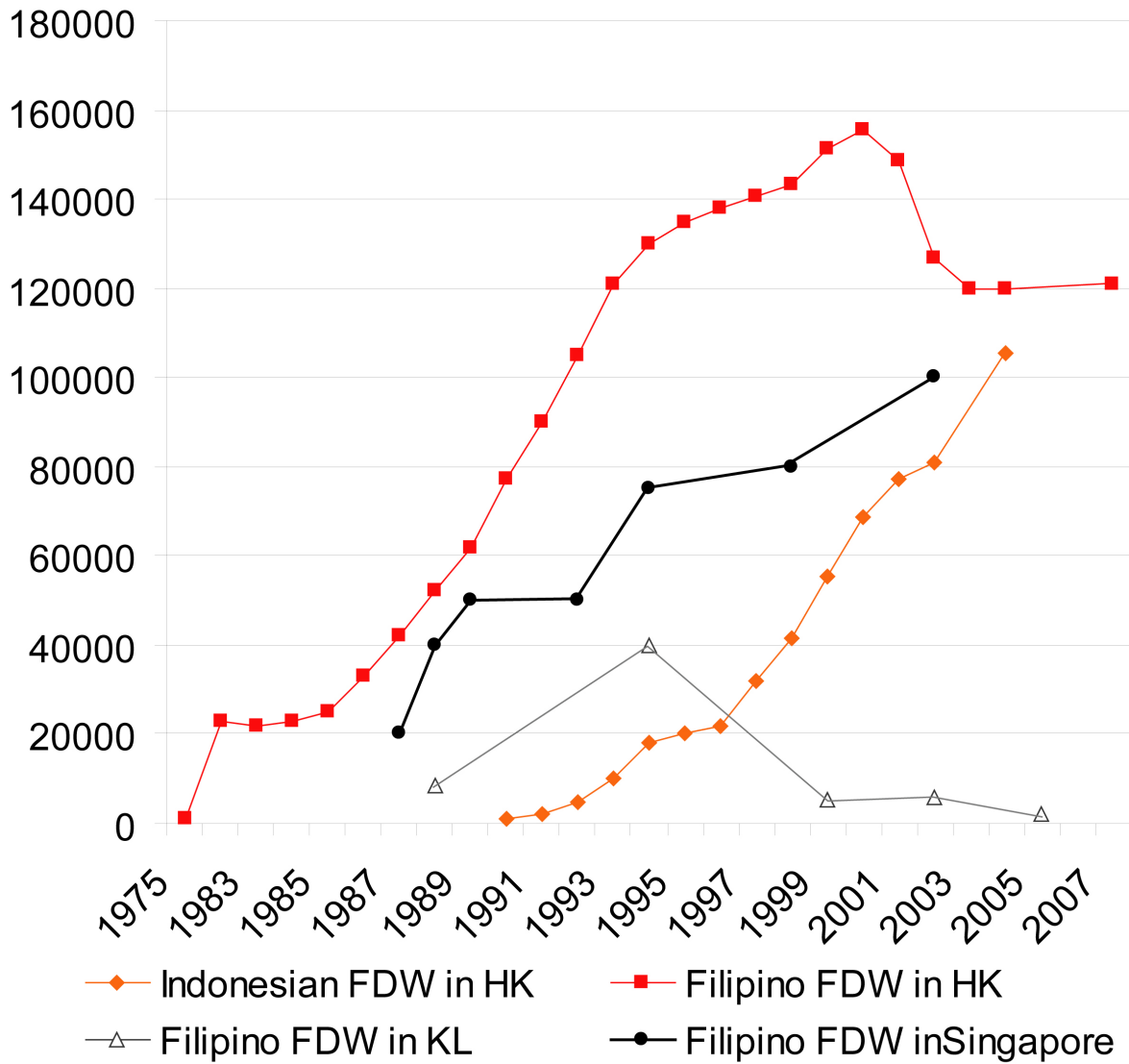


Figure 1.2: Number of FDWs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur from 1982 to 2007. (Source: (ADB, 2006), (AMC, 2004), (Constable, 2007), (Star, 2005))

FDWs are also expected to behave according to the customs and rules of the host family, which limits their personal freedom to express themselves according to their individuality and native cultural norms. Because the employers' residence fails to fulfill the basic spatial needs of FDWs, they seek a space for personal self-expression elsewhere on their off days (Yeoh and Huang, 1998). Ironically, this need is fulfilled in the public space.

1.3 Transnational Public Spaces

After three decades of strong flow of FDWs into the respective cities, there are approximately 330,000 FDWs in Malaysia, 230,000 FDWs in Hong Kong as well as 150,000 FDWs in Singapore. As larger numbers of FDWs began joining the domestic workers in each city, the demand for and nature of the public spaces they occupy began to change. Not only do FDWs consume larger net areas of the public space but they began to colonize these spaces, transforming them into 'Little Manila' and 'Indonesian town' similar to migrant neighborhoods such as 'Chinatown' and 'Little Italy' around the world. The difference is that these FDW ethnic enclaves are not hosted in a collection of private permanent architecture but unfolds unplanned in parks, plazas and sidewalks forming ephemeral towns within the city.

As Yeoh has noted in her discussion of FDW spaces, public spaces have traditionally been understood as gendered and socially polarized spaces. From the ancient culture of Athens to Imperial China, public space participation has always been a process of inclusion and exclusion; spatial manifestation of the powerful and powerless. Women who have been traditionally associated with domesticity have only recently begun to participate in the public space as individuals. The recentness of their participation places them in a subordinate position, where their private boundary as individual selves in the public space is often challenged by males through invasive acts such as 'wolf-whistling' and 'sexual remarks' (Yeoh and Huang, 1998). Minorities have also been historically invisible in the public space, either

through dilution by the dominant majority or deliberate exclusion from the surface of society. Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) assume both these identities, placing them in a double negative position in this arithmetic of public space participation. Their subordinated position is evidently seen in Orchard Road Singapore, where their presence is deemed polluting to the social landscape of the city (Yeoh and Huang, 1998). However, in cities that actively accommodates the presence of migrant workers, FDWs' position is far from subordinate. In fact, FDWs have successfully reversed the principles of public space participation to emerge as the dominant force within the public space. According to Edwards, 'open-minded' public spaces should ideally allow everyone the right of access and opportunity for spontaneous unplanned encounters and also permit behavior governed by only social civility (Yeoh and Huang, 1998). Long standing FDW gathering spaces do not adhere to these definitions. In these FDW occupied public spaces, the access is somewhat limited to FDWs, and encounters between individuals are often planned and organized, while their behavior is governed by the norms of the FDWs instead of the host city. This phenomenon of public space colonization by FDWs signals a shift in the definition of public spaces in global cities around the world.

Figure 1.3 shows that the public spaces in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur are systematically and routinely transformed each Sunday by different FDW groups in the city. The colonized public space becomes a temporary extension of the Philippines and Indonesia that overlaps with the host city, making it a public space for citizens of both countries. It is in this host city and colonized space that most discourse between both societies are conducted, mostly in the form of protest and campaigns. Demonstrations such as the "Wage and Labor Protection Campaign" in May 2005 are often staged in Central Hong Kong. This is because on Sundays, the space is an intersection between Hong Kong and Philippines, allowing FDWs to voice their issues to both societies simultaneously. In other words, like labor and capital in the globalization age, public space too can transcend national boundaries. Instead, this form of public space transformation is dependent on the maturity of the cosmopolitanism in

each city. While all three cities strive to be the cosmopolis of the 21st century, their social exclusion and inclusion arithmetic varies greatly. Often, they do not approximate the ‘open-minded’ public spaces prescribed by visionaries such as Jane Jacobs, less so the transnational and all inclusive public space required to accommodate subordinated groups like FDWs in the city. Nevertheless, we will find in this thesis that these transnational public spaces is not only possible but have begun to take root in globalized cities.

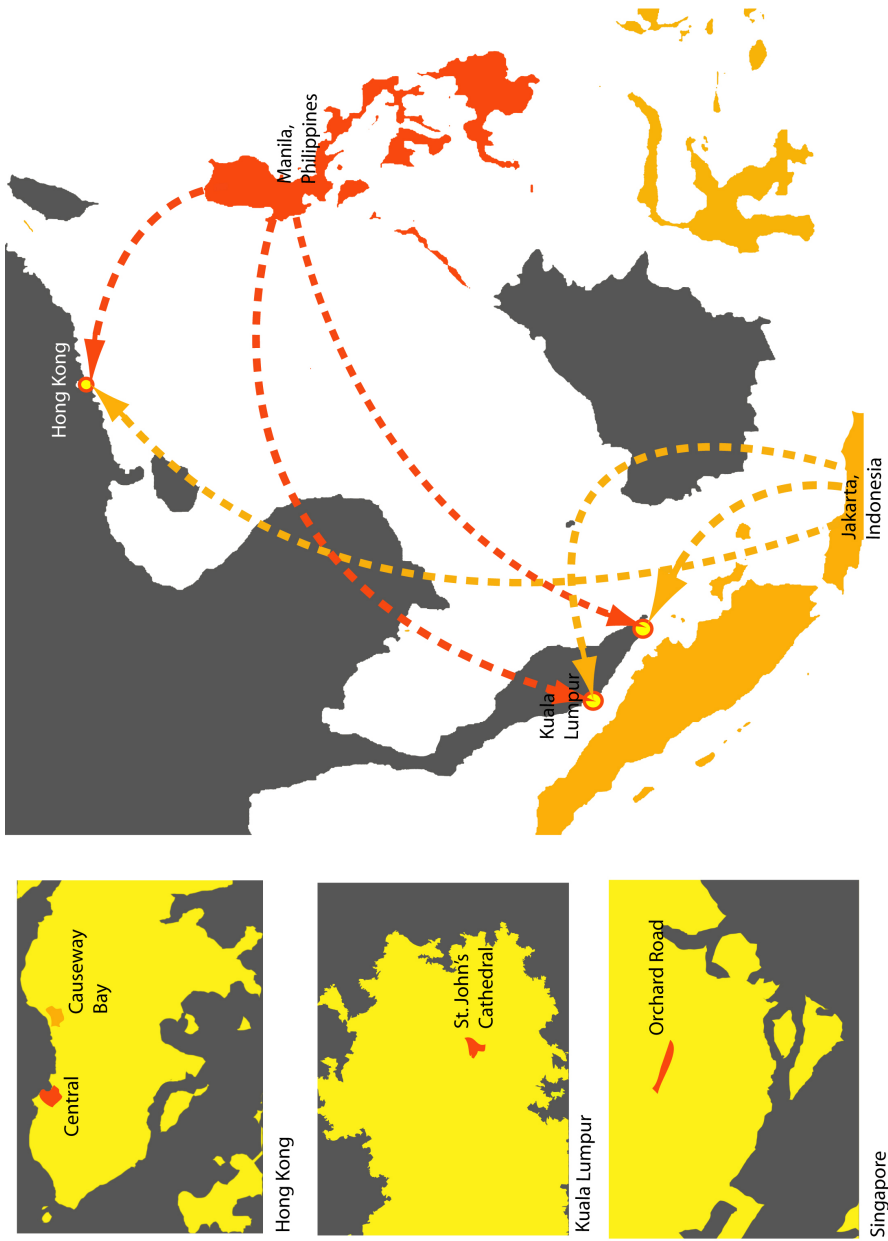


Figure 1.3: Transnational Public Spaces: Colonization of Public Space by Filipino and Indonesian FDWs on Sundays

1.4 Research Methodology and Literature Review

This research is based on one-day observation studies carried out in FDW gathering spaces. The case studies were conducted on four separate Sundays in December 2008 and January 2009. The case studies include Central Hong Kong, Causeway Bay Hong Kong, Orchard Road Singapore and St. John's Cathedral Kuala Lumpur.² Besides observing the physical spaces, I also conducted interviews with FDWs as well as other relevant participants such as security guards, business owners, employers and the general public who are also present in the space. To understand the evolution and history of these spaces, the author relied on newspaper articles, published literature and in some cases, Internet blogs, forums and discussions, to draw conclusions on the dynamics of the space prior to and during the time of observation.

Literature of the spatial transformation process by FDWs in public spaces are scarce but there are two notable scholars who have written extensively on this topic in Singapore and Hong Kong. Brenda Yeoh from the Department of Geography in Singapore published the "Negotiating Public Space: Strategies and Styles of Migrant Female Domestic Workers in Singapore" in 1998 to describe the spatial consumption of FDWs in terms of political and social contestations between social groups. While the literature describes the behavior of FDWs in the public space, it does not provide analysis on either the physical space itself or the usage in the space. Lisa Law, who is a scholar from the University of Hong Kong, researched extensively on the use of public space by FDWs in Central Hong Kong. In her article "Home Cooking: Filipino Women and Geographies of the Senses in Hong Kong", she describes the physical transformation of the space by FDWs through the sense of sight, sound, smell and taste, facilitating place-making through the memory of the senses. Her discussions are enlightening and strongly assisted my understanding of the subtle motivations

²Further details of observation methodology can be found in Appendix A

behind activities in these spaces. Recently, scholars such as Amy Sim have begun to study the use of public space by Indonesian FDWs in Causeway Bay. Her study shows that the different demographic characteristics of FDW groups can result in contrasting patterns of spatial consumption. Her analysis permits further understanding of the underlying factors that influence the physical form of these ephemeral towns.

1.5 Thesis Goals and Organization

The goal of this thesis is to provide a stronger understanding of Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) gathering spaces that are emerging in global cities throughout Asia. In particular, I hope to uncover the physical spatial characteristics of these spaces, their historical evolution and the role and position of different factors in shaping the FDW gathering spaces. The thesis consists of four case study chapters followed by a comparative analysis of these case studies. Each case study chapter will begin with a discussion of the historical background or socio-political climate in which the FDW gathering space is formed. Subsequently, we will detail the physical spatial characteristics and dynamics found on the day of the observation. I will then analyze the observed characteristics according to the influences of different stakeholders in the public space. Next, I will discuss the FDWs' 'sense of ownership' within these gathering spaces, as well as the associated effects of space ownership on the FDWs' experience and space transformation process. Through these discussions, I will then draw conclusions on the spatial dynamics and configurations found in each gathering space. Finally, after the detailed analyses of all four case studies, I will compare and contrast the features and characteristics found in each gathering space to extract the relevant influential factors that shape and transform these spaces into the vibrant and dynamic havens for FDWs on Sundays.

Chapter 2

Hong Kong, Central

Every Sunday, hundreds of thousands of Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) pack their personal belongings into large suitcases to perform their weekly mass migration ‘home’. The behavioral pattern is similar to consultants that fly across America every week to work in clients’ offices only to return home on weekends. The differences, of course, are that Hong Kong Filipino FDWs board the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) and the ferry instead of airplanes, and they head to Central not Philippines. Today, there are over 140,000 Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong and approximately 15% (20,000) visit Central on their day off (inferred from (Wallis, 1992c)). It is this group of enthusiastic individuals that has been transforming the grey financial district into the dynamic and colorful ‘Filipino Town’, week after week, for the last three decades.

2.1 History of FDWs in Central: Battle of Chater Road

Filipino FDWs have been gathering in and around Chater Garden and Statue Square since the 1980s (Constable, 2007). Located in close proximity to WorldWide Plaza, Filipino FDWs

found public spaces such as Statue Square and Chater Garden to be strategic and pleasant spots for them to spend their off days inexpensively. To further minimize expenses, most would bring home cooked meals, personal photographs and mobile entertainment to their picnicking spot. As Hong Kong's flourishing economy in the 1980s created a larger demand for foreign domestic workers, the FDW patrons to Central also increased. Since the parks could no longer host everyone, FDWs began to camp in and around sidewalks, underpasses and along pedestrian bridges, especially along the newly pedestrianized Chater Road. Coincidentally Chater Road and the adjacent areas host the most expensive stores in the city. When it rains, a large number of FDWs would rush to find cover inside underground MTR stations or within the corridors of nearby prestigious shopping buildings such as Prince Building, Alexandra House and Swire House. The increasing spatial conflict between FDWs and business owners in the area sparked the beginning of what is commonly known as 'Battle of Chater Road'.

In 1992, the biggest landowner in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Land, filed a petition to the Transport Department and Urban Council of Central and Western Hong Kong to reopen Chater Road for traffic on Sundays (Wallis, 1992e). The move was a result of intense pressure from the 360 tenants in the area who had been complaining about the "crowd, noise and unwanted activities" resulting from FDWs gathering in Central (Wallis, 1992e). FDWs' gathering has affected businesses in high-end establishments such as Mandarin Oriental Hotel, that received numerous complaints from hotel guests about the noise in the area (Wallis, 1992d). Clearly, the initiative to reopen Chater Road was a strategy to displace FDWs from Central. In addition to reopening Chater Road, Hong Kong Land also suggested relocating Filipino FDWs from public spaces in Central to vacant car parks and governmental buildings in the area (Wallis, 1992d).

The move by Hong Kong Land immediately generated much attention amongst local media, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), FDW groups and governmental bodies.

Local media began highlighting the various issues associated with FDWs' gathering in Central. Belinda Wallis of South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported that FDWs generate approximately six tons of litter, requiring 36 men to clean up the area every Sunday. The gathering also required a larger number of foot patrols to control for hawking and illegal gambling in the area (Wallis, 1992a). Despite these issues, many criticized Hong Kong Land's suggestion to move FDWs to vacant car parks. Members of the Rotary International Hong Kong called the move 'inhuman' and 'impractical', while leaders of Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers were disturbed by the suggestion and noted that the move would result in 'chaos'(Wallis, 1992d). Many FDWs also expressed their disappointment and worries over the issue through local media, noting that Central is their only haven on their rest days (Nott, 1992). Other FDW led NGOs such as League for Asian Workers (LAW) were more proactive in confronting the issues, calling fellow FDWs to keep the area tidy and to avoid engaging in illegal activities in order to minimize the conflict between parties (Tyrrell, 1992). Government bodies such as the Philippines Consulate also expressed concern over the issue but unlike others in the community, did not instigate proactive measures to participate in the solution process.

In response to the increasingly heated issue, Central and Western District Board Council decided to set up an interdepartmental study to solve the issue. Eventually, the government engaged the Urban Service Department to mobilize the relocation of FDWs to school facilities to cut down conflicts between parties (Yue and Perez, 1993). This strategy in turn received strong objections amongst local residents, resulting in the formation of organizations such as 'Join Movement Against the Establishment of Center for Domestic Helpers'(JMAEC). Many Hong Kong residents expressed both concern and disapproval towards moving large groups of FDWs, and presumably the issues associated with their gathering, into their neighborhood. Despite their objections, governmental agencies were persistent in their efforts to establish a safe facility for FDWs in the city. On the 8th of September 1994, the Department of

Home Affairs announced the allocation of seven schools as community centers for FDWs on Sundays as well as a total of \$3 million funds for the operation of these facilities (Ionides, 1994). The measure was meant to be a pilot project that government bodies had planned to expand to 70 if it proved to be successful. With the cooperation of Filipino led NGOs such as Bayanihan Trusts, activities such as cooking demonstrations, beauty pageants and seminars were set up in these facilities to attract FDWs (Yeung, 1995). Unfortunately, these community centers failed to replace Central as the favorable spot for Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong. Many FDWs said that Central not only has all the amenities such as proximity to church and to the commercial hub but its central location allows all friends and family to have equal accessibility to the area either by ferry or train. Not only are some unaware of the availability of these alternative community centers, but others said that the activities are repetitive and the centers are not their 'home'(Yeung, 1995).

Due to the failure of various governmental schemes to lure Filipino FDWs away from Central, business owners and governmental bodies eventually gave in to FDW's occupancy of Central, and Chater Road remained closed to traffic on Sundays. Instead, governmental agencies adopted a more accommodative approach to the issue, increasing manpower and amenities in the area to avoid conflict between different parties at the site. Subsequent to the subsiding tensions between business owners and FDWs, the general public began a heated discourse about FDWs' gathering in Central, mostly focusing on the littering situation in the area. From 1994 to 2008, some members of the public expressed strong opinions, labeling the gatherings as 'menacing' or 'irresponsible' (Ku, 1994)(Anonymous, 1995). Others were concerned about the 'squatter' and 'uncivilized' image that the gatherings were creating for Hong Kong (Chan, 1998) (Fung, 1995) (Cooke, 1998). The issue raised debates about the 'cosmopolitan' state of Hong Kong, with some expatriates and residents calling these direct attacks on Filipino FDW as racist and intolerant (Dunbar, 1998). FDWs also voiced their views about these issues, calling compatriots to 'discipline' themselves by tidying up Central,

at the end of every Sunday (Purificacion, 1998). Meanwhile, public services were increased by placing additional cleaning staff and trash bins throughout Central as well as circulating a broadcasting van to encourage patrons to ‘Keep Hong Kong Clean’ (Annonymous, 1995).

From occupation to resistance and finally accommodation, Hong Kong society has experienced all stages in the process of accommodating FDWs in the limited public space within the city. This process saw the involvement of different parties, which are briefly summarized in Table 2.1. Despite the increasing number of FDWs in the city from 1994 to 2008, the issue of their occupancy of Central has raised only a few controversies ever since 1995 besides discussions on better accommodating Filipino FDWs in a variety of additional facilities besides Central. It is in this mature state of accommodation that I observed Filipino FDW’s occupancy of public spaces in Central, Hong Kong.

Table 2.1: Parties involved in the Battle of Chater Road

Business Owners	NGOs
Hong Kong Land	Rotarian International
Alexandra House	Joint Organization of Trade Unions
Prince Building	Local Action Group
Swire House	JMAEC
WorldWide Plaza	Movement Against Discrimination
Mandarin Oriental	

*JMAEC=Joint Movement Against the Establishment of Center for Domestic Helpers

FDW specific NGOs	Regulators
Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers	Environmental Protection Department
Asian Domestic Workers Union	Urban Services Department
Bayanihan Trust	Transport Department
League of Asian Workers (LAW)	Central and Western District Board
United Migrant Workers	District Land Office
United Filipinos in Hong Kong	Police Department
	Home Affairs Board
	Urban Council

Religious Institution	Government
St. John's Cathedral	Philippine Consulate

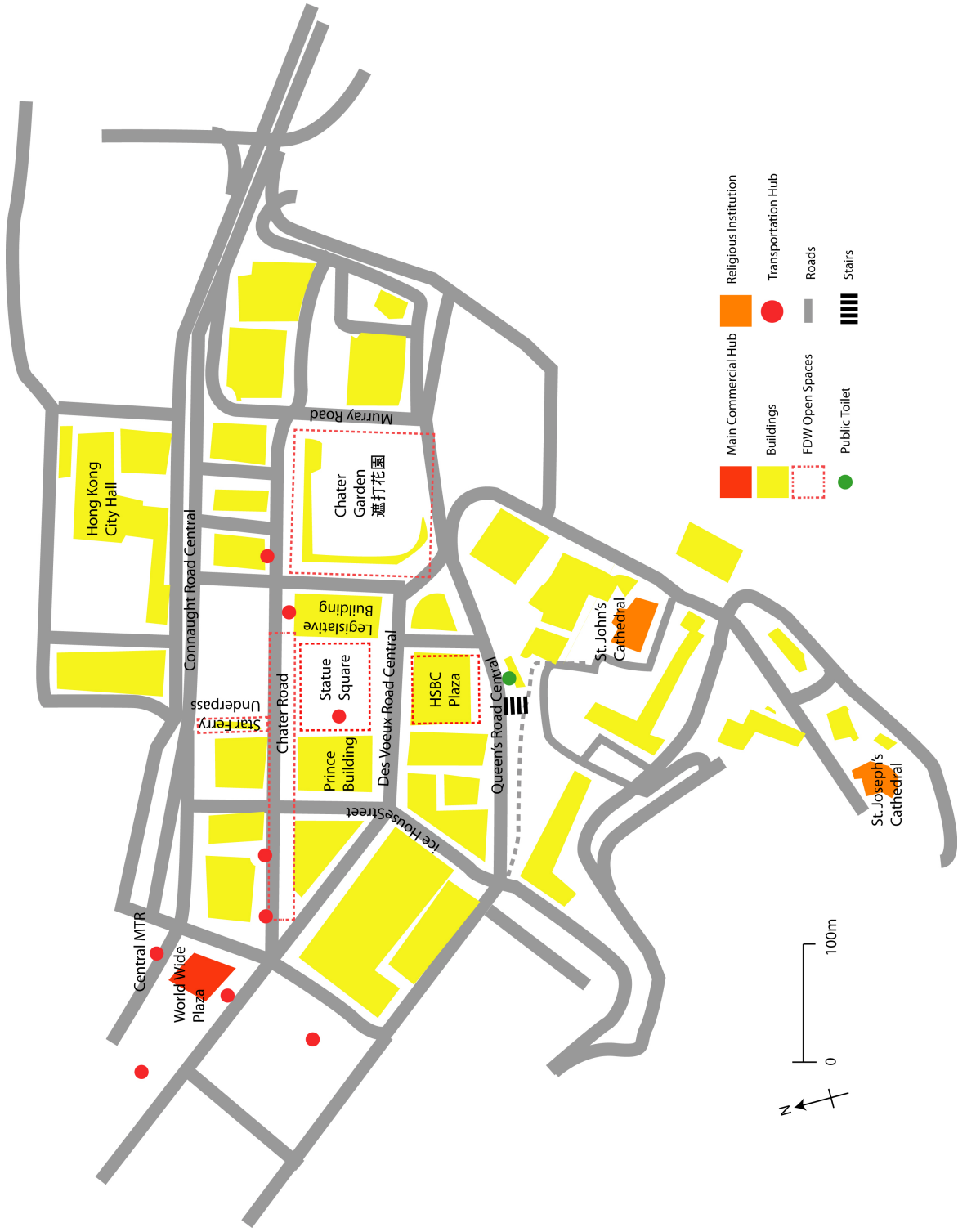


Figure 2.1: Map of FDW's use of public space in Central, Hong Kong

2.2 Observation of Central, Hong Kong (2008)



Figure 2.2: World Wide Plaza early morning 11 January 2009 (picture by author)

A primary activity for Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) on their rest days is to perform errands that they cannot on normal weekdays such as remitting money and purchasing calling cards or phone credits. To cater for these compulsory needs, all FDW gathering spots have a commercial hub where these services congregate. These commercial hubs are often located in close proximity to main transportation hubs. The commercial hub for Filipino FDWs in Central Hong Kong is Worldwide Plaza, located directly above one of the exits of Central MTR Station. On the day of observation, the WorldWide Plaza was bustling with people, leaving hardly any space to circulate, while most stores around Central were not yet opened for business. The complex is a multistory building that caters specifically for Filipino FDWs on Sunday, hosting a large number of stores that sell mostly phone cards, mobile phone credit, groceries, clothes and books. These tiny stores often offer a combina-

tion of all these goods with additional food businesses extended from their premises into the corridors. Filipino snacks are piled outside shops and people eat and chat in front of these stores. The stores also provide stools to allow patrons to sit while consuming their food. Few people enter the stores, making the circulation area the main business area. On Sundays, 95% of the crowd consist of female Filipino FDWs. The exclusivity of the complex is evident with the advertisements placed around in the complex; they are written entirely in Tagalog or are targeted directly towards Filipino clients. While foreign to others, the combination of the smell of Filipino food, the sound of Tagalog and the sight of so many compatriots will recreate ‘home away from home’ for many homesick Filipino FDWs, even for a brief moment.

Besides running errands, WorldWide Plaza also serves as a meeting point for friends and family. Since the internal areas of the complex are overly crowded, FDWs often choose to wait along the pedestrian bridge that connects the plaza with another building or around the exit area of Central Station. Capitalizing on these waiting individuals, many peddlers and promoters also station themselves along these areas to promote products ranging from phone cards and contracts to self-improvement classes. Therefore, the atmosphere in and around WorldWide Plaza is constantly bustling. Unfortunately, the complex does not offer toilet facilities for its customers despite the large number of patrons. All except for one female toilet on the ground floor are perpetually closed ‘for tenants’ only. Even though WorldWide Plaza is an important place to Filipinos FDWs, most do not picnic in and around the complex.

The most popular picnicking spot for Filipino FDWs is the HSBC Plaza. Located next to Statue Plaza and bordering the entrance to St. John’s cathedral, the spot is located along a major tourist walking path. Filipino FDWs begin occupying the plaza from early in the morning, forming different groups and setting up picnic areas defined by mats. Their formation includes two major circulation paths that are automatically left uninhibited to allow the plaza to continue to function as a circulation path for tourists and visitors to Central.



Figure 2.3: HSBC Plaza early morning Sunday, 11 January 2009 (picture by author)

No barriers are erected to guide the formation of this circulation path. Within the major picnic area, the arrangement mimics a rough grid that allocates smaller paths in between mats to allow people to enter, leave and circulate the area. Since HSBC plaza is the largest hard-surfaced and shaded public space in Central, it is regarded as the primary real estate amongst Filipino FDWs who set up their temporary homes every Sunday. The number of FDWs that gather changes throughout the day from groups of three or four persons in the early mornings, to fifteen or more people in the late afternoons. Bordering the HSBC plaza is also a public toilet recently constructed to perhaps facilitate the large number of FDWs that frequent the area on Sundays.

Adjacent to the HSBC plaza is the Statue Park, a public space that is specifically designed for recreation. This park features a fountain as well as benches and shades surrounding the area. Besides physical amenities, the park is also a Wifi hot spot, providing free Internet service to patrons with laptops. The area is bordered by Prince Building, which



Figure 2.4: Filipino FDWs taking pictures at Statue Square, 11 January 2009 (picture by author)

hosts a number of luxury stores, as well as the Legislative Council. The space is a popular photography spot amongst FDWs with famous architecture such as Bank of China acting as the backdrop. The area is also a mini-commercial space where some Filipinos bring along books, toys and other goods for sale, hidden in their suitcases. Perhaps in response to this behavior, the park is surrounded with signs that warn of illegal activities such as smoking and hawking often written in Tagalog and clearly targeting Filipino FDWs. Picnicking is also practiced in this area even though FDWs do not group in circles but instead, sit in lines of benches or along the edges of fountains. Because standing and sitting in linear arrangements do not encourage long-term interaction between large groups of people, FDWs in Statue Park mostly gather as two to three persons. Also, they do not appear to be occupying the spaces permanently but merely use the space for food consumption. The park arrangement allows for good circulation, making it possible for Filipino females to gather in designated

sitting areas without inhibiting the flow of pedestrians. Park regulators are also present to assist and monitor activities in the park.

Besides HSBC plaza and Statue park, Filipino FDWs also gather and picnic in other areas such as Charter Garden and City Hall, as well as vacant areas underneath pedestrian bridges and along sidewalks. In particular, a large number of FDWs camp along the underpass that leads to the Star Ferry. The spatial organization along the underpass mimics that of HSBC plaza where picnickers have a permanent logic of space occupancy that does not inhibit circulation of the underpass. Gathering also occurs along Charter Road that remained closed despite the controversy in 1992. Through the observation study, it is found that areas that provide shade to protect picnickers from rain and sun are more popular than open spaces, irrespective of the cleanliness of the area. This is apparent in Central since vacancies in bus stops, underneath pedestrian bridges and underpasses are filled before the clean and empty spaces along Charter Road or Charter Garden. Also, sheltered areas are popular amongst those who have a higher need for privacy since they are more likely to use umbrellas or other objects to hide card-playing or gambling activities.

Besides the proximity of WorldWide Plaza, Filipino FDWs favor Central as a picnicking spot because of the large number of churches in the area. Religious institutions provide emotional and social support to Filipino FDWs. Most FDWs attend mass at either St. John's Cathedral, an Anglican Church, St. Josephs, a popular Roman Catholic Church or other nearby churches. St. John's provides a Tagalog service at 2 p.m. on Sundays but FDWs rotate their attendance throughout the day due to avoid crowding in the church. Perhaps in anticipation of the large number of FDWs that flood the streets, policemen arrive at the end of each mass to facilitate the flow of pedestrians downhill towards the picnicking spots.

While the paragraphs above detail descriptions of the public spaces occupied by Filipino FDWs in Central, the characteristics of these spaces change throughout the day. Depending on the number of people gathered, the activity scheduled as well as the presence of regulators,



Figure 2.5: Star Ferry Underpass, 11 January 2009 (picture by author)

the behavior, atmosphere and organizational pattern of the space changes. In the sections below, we will discuss the influence of business owners, regulators, government bodies and general public on Filipino FDW's use of public space in Central, Hong Kong.

2.3 Role of different actors in Place Making

2.3.1 Institutions

Institutional bodies have a strong influence on the public spaces consumed by FDWs in Hong Kong, Central. In particular, the large number of churches in and around Central provides strong social and religious support to the majority of the Christians Filipino FDW population in the area. Being separated from friends and families for long periods of time, FDWs are in need of not only social and emotional support, but also an avenue to fulfill their spiritual needs. Therefore, besides money remittance, church attendance is the second most important agenda in the schedule of Filipino FDW's day off. Since FDWs cannot afford to travel repeatedly, proximity to church is an important factor that made Hong Kong Central a strategic spot for the formation of the ephemeral Filipino Town.

Not only do the location and presence of religious institutions attract Filipino FDWs to Central, but also the churches' proactive gestures that specifically support this demographic. For example, to accommodate the large number of Filipino patrons, churches specifically increased the number of services and also provide services in Tagalog and English on Sundays. Also, realizing the limitations of their church facilities and services, some ministers have even ventured out of the churches to offer mobile religious support to FDWs in and around Central (Tubeza, 2007). Besides spiritual support, religious institutions also attempt to provide community halls for FDWs. Although the space serves an ideal shelter, it is not favored by most FDWs because the activities within church grounds are limited (Tubeza, 2007).

Besides religious institutions, the long history of Filipino FDWs' occupancy in Hong

Kong Central has allowed the formation of a number of FDW-based organizations. These organizations not only serve to protect the employment rights and benefits of FDWs in Hong Kong but also act as active protectors of their ‘home away from home’. Previously, various NGOs were formed to protect FDWs from being displaced from Central during the Battle of Chater Road. These NGOs have continued to function as protectors of the space after the event and have even inspired local NGOs such as the Local Action Group in its effort to protect their public spaces in Hong Kong (Tubezza, 2007). Their continuous strength is evident in the recent discussions on transforming car parks into recreational areas for FDWs. NGOs such as United Filipino Migrant Workers clearly stated that their support for the idea is conditional upon the fact that the gesture is not an effort to remove FDWs from the public eye (But and Ng, 2007). Besides FDW-based NGOs, local groups such as Rotarian International Hong Kong and Movement Against Discrimination effectively act as protective agents that support Filipino FDWs’ occupancy of Central. The involvement of international agencies such as Human Rights Watch has increased the publicity of the phenomenon to the international community in recent years. Even resistive local groups such as JMAEC have also ironically served to support FDWs’ stay in Central by vigorously objecting to their location elsewhere. However, they no longer impose a significant influence on the subject.

2.3.2 General Public

Physically, the general public in Hong Kong does not participate in the public space in and around Central on Sundays. The lack of middle class commercial outlets in Central makes it unlikely that middle class consumers will visit the area on Sundays. Meanwhile, upper class individuals who frequent high-end stores and hotels in Central appear to avoid direct confrontation with the large number of FDWs. Most high-end customers travel directly to destinations via automobile to avoid passing through gathering spots. Even though the be-

havior can be seen as a sign of xenophobia, it is perhaps a more complex process of space negotiation. Perhaps, the phenomenon is a sign of locals surrendering the area to FDWs, recognizing it as a temporarily privatized Filipino town. Perhaps it is a combination of both. As a fewer number of local residents and a higher number of FDWs visit Central every Sunday, the comfort level of locals decreases while FDWs' sense of ownership increases. The absence of "the other" is an important factor in place making and in this case, the reluctance of locals to participate in the public space has helped to further establish the Filipino identity in Central.

Even though for decades local residents have stopped frequenting Central on Sundays, they are capable of influencing the space through media and other forms of public discussions. Since 1994, South China Morning Post (SCMP) was flooded with letters from the public that both criticized and supported FDWs' behavior and occupancy in Central. Mostly, the topics discussed revolved around issues of littering and 'image' building. While these discussions did not translate into any physical consequence to FDWs or on Central, they did exert pressure and tension on regulators and civil bodies who are responsible for the management of these public spaces. Today, these issues are no longer publicly debated in the media. Instead, most local residents have grown accustomed to the rituals of FDWs in Central and have turned empathetic towards FDWs, often quoting that "they (FDWs) need a place too". General public's support towards the phenomenon is an important milestone in the accommodative process of cities towards FDWs and Hong Kong's self-image as a cosmopolitan place.

2.3.3 Regulators and Government Authorities

Contrary to popular belief, regulators and government bodies play one of the most significant roles in enabling the events in Central to unfold every Sunday. The various roles that they play include the determination of a general attitudinal position towards FDW's presence,

conflict resolution as well as physical space management to support FDWs' activities. The position undertaken by government bodies have a strong ripple effect on controversial issues. For example, by choosing not to reopen Chater Road and to not engage in the movement to displace FDWs from Central, authorities sent a message that they recognize FDWs' right to consume public spaces in Hong Kong. This form of passive recognition is very important as it serves to protect FDWs from future displacement, but also gives FDWs the crucial sense of ownership and belonging that further elevates their self esteem. Without this recognition, the current phenomenon could take a significantly different form as compared to the peaceful and comfortable 'homes away from homes' currently observed in Central.

Besides providing support at the policy and administrative level, regulators and civil service play an important role in maintaining the physical gathering space as well as conflict resolution. As mentioned previously, a large number of cleaning staff are employed to clean up litter produced by FDWs every Sunday to resolve the complaints by residents. Policemen are also dispatched to Peak Road at the end of mass to ensure pedestrian safety of the FDWs as they move from St. Joseph's church to HSBC plaza or Chater Garden. These support are carried out to ensure that residents in the area are not 'inconvenienced'. Besides services, facilities such as public toilets were also built in areas around main picnicking spots to provide adequate female toilet facilities to the group. This is also to prevent FDWs from overcrowding toilet facilities in nearby high-end shopping complexes such as Prince Building and Alexander House that could result in further conflict between business owners and FDWs. Without the regulators' and authorities' continuous effort to act as mediators, conflict managers and problem solvers in these spaces, it is unlikely that FDWs could continue to gather in Central every Sunday in a conflict-free environment

Why did authorities adopt an accommodative approach towards FDWs' occupancy of Central? Instead, authorities could have adopted a more resistive approach in 1992, either displacing the FDWs from Central or collaborating with Hong Kong Land to reopen Chater

Road. While their actions could be purely humanitarian, other possible explanations include the ‘sensitive period’ of British-China handover in the 1990s as well as the pragmatic cost of displacement versus accommodation in regards to this issue. Hong Kong in the 1990s was experiencing a politically sensitive period, when both the British and Chinese government were careful not to raise controversial political issues that would damage the reputation of either government. The British were eager for a ‘smooth’ handover while the Chinese were careful not to evoke criticism of ‘intolerance’ or invalid ‘prosecution’. Perhaps benefiting from this political climate, FDWs were able to carry out their activities with strong support from the local government. The other explanation involves the actual cost of resistance versus what it would cost for accommodation. Hiring the manpower to displace, prosecute FDWs as well as image damage control would cost the government far more time and resources than employing cleaning staff at the end of every Sunday. Realizing this, the government’s accommodative approach could be merely a pragmatic planning decision due to the actual cost of the approach.

2.3.4 Business Owners

From the events that unfolded during the Battle of Chater Road, we saw the influence of business owners on the spaces occupied by FDWs in Central. To control the gatherings, they have previously engaged in various strategies including hiring large numbers of security guards, launching renovation projects as well as engaging their landlord to institute negotiation with relevant authorities. Ultimately, their efforts were not fruitful and the business owners were forced to accommodate FDWs’ space consumption patterns in Central. Since the end of the conflict, high-end businesses have stopped their attempts to displace FDWs from their complexes. Instead, they have chosen to shorten their hours of operation on Sundays. Despite previous complaints that FDWs’ presence discourages high-end consumers from the area, the phenomenon has also attracted large numbers of curious foreigners and

tourists to the area, which seems to contribute to the higher number of patrons observed in these luxury stores during the observation study.

Luxury business owners are not the only commercial powerhouse in Central on Sundays. Perhaps more influential are the businesses in WorldWide plaza (WWP) that cater specifically for Filipino FDWs on Sundays. Money remittance centers, mobile phone service centers and grocery stores are all businesses that Filipino FDWs require on Sundays since it is the only time in the week when they are able to perform necessary errands. Therefore, WWP plays a crucial role in the formation of the Filipino town in Central. WWP was not always the bustling Filipino commercial hub observed today but began as a quiet complex with few stores and banks that were mostly closed on Sundays. However, when the number of Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong exploded in the 1980s and 1990s, the central location, affordable rents and bank services made WWP a strategic area for Filipino targeted businesses (SCMP, 2006). With this new wave of consumption power, Filipino stores began to displace other stores in the complex, slowly converting the complex into a center specifically catering for Filipino patrons. With this rise in demand, the stores multiplied dramatically to 200 stores today, and the rent in the area skyrocketed from HKD 30,000 (USD 3,869) in the early 1990s to HKD 210,000(USD 27,084) in the 2000s (SCMP, 2006). While the rent is exorbitant, business owners are reluctant to leave WWP due to the popularity of the area amongst Filipino FDWs.

It is important to understand the influence of Filipino businesses in the process of place making. Since hawking and other mobile businesses are illegal in Hong Kong, permanent businesses act as significant anchors on the location of Filipino communities. Without these businesses, FDWs would not be likely to continue to favor Central as the primary Filipino town. The influence of business owners' decision on where to locate is clearly seen with the new businesses being set up in North Point, Sai Kung and Tai Po(SCMP, 2006). In areas like Planet Square in Hung Hom, clusters of around 15 shops have begun to grow and

attract FDWs to the area. As in Central, FDWs come to carry out errands and picnic in nearby areas. Successful businesses like the mini-market, Uniworld, have in turn encouraged other Filipinos to set up business in the area, further increasing the popularity of the area (SCMP, 2006). The emergence of these new Filipino hot spots is perhaps a sign that the “Filipino City” in Central has reached its maximum capacity and new temporary satellite towns are beginning to grow in other areas to meet the rising demand for space. While the well funded FDW community centers set up by government authorities have failed to lure FDWs away from Central, we see that Filipino businesses are more successful in creating new areas for FDWs. These cases show the importance of business owners in place making, even for impermanent Filipino towns.

2.4 FDW Ownership

The establishment of thousands of temporary ‘homes’ in Central is possible because Filipino FDWs have a strong sense of ‘ownership’ of the area. Formed through a series of historical events, this sense of ownership is evidently observed in the behavior of FDWs in the public space they occupy as well as the spatial configuration of the community as a whole. The degree of ‘ownership’ the Filipino community has of a public space affects not only the permanency of their settlement but also changes the dynamics of their relationship with regulators, locals and business owners in the area.

2.4.1 How do they show their sense of ‘ownership’ of the public space?

One of the strongest signs of space ownership is location permanency. While there are many picnicking spots available in Central, FDWs do not normally change their picnic spot but instead settle in the same area week after week. Just like the organization of a city, where there are often different ethnic districts, there is an internal real estate logic for picnicking in Central. According to Constable, Filipino FDWs from different regions or belonging to different dialect groups congregate in different areas around Central (Constable, 2007). Fr. Robert Reyes, a Catholic Priest in the area, gives us further details of the ethnoscape by noting that FDWs from “Mindoro would gather underneath footbridges near the post office, those from Rizal will gather in Star Ferry Pier and the Ilocanos would station themselves in the HSBC Building” (Tubeza, 2007).

Filipino FDWs who arrive at the picnic site would often set up camp for both themselves and their friends who have not yet arrived. By simply laying out a mat and placing a large piece of luggage in the middle, the space can be reserved for friends and family to ease socializing later in the day. Sometimes, occupants would set up picnic areas before leaving to run errands and attend church, trusting ‘neighbors’ in the area to take care of their belongings while they are gone. Through this system, the physical space configuration began to mimic actual social relationships of FDWs in the area. The collective memory present in the space is not unlike flea markets of the world, where people return to the same spot for familiarity and for the convenience of finding friends and family despite the temporary state of these spaces. The location permanency in Central is so strong that FDWs can retrieve and send mail to and from Philippines, a service offered by fellow FDWs when they return to Philippines for visits (Constable, 2007). Considering the permanence of this configuration, it is not surprising that Central is a dubbed Filipino Town on Sundays.

Within picnicking spots, FDWs often carry out private activities such as dining, chatting and sleeping as well as other illegal activities normally shielded from the public eye. In the late afternoon, when the numbers of FDWs in picnicking spots peak, the activities shift from chatting and eating to playing board games such as scrabble, chess, cards and Bingo. Often, these games are played with a stake, which means that many FDWs are openly gambling in these spaces. While gambling is illegal in public spaces in Hong Kong, they are permitted within private areas. Besides gambling, there are also a larger number of people smoking despite clear prohibitive signs nearby. Their uninhibited display of private activities is evident of their high level of ownership of the space. Although there are regulators that patrol the area, these activities are ignored. It appears that there is a general consensus amongst parties, that ‘allows’ FDWs to perform private activities in public spaces. Despite this, most FDWs do not welcome the presence of outsiders when they are performing these activities. Clearly, the protection of these privatized spaces is based on a circle of trust formed by regular patrons and not on outsiders to the space.

2.4.2 How is this sense of ownership formed?

Filipino FDW’s ‘sense of ownership’ of Central is not a given condition but a factor established through a series of events and later strengthened by their increasing population within Hong Kong. As previously discussed, the Filipino FDWs’ occupancy of Central faced various resistance from business owners, general public and regulators in the early 1990s, commonly known as the ‘Battle of Chater Road’. After they successfully defeated Hong Kong Land’s intention of reopening Chater Road on Sundays and rejected regulators’ effort to relocate them to other areas, Filipino FDWs felt victorious in the space contestation. Consequentially, a common consensus that Central temporary ‘belonged’ to Filipino FDWs on Sundays was formed.

Even though there is a general strong sense of ownership, the degree of ‘privatization’ of these spaces differs in different areas of Central and it also depends on the number of people gathered throughout the day. This is most clearly seen by the degree in which outsiders are welcomed into picnicking areas. HSBC plaza is an area where the presence of outsiders is treated differently throughout the day. While I was invited for tea and food in the morning, most people in the late afternoon appeared to be unhappy about my presence. My requests for interviews were swiftly turned down. Several people also warned me against taking pictures in the area to ensure that the gambling activities were not recorded. Towards the late afternoon, the number of locals, tourists and non-domestic workers walking through the plaza has also significantly dwindled, making my presence appear even more noticeable. Despite being in public spaces, my presence was clearly seen as a disruption to the ‘privacy’ of the area. It was interesting to observe that groups become more protective in the late afternoon, indicating that the sense of ‘privacy’ and ‘ownership’ is possibly correlated to either the density of FDWs or the activities performed in the area, or both.

2.4.3 Why is sense of ownership so important?

“Weve been here for many years. Weve grown old in this place. This is our home while we are in Hong Kong. It would be like losing our address if maids were evicted,” she added in Filipino. (Tubeza, 2007)

The ‘sense of ownership’ is an important factor as it correlates strongly with the level of satisfaction and enjoyment that FDWs experience in public spaces on their rest days. Most feel that it is important to belong, to not be a foreigner for once in their permanent state of being abroad. The importance of ‘ownership’ to FDWs is clearly seen in the interviews I conducted in the HSBC plaza, Central. While Hong Kong is generally cold in the month of January, with temperatures around 10 Celsius (40 Fahrenheit), HSBC plaza is particularly



Figure 2.6: FDWs using personal umbrellas to protect themselves from the chilly wind, 11 January 2009

chilly because the sloping ground level of the plaza creates a low pressure area and invites strong wind through the plaza from the sea. Protecting themselves from the strong wind, Filipino FDWs were seen seeking shelter underneath small personal umbrellas. Some campers were also seen burying their heads in caps and hoods. When questioned why they insisted on camping in the area despite the availability of many other camping spots, the interviewees cheerfully replied, “because this is our place”. From the interview, I found that the ability to have a place where they can call their own, despite the ephemeral state of this ownership, gives FDWs a tremendous amount of joy. Because FDWs cannot afford to meet in private spaces, they need a permanent public place to spend their days that act as stations in between running chores, shopping and going to church. The interviewee explained that most people come and go according to the church service they go to and they rotate throughout the day, allowing them to meet different friends at different times of the day. The ability to return to the same spot for the convenience of finding friends and family is crucial on their rest day. When asked about the facilities that they feel lacking in the area, they happily

said “nothing”. According to the interviewees, they felt that all their necessities can be brought along from their employers’ home with which the conditions of the place can also be accommodated with. However, having a place that they can call their own was, as the Mastercard advertisers would say, priceless. Clearly, the sense of ownership is closely related to the level of enjoyment experienced in these public spaces, where the facilities themselves can be foregone or substituted, whereas the sense of ownership is irreplaceable.

Complaints of the littering situation in Central continued to the late 90s but quickly dwindled and was no longer publicly debated in the media. The improved situation calls for less services and manpower by authorities to maintain the space. While this can be attributed to the educational efforts by authorities, it does not fully explain the change. In an interview with a park administrator at Statue Square, she described the FDW patrons as well-disciplined and do not block the circulation in the park. During my observation study, I found the space clean and well-maintained. There is also a cleaning staff stationed at Statue Square all day to clean up the area. It appears that maintenance of the space is internalized amongst FDWs to some degree, which can be attributed to their sense of ownership of the space. Knowing that they will return to the space week after week and to avoid persecution and displacement by authorities, FDW has greater inclination to maintain the area they occupy. This point is explicitly promoted by League of Asian Workers(LAW) since 1992, calling compatriots to ‘behave’ to avoid displacement (Tyrrell, 1992). My observation and research indicate that the construction of a strong sense of ownership not only benefits FDWs but also places less pressure on authorities to maintain public spaces.

2.5 Conclusion and the Spatial Configuration

From the discussions above, we saw that the FDW space in Central currently receives strong support by authorities and regulators, Filipino businesses, NGOs, employers and religious in-

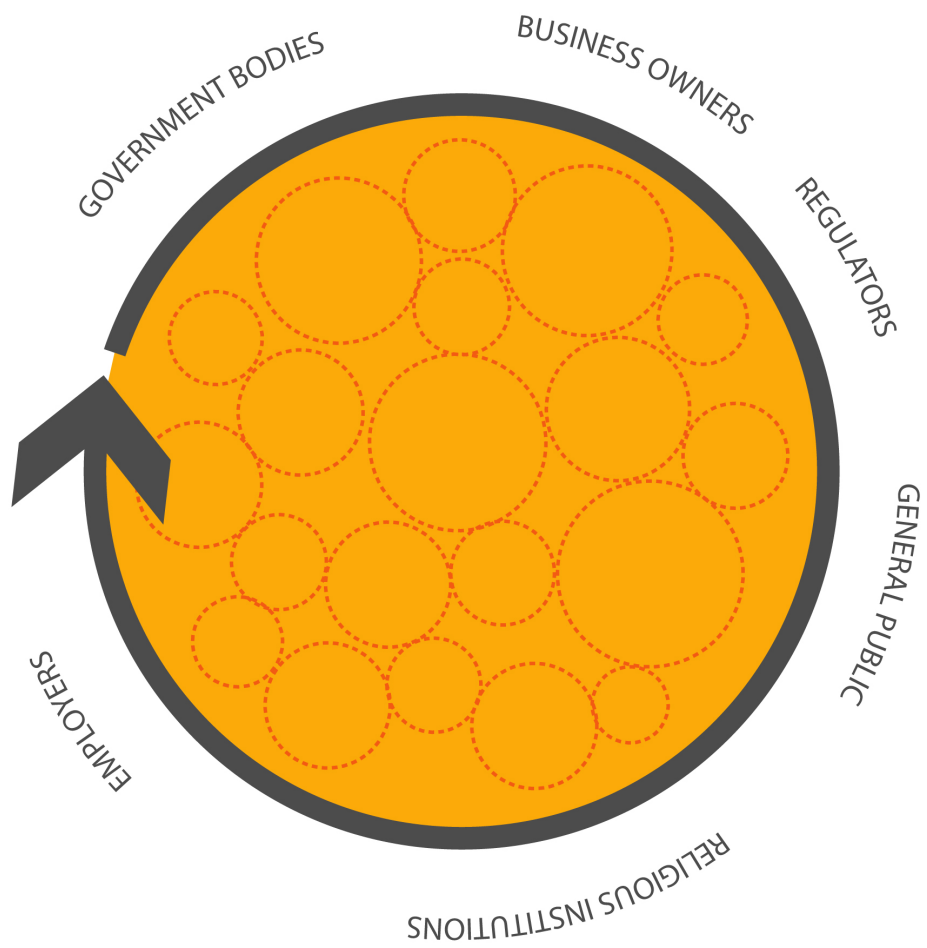


Figure 2.7: Forces that limit space consumption in Central, Hong Kong

stitutions in the area. These actors act as protectors of the space, creating a strong boundary where FDWs gather as diagrammatically shown in Figure 2.7. With this protection, FDWs are free to self-organize within the area according to language and regional affinity. Their freedom within the space allowed them to recreate their ‘home away from home’ through their sensory memory of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch as described in Law in the article ‘Home Cooking: Filipino Women and Geographies of the senses in Hong Kong’ (Law, 2001). Hong Kong Central is an example of the most matured state in the process of FDW accommodation in a global city.



Figure 2.8: HSBC Plaza early morning Sunday, 11 January 2009(picture by author)

Chapter 3

Hong Kong, Causeway Bay

Due to Hong Kong society's unfamiliarity with Indonesian Culture, Indonesian Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) are relatively latecomers in the domestic work industry in Hong Kong and have only begun to arrive in large numbers since the 1990s. However, as soon as the practice began, the demand for Indonesian FDWs grew exponentially from 6,100 in 1993 to 114,400 in 2008 (Lau, 2007)(Lau, 2008) According to some, this growth is closely related to the shifting demographics in Hong Kong, where the increasingly aging population prefers Indonesian FDWs who speak sufficient Cantonese and have the willingness to perform unpleasant tasks, instead of the English-speaking Filipino FDWs.(Lau, 2007). Others feel that it is their docile image and lower salary that make them competitive Constable (2007). Like Filipino FDWs, Indonesian FDWs are granted the same protection under the Hong Kong Local Ordinance and the standard employment contract. Unfortunately, despite this policy, most Indonesian FDWs are underpaid and only 40% of them are granted the weekly day off stipulated in their contracts (AMC, 2004). Nevertheless, tens of thousands of Indonesian FDWs would arrive in Causeway Bay every Sunday to transform Victoria Park and the vicinity area into the vibrant and colorful Indonesian town that allows them to enjoy a rare moment of blissful freedom.

3.1 Space of and for Transformation

Despite the standard regulatory rules imposed by the Hong Kong government on all Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs), the experience of Indonesian FDWs in public space is starkly different from that of their Filipino counterparts. The difference between the two groups is mainly, but not exclusively, correlated to their demographic characteristics. An average Indonesian FDW in Hong Kong can be described as a young, single and uneducated female from a rural area in Central Java, who has never traveled or lived elsewhere other than their home before moving overseas as a migrant domestic worker (Sim, 2007). Their profile contrasts sharply with the middle aged, married and highly educated Filipino who has lived mostly in urban area in the Philippines.

An Indonesian FDWs are first recruited by Indonesian recruiters in rural areas where the women and their families are promised large amounts of earnings for their overseas work. After receiving consent from parents, brothers and husbands, the women are sent to training camps where they are confined by recruiters while waiting for their visa, passport and employment contracts, sometimes for periods of three to four months (AMC, 2004). After being dispatched to the respective receiving countries, they live with employers for six days a week, and in the case of Hong Kong, may be allowed a rest day every week or once a month. Considering their relative youth and rural cultural background, Indonesian FDWs are often victims of sexual, emotional and physical abuse. While these are very important issues in the domestic labor trade, the discussions of these issues are beyond the scope of this thesis. Interested readers should refer to (Sim, 2007), (AMC, 2005) and (Anggraeni, 2006) for more discussion on the Indonesian FDWs labor trade and trafficking in Asia. Here, we will focus on specific aspects of Indonesian FDWs that relate to their

spatial consumption pattern in Hong Kong's public spaces. In particular, we will discuss the consequences of Indonesian FDWs' relative youth, their rural cultural background as well as their employment characteristics, such as their length of stay, in order to understand their use of public spaces in Hong Kong.

Officially the average ages of Filipino and Indonesian FDWs are respectively 33 and 27, indicating a six year difference between the two groups (Sim, 2007)(AMC, 2004). However, rampant age falsification amongst FDWs in the attempt to package themselves as desirable maids makes these official figures unreliable(Sim, 2007). Filipino FDWs are known to declare a younger age while teenage Indonesian FDWs often claim to be older. Both groups attempt to fit the profile of the 25 to 35 year old maid that employers prefer(Constable, 2007). According to Asian Migrant Centre, in reality, most Indonesian FDWs fall in the range of 19 to 25 and have an average age of 21. This resonates with the profile of the interviewees I met in Hong Kong Victoria Park.

The youth of Indonesian FDWs introduces difference challenges to host countries in supporting and providing the public spaces which they consume. Their young age, lack of education, limited exposure and rural background make these Indonesian FDWs highly vulnerable to exploitation. Before coming to Hong Kong, most young Indonesian FDWs did not participate in public spaces, much less urban public spaces, independent from the supervision of family or trusted community members. Instead, young women are placed under strict protection of fathers, brothers or community members when they leave the compounds of the home. One Indonesian FDW described her interaction with a boy friend in her home in Java while being supervised by her mother in her home. Besides her mother, neighbors and community members were supervising his presence. Because he did not leave at 10pm, neighbors began to throw stones on the zinc roof as a reminder of the hour. When he did not leave immediately, they began to throw stones into the house(Sim, 2007). This story illustrates the level of protectionism that occurs in the rural villages. Two thousand miles

away from home, these young women are suddenly exposed to a diverse and complex urban environment, stripped of the protection of family and communal members and unequipped with sufficient knowledge or experience to protect themselves against the ‘dangers’ of the city. Consequentially, they become the targets of male predators; namely lonely male migrant workers and prostitution rings in the city. Stories of sexual, physical and emotional abuse of Indonesian FDWs are disheartening and abundant. Only recently, two Indonesian FDWs were deceived into a sexual and monetary scam by a self proclaimed ‘Wizard’(Wong, 2006). The issue is beginning to concern authorities and government officials due to the social problems that it introduces(Law, 2005).

The vulnerability of young FDWs is not only due to the sudden absence of protection but also due to their lack of sex education prior to their arrival in Hong Kong. Sex remains a taboo subject in rural Indonesia, and young single women are thought to be better left uncontaminated by discussions of sex prior marriage. The Hong Kong government and various NGOs in support of Indonesian FDWs have called for sex education for FDWs but the movement received criticism and resistance from the Indonesian Consul, stating that “sex education for migrant women cannot be introduced until the ulama or Islamic leaders in Indonesia approve it”(Sim, 2007). The conservative view is based on Indonesia’s traditional view of women as dependents and in need of male protection. It is unlikely that the view would be reformed and revised in line with the needs of migrant workers, despite the aggressive labor trade in the region. The consequences of these issues are severe, ranging from physical and sexual abuse to long-term monetary and social damages due to unwanted pregnancy. Pregnancy outside of wedlock bears drastic consequences to Indonesian FDWs. Not only will they lose their employment, but will also be rejected by family and community back in Indonesia (Sim, 2007). The fear of pregnancy or sexual abuse coupled with the need for intimacy and emotional support in a foreign environment have encouraged many young women to turn to other women for comfort (Ma, 2006). The result is the phenomenon of

lesbianscape or public display of lesbianism amongst Indonesian FDWs that is not observed elsewhere in Singapore or Kuala Lumpur.

For youthful FDWs whose individuality is still open for interpretation, the privatized public space allows them to experiment with different identities. The public space becomes a 'Space for Transformation', where subgroups such as lesbian FDWs feel safe and free to express their sexual orientation through their behavior and attire; a freedom which is not found in either the employer's home or their own home in Indonesia. This behavior has invited unwanted attention from the Indonesian Parliament who has exerted pressure on the Indonesian Consul to "solve the issue" (Ma, 2006). The popularity of lesbianism amongst these young Indonesian FDWs can be understood as a defense mechanism. The relationship allows the individual to remain chaste and prevent unwanted pregnancy, while engaging in an emotional and physical relationship to fulfill their youthful needs for intimacy. As discussed by Sim, the relationship between lesbian FDWs mimics that of heterosexual couples where relationships are mostly based on role playing. Young women playing the male role in the relationship are more likely to spend their income on their girlfriends and vice versa during courtship. An example is the story of Katik who spent HKD 2,000 (approximately 60% of her salary) to book a room for four hours to celebrate the birthday of her girlfriend in a local karaoke facility (Sim, 2007). While this form of consumption does not represent the majority of Indonesian FDWs, it shows that Indonesian FDWs might be more aggressive consumers than their Filipino counterparts due to their relative youth and lesser responsibility towards children and husbands in Indonesia.

What do these characteristics have to do with the use of public space? The place making process by FDWs in public space is closely related to and dependent on their need to create a private space that functions as an alternative from their working space throughout the week. Therefore, the public space formed is correlated to the specific spatial needs of FDWs. While the homesick Filipino FDWs strive to create a 'home away from home', this might not be the

dominant need for the younger and more experimental Indonesian FDWs. Their experience in Hong Kong is an opportunity for them to truly consume space independently away from the strict watch of family and community, while expressing their personality, one other than ‘the maid’. We will see that their different needs create a different spatial configuration than the one seen in the Filipino centric areas in Central.

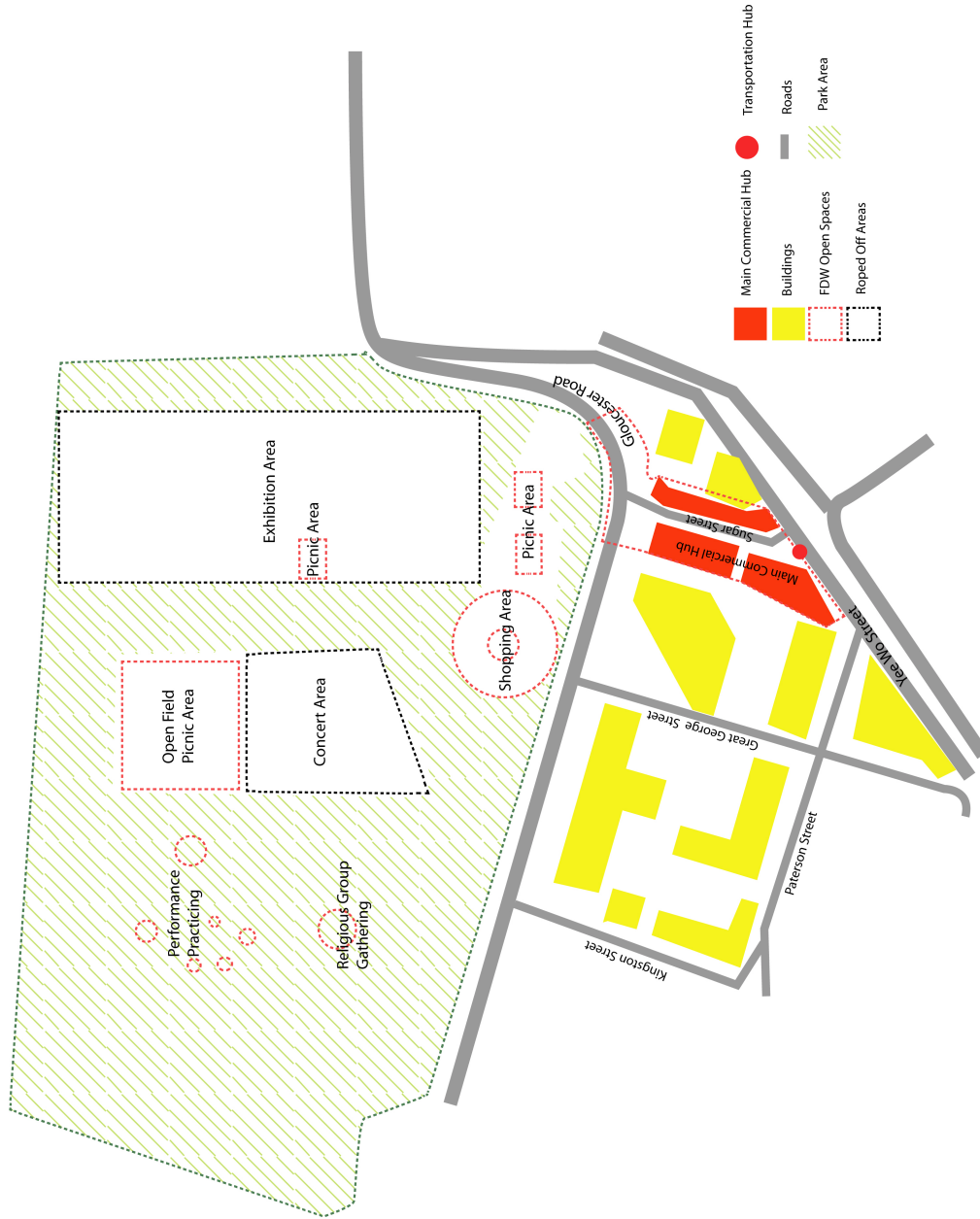


Figure 3.1: FDW occupancy map in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

3.2 Observation Study of the Public Space



Figure 3.2: Commercial hub of Indonesia Town, Sugar Street, 11 January 2009

Like Filipinos in Central, the weekly Indonesian town in and around Causeway Bay has a commercial hub that is located along Sugar Street, connecting Yee Wo Street to Victoria Park. Here, the atmosphere resembles that seen in Mongkok on weekends where the old configuration of shops and narrow pedestrian sidewalks clearly did not anticipate the large number of patrons. As a result, the street is constantly crowded with FDWs trying to enter stores, causing most pedestrians to walk on the vehicular road surfaces instead. Since the street level stores here cater specifically for FDWs, vehicles seldom enter the area. Once FDWs have completed their weekly errands, they proceed to Victoria Park to enjoy the rest of their day off.

Within Victoria Park, the programs such as picnicking, shopping, performance practicing and praying are all clearly separated and allocated according to the facilities available. Al-

though some areas such as the “shopping area” and “ photography area” are pre-determined by institutions and regulators, other areas appear to be programmed, by FDWs themselves. Open areas with hard surfaced floors, shaded with trees, are popular as picnic sites. There are three main picnicking areas in the park located at the entrance to the park, at the new garden area as well as the main open field within the park.



Figure 3.3: Picnicking area near Sugar Street entrance, Victoria Park, Causeway Bay, 11 January 2009

The picnicking spot at the entrance to the park is separated into two areas where large groups of FDWs sit compactly underneath newly planted trees. Picnickers are strictly confined within a rectangular space by mobile barriers; this allows circulation to remain uninhibited despite the large crowds of people. This particular picnicking spot is located close to a large toilet facility and adjacent to the “shopping area”. There are also two large and very visible trash bins in anticipation of the large litter that will accumulate at the end of

the day. Also, the circulation paths surrounding the area are lined with “fancy” photographers, who are mostly locals offering to take pictures for Indonesian domestic workers to send home to friends and families. Unlike Central, none of the domestic workers were playing cards or games. Instead, most picnickers either talk on their cellphones, look at or take photographs, have lunch or chat. However, there are numerous signs displayed in Chinese, English, Tagalog and Bahasa Indonesia that warn ‘No Smoking’ in the area. The picnicking spot is adorned with colorful umbrellas used by the FDWs to protect themselves from the burning sun, since the newly planted trees have yet to provide sufficient shade for them.

The second picnicking area is a garden area that appears similar to the entrance area. Here, there are no barriers that contain the picnickers, but the overall circulation of the area is internalized and self-maintained, although it is unstructured. Because of the secluded location of this area, there are many individuals who hawk food and other goods. The third picnicking area is a large, open grass field located deeper in the park. There is no shade in the area so umbrellas mushroomed with some picnickers using their hoods and coats to shelter from the sun. The picnicking is far less dense than that observed in other areas. Almost all the picnickers sit on disposable plastic sheets instead of picnic cloths or mats. In the periphery of the area, there are also barriers such as those seen in the entrance that function to designate and segregate circulatory areas from picnicking areas. Besides Indonesian FDWs, there are occasionally local families who stroll the area with their babies and infants, but they are overwhelmingly outnumbered by the large number of Indonesian females.

Smaller, more intimate areas in the park are used by choirs, dance groups and other FDWs practicing performances in groups. These secluded pockets are usually far from main circulation areas and shielded from the rowdiness of picnickers. One section hosted a group of Indonesian girls practicing a traditional Indonesian dance while being instructed by an Indonesian male. They arrived to the park in a van, equipped with a sound system to facilitate the practicing. The beautiful and colorful dance attracted locals to watch the performance.



Figure 3.4: Dance practice, Victoria Park, Causeway Bay, 11 January 2009

Nearby, a group of Christian Indonesian FDWs rehearsed gospel in a choir. More secluded areas hosted younger groups of FDWs practicing hip-hop modern dances to contemporary Indonesian music. While the facilities surrounding these areas were basic, the groups brought along sufficient equipment to carry out their activities.



Figure 3.5: Koran Class conducted by FDWs underneath a hut, Victoria Park, 11 January 2009

Besides performance groups, religious activities also require a quiet spot, for which they choose an area with a few huts that shelter them from the main crowd in the park. Located around greenery, these huts provide comfortable shade but are much too small to provide any group activities other than quiet praying, sitting and reading the Koran. Some groups have even brought along speakers and microphone to facilitate religious discussions amongst large groups. Here, the prayer sessions are conducted and led by women instead of the traditional male religious leaders.

Indonesian FDWs in Victoria Park also boast a “shopping area” that is not found in Central. Adjacent to the entrance area is a flea market organized by the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Hong Kong. Although the flea market is organized by locals, the goods sold caters almost specifically for Indonesian female customers. Rows of stalls line both sides of the pedestrian way surrounding a circular man-made pond. Other interesting programs in the space includes grooming services outside public toilets and demonstrations by some FDWs on Indonesian or Muslim related political issues.

At first glance, the gathering in Victoria Park appears similar to that observed in Central. Both spaces are overwhelmingly crowded with chattering females who are busy eating, drinking or taking pictures, often in a space limited by their plastic sheets. But on closer observations, their spatial consumption pattern differs. The Indonesian FDWs’ gathering space is far more confined, with a strict boundary defined by the park compound and further divided by mobile barriers within the park. Within this boundary, the areas are defined by programs and activities rather than regional or dialect affiliations. Also, the park appears far less maintained, with litter piling all over sidewalks and circulation spaces, despite the many cleaning staff in the area. Most importantly, there are far more police, park administrators and foreign men in Victoria Park who are mostly stationed or found lingering at the entrance to the park. These differences can be attributed to the actors within the space as well as the different cultural demographics of the FDWs gathered in Victoria Park. The sections below will discuss the spatial consequences of these factors in Victoria Park and Causeway Bay.

3.3 Roles of Different Actors in Place making

3.3.1 Institutions

While human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and others are able to provide legal and social support to protect FDWs' right to rest days, other organizations provide more direct support in the physical space. As mentioned above, YMCA is responsible for setting up the flea market that sells mostly Indonesian products in Victoria Park every weekend. Accordingly, the rental fee for a stall is HKD200 (USD25) a day and anyone with a Hong Kong ID can rent a stall. Most international students with a visa and domestic workers who have been in Hong Kong for more than seven years are eligible for an ID. The leaflet by the YMCA also details its intention of promoting the park for use of Hong Kong Youth. Was it YMCA's intention for the flea market to cater for Indonesian FDWs? Or did the large number of FDWs deter its plans to promote the park for Hong Kong Youth? While the stationed YMCA representatives declined to answer these questions, their decision to continue to operate the flea market on weekends despite the small number of local patrons shows that the institution has decided to accommodate their agenda to the changing demographic of the park. As a result, YMCA has become an institution that provides support to FDWs in their weekly consumption of space within the public park.

While the presence of an institution can alter the use of public space, so can the lack of an institution. Britain's hundred year rule in Hong Kong has allowed the establishment of a large number of churches in the city which provides strong religious support to the Filipino FDW community. On the contrary, religious support for the Muslim community is weak, with only four public mosques in the city located respectively in Kowloon, Wan Chai, Chai Wan and Mid Levels (Clem, 2006b). Therefore, even though prayers by Muslim females are usually performed indoors, the lack of such facility has forced most to pray in open areas and to seek their own space to transform it for religious activities. In Victoria Park, prayers

are seen performed individually or in groups at picnicking spots. The women would usually perform the ritual of ablution in a nearby toilet before returning to pray facing the Mecca. Besides prayers, it is a norm for young Muslims to undergo Koran studies which is a practice similar to Bible studies practiced by Christians. Since facilities for these sessions are also unavailable, groups self-organize and gather to carry out Koran studies through their own initiative. In Victoria Park, this is carried out around the boat racing pond.



Figure 3.6: Praying in the open, Victoria Park, 11 January 2009

Recently, there has been an initiative to establish a women's only mosque in the proximity of Causeway Bay to accommodate the growing female Muslim devout on Sundays (Clem, 2006a). The facility is to provide an indoor praying space to protect the woman from the rain, cold and hot weather during prayer and religious studies. Groups such as the Wanodya Indonesian Club and Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama plan to raise HK500,000 to support the establishment and hire a female religious leader from Indonesia. Unfortunately, this initiative

faced objections from Muslim leaders and Islamic establishments in the city (Clem, 2006b). If successful, the mosque will result in less open-air praying as those currently seen in Victoria Park. Clearly, religious institutions, either in their absence or establishment, strongly influence the spatial formation of these public spaces.

3.3.2 General Public

Since Victoria Park is one of the most prominent public parks in Hong Kong, one would expect conflict between residents and FDWs on Sundays with the large number of FDWs using the space. Indeed, like Central, the complaints of their occupancy and associated maintenance issues have begun since the 1990s, but the number of complaints is negligible compared to those targeted at Filipinos in Central (Yang, 1998). Complaints are generally focused on congestion and littering within the park. To address these issues, some officials have recently also proposed to relocate the Indonesian FDWs from the park by establishing an alternative recreational facility in North Point (Law, 2005). Perhaps due to the previous resistances such as the Battle of Chater Road in Central, this plan did not materialize.

Victoria Park features walking or jogging paths used mainly by local Hong Kong residents on Sundays. Regulators are stationed along the path to ensure that the area is not inhibited by picnicking FDWs. Besides the paths, few local families also frequent other areas in the park, often for strolling or exercising with families. In particular, the boat racing pond is popular amongst locals in the area. Even though locals are outnumbered significantly by Indonesian FDWs, they appear to be enjoying the park. Contrary to the news reports, information gathered from the observation studies and interview conducted with locals and park administrators show that the general public does not resist Indonesian FDWs' occupancy of Victoria Park. However, most are concerned over the inadequate facility and space within the park to simultaneously accommodate the growing population of Indonesian FDWs and

locals on Sundays. Since the general public in Hong Kong has mostly entered the accommodative state after the Central experience, this behavior and perspective are not entirely surprising.

3.3.3 Business Owners



Figure 3.7: FDW taking a picture at a fancy photography stall, Victoria Park, 11 January 2009

Business owners in Causeway Bay are well aware of the purchasing power of FDWs. Entrepreneurs have directly capitalized on their needs by setting up stalls selling Indonesian goods in the flea market or providing ‘fancy’ photography services. One photographer reported making HK200 to HK1000 from Indonesian clients every Sunday (Lee, 1998). Other larger stores in the area have taken this demographic into account in their business strategies. One shopping complex has recently renovated and included a large number of fast food

chains like KFC and McDonalds with other stores that offer pork-free food for the larger number of Muslim FDWs who frequent the area. Perhaps regarding them as clients make most business establishments eager to accommodate Indonesian FDWs in their facilities.

Despite the large park space, there is an insufficient number of female toilet facilities to cater for the large number of females who frequent the park every Sunday, thereby making the toilet facilities in neighboring shopping complexes popular amongst FDWs. In one shopping complex along Great George Street, the janitor noted that the number of janitors needed to service the facility triples on Sundays. One janitor is needed to shepherd patrons while the other two constantly clean the facility to accommodate the large number of Indonesian females. Unlike WWP, the complex does not restrict or charge the domestic workers but merely increases manpower to cater for the large volume of visitors. While most business areas welcome the crowd, other areas that do not benefit from their business are less friendly. Hong Kong Mansion, a residential and commercial building in the area began charging ‘guests’ to the building HK10 per entry at the end of 2005. The move was meant to reduce the number of Indonesian FDWs who go visit consultancies and training centers in the building on Sundays (May, 2005). Nevertheless, this restriction appears to be an isolated incident that does not reflect the general attitude of business owners towards Indonesian FDWs. As compared to the history of Central, FDWs in Causeway Bay received significantly less friction from business owners. There are several possible reasons that have enabled this phenomenon. First, it is possible that business owners are aware of the lessons learned in Central and realize the futility of resistance has thus taken on an accommodative strategy. Secondly, the accommodative state might be a result of differences in store characteristics, with luxury brands making up most of the stores in Central, while products in Causeway Bay are within the purchasing power of Indonesian FDWs. Finally, the large open space and facilities found in the park could result in less spatial pressure on surrounding business areas, making it easier for business owners to accommodate the number

of FDWs in the area. While the phenomenon has most probably resulted from a combination of these factors, it is clear that business owners are learning to cope and capitalize on this new demographic group in Hong Kong.

3.3.4 Regulators and Authorities



Figure 3.8: Policemen at entrance of Victoria Park, 11 January 2009

Even though both Filipino and Indonesian FDWs enjoy the relatively accommodative policies practiced by the Hong Kong government, the public spaces they occupy are managed differently by regulators in the city. As compared to Central, a larger number of police and regulators are deployed in Victoria Park. These regulatory officials play a strong role in organizing the FDWs' space consumption pattern in the park. Policemen are seen to patrolling areas surrounding the entrances to the park, namely around St. George and Sugar Street entrances. Also, in the immediate area beyond the entrances, park administrators are stationed to help maintain "order" in the park and to make sure that park rules are adhered

to. Through an interview with a park administrator, we found that park officials are still in the process of finding suitable strategies to manage the large number of Indonesian FDWs on Sundays. He explained that, while there are only seven administrators throughout the week, the staff need to be tripled on Sundays in order to maintain the safety of the park. This number has again increased recently due to fear of “terrorism” threats in the city. These park administrators are in charge of erecting the mobile barriers that confine Indonesian FDWs in designated picnicking areas to ensure that the circulation of the park remains ‘unclogged’ by people. Many are also stationed along the jogging path frequented by locals to ensure that the jogging facility is not inhibited by gathering FDWs.

Besides security issues, Indonesian FDWs’ gathering complicates the maintenance of the park. The park administrator noted that due to the gathering of Indonesian FDWs every Sunday, several garbage trucks and dozens of staff are recruited to restore the cleanliness of the park for patrons who visits on Mondays. The amount of garbage and litter in Victoria Park far exceeds that found in Central because both groups practice different consumption habits. While Filipino FDWs mostly bring their own equipment and home cooked food in personal containers, Indonesian FDWs purchase disposable plastic sheets to sit on and take away from nearby restaurants. This behavior results in larger amounts of garbage at the end of the day, which is more than the park is designed to support. As previously discussed in the case of Central, public space maintenance and conservation are associated with the groups’ ‘sense of ownership’ and responsibility in the space. We will see that Indonesian FDWs’ tendency to produce more litter is correlated to their average length of stay in Hong Kong and their ‘sense of ownership’ of the place.

The large number of police present in Victoria Park seen could be either a coincidental observation or regular routine on Sundays. On the day of observation, there was a small scale demonstration in the park which could have called for a number of police in the area. However, according to the park administrator and news articles, their presence seem to be

a regular routine on Sundays. FDWs have previously complained that plain clothed and uniformed police often patrol Victoria Park to crack down on illegal peddlers and hawkers, causing FDWs to feel uncomfortable and as if their privacy on their day off is being disrupted (Benitez, 2004b). On the observation day, the policemen were not seen patrolling in the park but stationed at the entrances to the park; groups of foreign males also gathered at the entrances but did not enter. According to the park administrator, these foreign men are part of the ‘triad’ (gangsters), whom both the regulators and the police do not dare interfere with unless it is absolutely necessary. Evidently, there is a level of tension in Victoria Park previously absent in Central.

Were the foreign males targeting the young females gathered in the park? Were the police stationed at entrances to protecting the young FDWs? As previously explained, Indonesian FDWs in Hong Kong are prone to sexual, physical and monetary exploitation by male predators due to their inability to self-protect against the ‘dangers’ of the city (Sim, 2007). The gathering men in the female dominant park as well as the various reports of exploitation of maids in the city align with this theory (Wong, 2006) (Bradford, 2003). The police were present could act as protectors of this group of young females as a preventive measure against ill-intentioned males in the area. Nevertheless, the observation shows that there is a ‘layer’ of gathering males, of different interest, surrounding Victoria Park and thus reinforcing the boundary of the park that confines and protects the space occupied by Indonesian FDWs.

In the interview, it was clear that the park administrator was not pleased with the complications caused by the large number of Indonesian FDWs, but he was also sympathetic to the fact that they need a recreational facility and a “place to go”. He also expressed that if they are not allowed in parks, they would clog up the circulation in the streets around Hong Kong, which would be “more troublesome”. This pragmatic approach resonates with other policies practiced by the Hong Kong government in regards to this issue. Instead

of the manpower and costs required to legislate and prosecute offenders in public spaces, they have chosen to accommodate the new wave of patrons by increasing the number of maintenance staff. This approach which was previously adopted in Central introduces less conflict between groups and might even turn out to be a cheaper strategy than hiring a larger number of prosecutors. However, despite having previously accommodated FDWs from the Philippines, differences in age and cultural background make strategies in Central not readily transferable to Victoria Park. For example, Hong Kong regulators could not tell the difference between Filipino and Indonesian FDWs, resulting in the initial placement of Tagalog “No Smoking” or “No Hawking” signs in the public spaces frequented by Indonesians (Law, 2001). This has been since corrected, with most signs now written in Chinese, English, Tagalog and Bahasa Indonesia to avoid any confusion. Besides these initial glitches, the young and relatively less educated Indonesian FDWs also complicate efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and to educate them of anti-hawking and park maintenance laws (Law and Wu, 2003) Despite these difficulties, we are beginning to see progress in the process. The clove cigarette filled atmosphere previously described by Lisa Law during her visit to Victoria Park in 1998 has since disappeared due to the anti-smoking laws in the park (Law, 2001). Surely, like Central, Hong Kong regulators will eventually learn to accommodate this group efficiently within these public spaces.

3.4 FDW Ownership

While both Filipino and Indonesian FDWs practice the ritual of picnicking in public space, Indonesian FDW’s picnicking practice appears less permanent as compared to its Filipino counterparts. The phenomenon of bringing home cooked food in containers, hot tea in thermos, foldable chairs and board games, occupying space by filling it with personal belongings is observed with less vigor in Victoria Park. As a result, the space occupied by Indonesians

appears far less permanent or 'homely' as compared to Filipino picnic spots indicating that both groups experience a different level of ownership within public spaces. In addition to their behavior within the immediate space they occupy, Indonesian FDWs in Victoria Park also do not practice a permanent consensus on real estate allocation that is seen in Central. Most picnickers do not return to the same spot week after week, except for those involved in specific activities such as dancing or religious studies. This shows that the organization amongst FDWs is limited to small groups and not organized, making them more mobile than the Filipino FDWs whose territory is defined at a larger scale according to dialect and place of origin. Indonesian FDWs' lack of attachment to or 'sense of ownership' of specific areas make them less likely to feel responsibility for a spot, resulting in more complications with littering and other maintenance issues in these public spaces.

Why do both groups appear to experience a different sense of ownership in public space? There are several possible reasons that could have resulted in this phenomenon. First, it is possible that the 'sense of ownership' is an element that requires time to establish. Since Filipino FDWs have resided in Hong Kong for a far longer period as compared to Indonesian FDWs, it is possible that this behavior is merely a stage in the slow process of establishing identity in the public realm. Secondly, it is possible that the behavior is correlated to the age and education level of the FDW groups, where Filipino FDWs are generally a group of well-educated and matured women, Indonesian FDWs are young women who are mostly single, uneducated and from a rural background. To them, Hong Kong is the only opportunity to enjoy a degree of freedom from the strict watch of family and community that was never experienced before; it is an opportunity for them to explore the self. Therefore, it is possible that young and single Indonesian women see no need for them to establish a 'home' away from home since most of these young women seek employment only for two to three years and do not have the same financial obligations as Filipino FDWs who often stay longer in the city. Finally, it is possible that since Indonesian FDWs did not fight for the public space

that they currently occupy, but have instead inherited the right from the previous struggles of Filipino FDWs, they take these rights for granted and have a lesser ‘sense of ownership’ of the space. While all these are possible reasons for their behavior, the truth is probably a complex combination of these factors.

Due to the overwhelming differences in the demographic of both groups, it is appropriate to further examine the second factor described above. As previously discussed in ‘Space of and for Transformation’, the young and exploratory FDWs are likely to carry out self-exploring activities in these public spaces. For example, they are more likely to use the space to meet with their writing groups of the popular Tabloid, *Apa Khabar*, to practice with their dances or even display their sexuality through lesbian beauty campaigns in the park (Lau, 2008). The diversity of activities and the lack of private spaces to perform them result in the clear segmentation of spaces based in activities. Meanwhile, the picnicking spots remain disorganized and messy. The tendency for Indonesian FDWs to focus on the self-building might cause them to neglect the construction of a communal or larger self-governing mechanism amongst themselves. This lack of overlying logic and self-management amongst the group in turn requires more assistance from officials to clean, manage and organize these spaces.

Besides the lack of self-maintenance, the younger Indonesian FDWs are also known to be more willing consumers than their Filipino counterparts. Their tendency to ‘buy and dispose’ of the equipment and food they use during picnic sessions results in a larger footprint in the park than that seen in Central. Moreover, they are also less likely to remain in the park all day, since they prefer to visit stores and shopping complexes in the area or frequent night clubs and karaoke bars despite their lower average income than Filipino FDWs. Lastly, their purchasing power are capable of attracting various businesses, further transforming the programs and configuration of the spaces they occupy. Clearly, the demographic characteristics of FDWs highly influence the spatial configuration of the spaces they

transform. With the ever increasing number of Indonesian FDWs in Hong Kong, it is crucial that these differences are understood in order to accommodate an even larger population of users within these parks in the future.

3.5 Conclusion and Spatial Configuration

From the discussion above, we see that Indonesian FDWs' gathering in Victoria Park is strongly supported by authorities, NGOs, business owners and the general public. This support forms a protective boundary that allows Indonesian FDWs to carry out private activities in public spaces every Sunday. While the phenomenon appears similar to Central, there are several key differences observed in the space. First, religious establishments are not found in and around the Indonesian gathering space, forcing them to transform public spaces for religious activities. Secondly, regulators and authorities play a stronger role in organizing, cleaning and maintaining the order of the spaces in Victoria Park as compared to Central. Also, larger numbers of policemen, park administrators and foreign males at the entrances further isolate the space occupied by Indonesian FDWs. Lastly, the location of FDWs is not organized in the meta-scale. Instead, they cluster according to special interest groups. This leaves the rest of the picnicking spaces unorganized, showing a looser social network than that seen in Central. I believe that most of these variations in spatial configuration stemmed from the different demographic characteristics of both FDW groups in Hong Kong. Figure 3.9 illustrates the spatial configuration of this space diagrammatically.

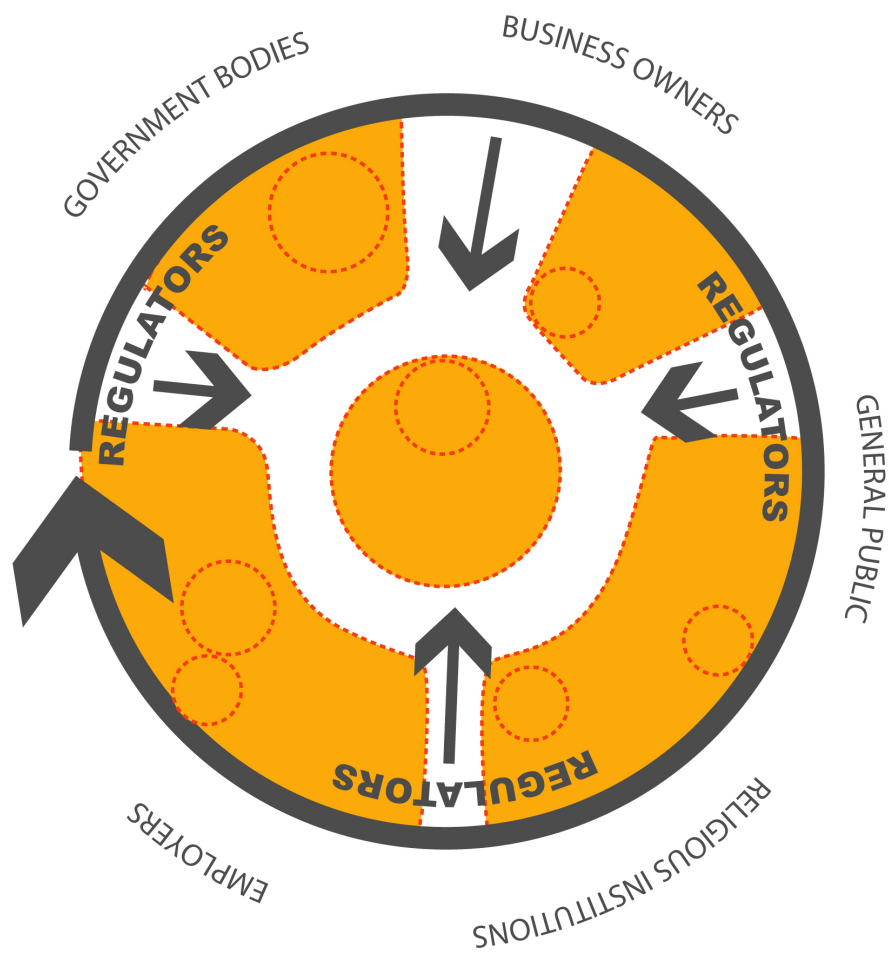


Figure 3.9: Forces in Victoria Park

Chapter 4

Singapore, Orchard Road

Singapore, like Hong Kong, experienced a significant change in the domestic and productive realm when a large number of the educated female population entered the formal workforce in the 1980s. This created a high demand for domestic workers that could not be met locally by the traditional Chinese *amahs*, who were not live-in domestic helpers in Singapore at the time. To meet this demand, the government was pressured to grant work permits to foreign Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) from the neighboring Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and others despite the current the closed-door policy (Yeoh and Huang, 1998). Since the Singaporean government began granting work permits to FDWs in 1978, the numbers of FDWs grew from the modest 20,000 in 1987 to the 160,000 workers in Singapore today (2008)(Yeoh and Huang, 1998). While the push and pull factor that instigated the mass migration of FDWs into Singapore was similar to the case of Hong Kong, FDWs experience different influences from government bodies, institutions, receiving communities and employers, that resulted in highly differen patterns in public space consumption by FDWs in Singapore as opposed to Hong Kong.

4.1 Policy and Labor Rights

The use of public space by foreign female domestic workers is highly depends upon their ability to obtain rest days from their employers. Without rest days, they cannot use public spaces. A right to day offs is not mandatory in all receiving cities. The ability for FDWs to obtain rest days during their employment in the receiving country depends upon the power relationship between sending and receiving countries as well as the relationship between employers and FDWs in the domestic realm.

Government bodies that have a long history and experience in mass labor exportation such as the Philippines, attempt to protect the interests of FDWs through standardized contractual agreements, specifically insisting on rest days for their FDWs. However, other government bodies such as the Indonesian Labor Department are less experienced in the negotiating contracts with receiving countries to protect the rights of their FDWs (Vatsikopoulos, 2006). Because Indonesian FDWs are less educated and do not have English speaking skills, as compared to Filipino FDWs, the Indonesian government is less inclined to insist on employment terms and conditions to protect their domestic laborers. As a result, Filipino FDWs have a higher probability of obtaining rest days as compared to their Indonesian counterparts and thus are more likely to be patrons of Singapore's public spaces on Sundays.

Despite the sending countries' effort in establishing better employment terms and conditions to protect the FDWs' right to day offs, the enforcement of these terms of employment is highly dependent on the host country. While the Hong Kong Labor Department is diligent in enforcing an Employment Ordinance that ensures that all FDWs in the city are entitled to a weekly rest day irrespective of nationality, Singapore adopts a more ambiguous rest day regulation for FDWs. Not only does Singapore's Ministry of Manpower (MOM) exclude FDWs from the Employment Act that stipulates a certain number of rest days and

maximum working hours, but it also allows employers to replace the FDWs' contractual rest days agreed upon in the Employment Contract with cash compensation . Recently, MOM rejected mandatory rest day petitions for FDWs and stated that the introduction of such a policy would introduce too much “rigidity” and “inconvenience” to employers given the “nature of domestic work” (BBC, 2006). In addition, the Ministry also released statements that purportedly reported on a survey of “satisfaction” of FDWs in Singapore who are given the opportunity to work in “the affluent city-state” to justify the lack of mandatory rest days(Perry, 2008). The combination of these policies and government views on the issue not only forms the impression that rest days are an option, but further strengthens the mentality that FDWs are Asian servants rather than employees whose freedom is at the disposal of employer. This approach continues to build sentiments of “the other” amongst the Singapore community members that are readily observable in the use of public space by FDWs in Singapore.

While they are given the option to grant FDWs periodic rest days, employers are in fact discouraged by government policies to do so. Employers of FDWs in Singapore are required to place a security bond of SGD 5000 to ensure that employers repatriate FDWs to their place of origin after the term of employment (Ng, 2005). In other words, if the employee disappears on her rest day, the employer will lose his or her security bond and all the employment fees previously paid to the government and insurance agencies. This financial risk leaves employers feeling insecure, resulting in the tendency for employers to limit the freedom of FDWs during their employment and to not grant FDWs periodic rest days to protect their “investment” (Suhaimi, 2007)¹. Moreover, because FDWs in Singapore are unable to take on these financial obligations and do not usually have sufficient bargaining power in the workplace, they often fail to secure rest days from their employers and are forced to accept

¹Recently, insurance schemes are offered in the market to insure against runaway FDWs. For a one time of SGD 140, the employer only pays SGD 250 if the FDW disappears (Suhaimi, 2007)

cash reimbursement instead.

The imbalanced power relationship between government bodies, employers and employees has resulted in the scenario that only 50% of FDWs in Singapore receive rest days in a given month and only 10% are given off days on a weekly basis (Bowring, 2005). Amongst those who are granted this right, 80% are Filipino FDWs (Lin, 2008a). In response to this situation, various Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Singapore have begun to petition for the rights of FDWs to rest days. Recently, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics (HOME) and Transient Workers Count Two (TWC2) have formed a joint initiative to launch a “Day Off” campaign in Singapore that aims to educate and encourage employers to grant day offs to their FDWs (Lin, 2008b). This campaign has sparked heated debates between the media, NGOs, government bodies, employers and FDWs. The conflict and tension on the issue are felt citywide from casual conversations in coffeeshops to internet community portal as well as in the atmosphere of public spaces frequented by FDWs in Singapore.

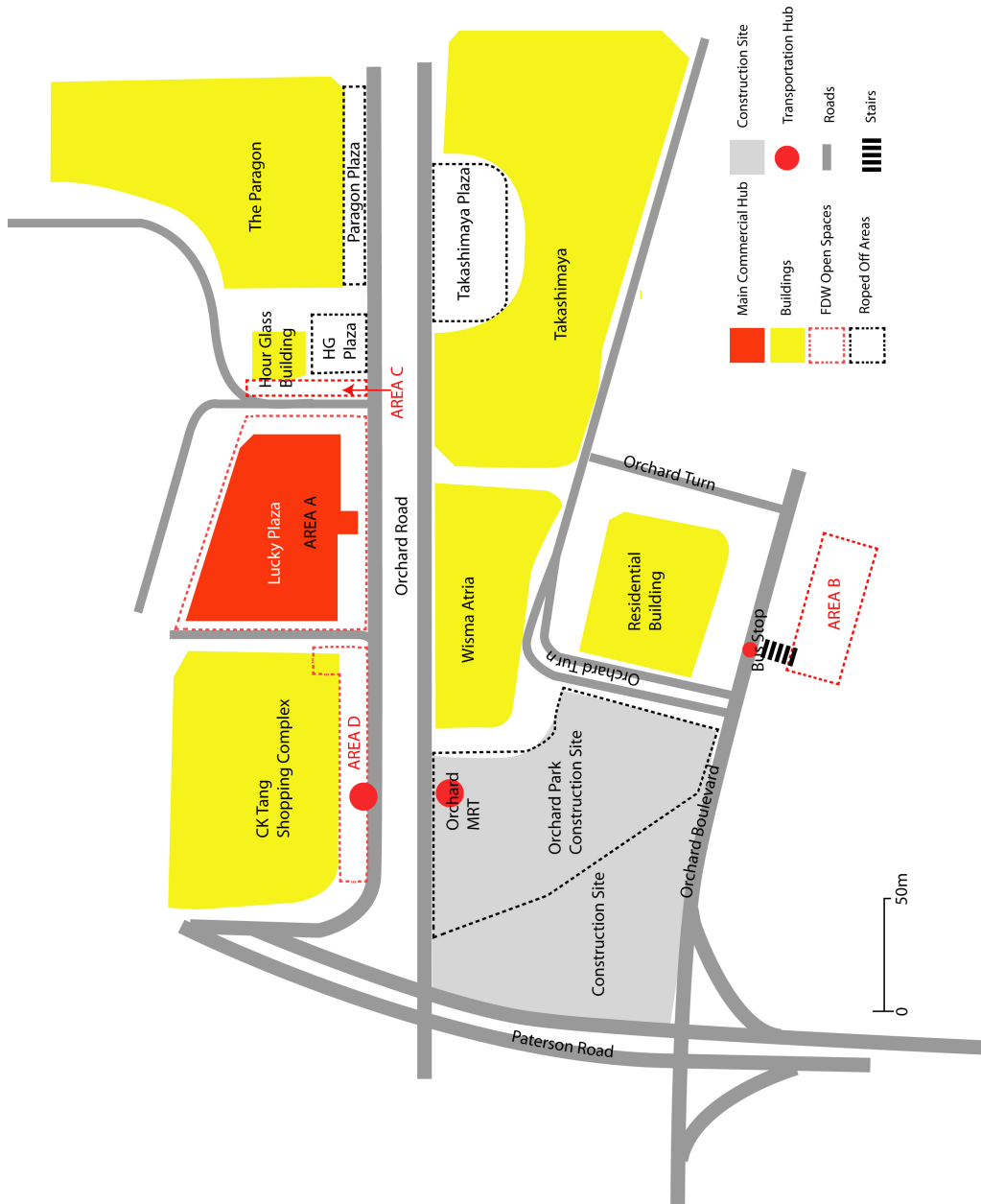


Figure 4.1: Map of Filipino FDWs in Orchard Road, Singapore

4.2 Observation of Orchard Road, Singapore



Figure 4.2: Filipino FDWs Gathering in Lucky Plaza on Sunday, 27 December 2008

From the observation studies, there are four main areas of gathering in and around Orchard Road that are frequented by Filipino FDWs, referred to as Areas A, B, C and D as indicated in Figure 4.1. Area A is Lucky Plaza Complex, the main commercial hub of Singapore's Filipino Town; Area B is a newly found picnic and lunch spot while Area C is a leftover area reminiscent of a larger scale gathering in previous years. Lucky Plaza is a multi-story shopping complex where the shop allocation is stratified. Luxurious and higher end stores are located on the lower floors while the higher floors cater for the lower income FDWs, with stores ranging from money remittance, banks, mobile service, food to clothes and inexpensive jewelry. While most FDWs gather on the higher floors, many also convene on lower floors where it is more convenient to meet friends and family. Small groups of four or five individuals are constantly gathered in front of popular shops or major circulation points,

such as areas adjacent to escalators. Due to the design of the complex, there are also nooks and corners beyond the major square that are not part of the major circulation. While there are no signs of FDWs picnicking or sitting on the floors of the complex, there are notices to prohibit picnicking, sitting or waiting all around the complex. Besides these signs, there are also evidence of controlling measures, such as barriers erected to prevent gathering groups from blocking circulation and toilets closed off to serve only paying customers. Despite the signs of tension, the large number female Filipinos shows that this place remains a Mecca for FDWs every Sunday.



Figure 4.3: Open space behind Wisma Atria, 27 December 2008

Area B is a secluded and well shaded public owned open space that is conveniently located behind Wisma Atria, which is within a short distance of five minutes from Lucky Plaza. Surrounded by higher end residential areas along a quiet road parallel to Orchard Road, the area is accessible by a flight of steep stairs adjacent to a bus stop. The bus stop

is a main public transportation access point used by FDWs on Sundays. Mostly frequented by Filipino FDWs, the open space is covered in cowgrass and adorned with full grown bayan trees. Except for a small walking path, one small trash bin and a few street lights along the path, there are no other amenities. Groups of FDWs rest either on fabric that they have brought from home or resort to sitting on wet grass, large cut up trash bags or surfacing roots of the giant trees. Most use the space to lunch with friends or chat but others can be found studying the bible or playing games amongst themselves. Some FDWs solicit Filipino food or goods to other FDWs gathered in the area. According to interviewees, FDWs often prepare food from home and set camp in the area as a resting spot between shopping and other activities during their day out in Orchard Road. While some friends would leave to meet other friends, others would come and rotate in this spot.



Figure 4.4: Area between Lucky Plaza and Hour Glass Complex, 27 December 2008

The third area, Area C, is a narrow strip located along a pedestrian path from Queen Elizabeth Road to Orchard Road immediately adjacent to Lucky Plaza. The area is located

at the periphery of the Hour Glass Plaza, which is roped off on Sundays to ward off FDWs. The entrance to the area is blocked by an ice cream peddler on one end and by flowerbeds and vegetations on another. There are no signs of anyone using the path for circulation purposes since most individuals around the area appear to be stagnant. Clearly, this indicates that the area is “occupied” or momentarily “privatized” for the group. FDWs in the area perform pedicures and manicures for each other while others are standing and sitting in circles chatting, drinking and eating. This is the only area along Orchard Road where the use of public space mimics that seen in Hong Kong. Unlike the ritual observed in Central Hong Kong, the FDW’s occupancy of this area is a slow process that begins with a few FDWs sitting on flowerbeds along the sidewalk and ends with gatherings of larger groups of five or six FDWs in the afternoon.

Even though all three areas appear to have different characteristics, they are all formed as a result of the relationship between the different actors and FWs. In the paragraphs below, we will discuss the the relationship between different actors with FDWs, highlighting the cause of their conflict as well as the behavioral pattern and usage of public space resulting from the relationship. Finally, we will also discuss the psychological effect of these conflicts on the FDW’s sense of ownership in these public spaces.

4.3 Role of different actors in Place Making

4.3.1 Business Owners

Like the Central and Victoria Park in Hong Kong, FDWs in Singapore too have a tendency to gravitate towards an identifiable spot that they frequent every Sunday. Filipino FDWs tend to gravitate towards Lucky Plaza, a shopping complex that hosts a variety of stores and services that target Filipino patrons. Because Lucky Plaza is located in a high profile and high pedestrian traffic area, the large concentration of FDWs in the area has generated



Figure 4.5: 'No Picnicking or No Waiting' sign in Lucky Plaza outside a non Filipino Business, 27 December 2008

high level of tension between business owners and FDWs.

The large concentration of FDWs forces shop owners and management staff to undertake certain measures in order to ensure better circulation in and around the complex. Areas around higher profile stores or ‘non-Filipino’ businesses are placed with signs that state “No-Picnicking” or “No-Sitting” to prevent FDWs from blocking circulation and preventing patrons from entering the shops. Besides signs and labels, complex managers also hired a large number of security personnel to install physical barriers to prevent gathering in certain areas. According to Robin, a security guard on duty, the Filipino FDWs have been using Lucky Plaza as a meeting point with friends and family for a long period of time. Because of the large number of FDWs inhibit business operations of shops in the complex, management staff has taken specific measures to ensure that the people flow through the plaza and do not clog up the circulation. The tenants of the complex, especially those of the luxury product stores, do not consider Filipino FDWs as potential customers. Thus, they are unhappy about the overcrowding and the “picnicking” that used to occur within the premises, since the gatherings affect the traffic of higher income groups (Nathan, 1992).

The pressure from the complex management within Lucky Plaza has forced FDWs to move outside of the complex. Previously, outdoor gathering spaces frequented by Filipino FDWs include beautiful plazas and open areas in front of higher end shopping complexes such as Takashimaya, Paragon and Wisma Atria. Here, there is ample space for FDWs to lay out mats and picnic gears for gathering. These open spaces and plazas are a unique feature of Orchard Road that greatly contribute to the pleasant pedestrian experience of the commercial area. However, as increasing numbers of FDWs gathered in these open spaces, they began to clog up entrances and storefronts, preventing potential patrons from accessing shops and complexes. As a result, owners of these public-private plazas have intentionally closed and roped off the plazas with strings and barriers on Sundays to specifically prevent FDWs from congregating in the area. This also applies to plazas of closed offices, where



Figure 4.6: Barrier erected in Lucky Plaza to control circulation, 27 December 2008

gatherings on Sundays do not affect the operation of the buildings. Today, FDWs report that they are not welcomed in outdoor areas of business premises; security guards will ask them to leave even though they are not picnicking but merely sitting or waiting to meet with friends and family. Clearly, the attitude towards FDWs' use of semi-public space in Singapore highly contrasts the hospitable approach seen in HSBC Plaza of Central, Hong Kong.

4.3.2 Authorities and Regulators

Government authorities have a strong influence on the pattern of FDWs' space consumption observed in Singapore. Similar to the policies on FDWs' rest days, government bodies are not concerned about the need to provide FDWs with sufficient space to gather on their rest days. Previously, FDWs gathered in Orchard Park, a green space located immediately outside of Orchard Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station. According to an interviewee, the

area was popular amongst Filipinos due to its proximity to Lucky Plaza and the availability of hard surfaces to sit on and greenery to enjoy. Unfortunately, this lovely park was recently sold to private developers for the construction of yet another shopping mall on Orchard Road; this resulted in an important loss to the Filipino FDW community (Sua, 2007).



Figure 4.7: Internal area of Orchard MRT in 2005 (picture by www.harosingapore.blogspot.com)



Figure 4.8: Internal area of Orchard MRT, 27 December 2008 (picture by author)

Even though the Singaporean government does not place regulators such as policemen or park administrators on-site as representatives in the negotiation of public spaces, its poli-

cies and planning decisions are capable of exercising control over the FDWs' Sunday public space. When the city sells parks to private developers, it does not only receive monetary gains, but relinquishes all responsibilities of maintaining and providing public facilities for large numbers of FDWs. By privatizing the land, the city no longer needs to clean up the large amount of litter produced by FDWs and hire a larger number of security officers to patrol the area. Singapore has been increasingly wary of terrorism threats in the city-state; even Robin, the security guard from Lucky Plaza, is concerned over their ability to prepare for terrorism given the large number of FDWs in the complex. While it is unclear if FDWs are seen as possible sources of terrorism, the policies and actions are related to sentiments of "the other" that appear to be strong in Singapore.

4.3.3 General Public

The FDWs' presence at the prominent Orchard Road commercial area not only faces resistance from business owners and authorities but also from the general public. To maintain Singapore's image as the pristine and orderly city-state, public spaces in Singapore are strictly regulated to prevent littering, illegal soliciting and other undesired activities. While the prosecuting strategy was initially effective, the increasingly large number of FDWs that gather around sidewalks and parks has made it difficult to locate and prosecute offenders². Singaporeans are infuriated by the large amount of littering at the end of Sundays found in FDW gathering spots as well as the lack of government action against offenders. According to a Singaporean interviewee, most locals do not object to their gathering but feel that FDWs should behave according to the customs and regulations of the city if they are to be

²Currently, littering offenders are placed in a work order program to pick up trash or a SGD 5000 fine (Green, 2007). Foreign workers who are caught are also required to attend a compulsory counseling session that includes a 15 minute video on the importance of a 'litter free' Singapore (Yeoh and Huang, 1998)(Times, 1992)

treated as equals in public space. After all, he said, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do”. This sentiment is shared by the security officer, Robin, stationed in Lucky Plaza who feels that “as long as they are disciplined and adheres to the rules and regulations, they can come and stay around”. Robin is very sympathetic to the fact that Filipinos need a place to eat, meet friends and socialize on their days off but feels more strongly about the need to keep order, cleanliness and business operations around semi-public places such as Lucky Plaza complex.

The issue of FDW’s gathering in public spaces has generated citywide heated debates, prominently publicized in local newspapers, magazines and internet community portals. This attracted supporters, protesters and scholars of FDWs’ use of public space in Singapore (Kwek, 1998). While a general opinion has yet to form amongst Singaporeans, some employers have already begun to use the debated issue as yet another reason to not grant FDWs their regular off days. By controlling their employment rights, Singaporean employers are able to control the public spaces in the city.

4.4 FDWs’ Sense of Space Ownership

Due to the amount of pressure placed by business owners and government bodies, FDWs are forced to gather around leftover spaces that are clearly unable to host the large number of FDWs who visits the area every Sunday. Women sit around edges of flowerbeds, window sills and street curbs where vehicles miss them by inches as shown in Figure ?? and Figure 4.9. Some gather along the edges of pedestrian sidewalks at important intersections and thus inhibiting normal circulation. The pushing forces applied by business owners and city officials have caused FDWs to react with a sense of defensiveness to protect the few remaining areas in which they gather.



Figure 4.9: Filipino FDWs sitting along the window sill outside CK Tang, 27 December 2008



Figure 4.10: Filipino FDWs sitting along flowerbeds or curb outside Lucky Plaza, 27 December 2008

During the period of observation study, patrons of Area C appeared protective over their territory and unwelcoming to any incoming “visitors” into the area. This sense of defensiveness was reflected in an interview with a FDW pedicurist in the area, who was wary of my observation of their activities. According to the pedicurist interviewed, Singaporean journalists have been reporting on their activities in the area, causing heated debates and further tension between FDWs, officials and business owners in the area. Fearing displacement and harassment, FDWs have become suspicious of non-FDWs or ‘visitors’ who enter the area. The interviewee stressed that it is extremely frustrating for FDWs to not have a safe and secure place where they can go to relax and recreate on their one and only rest day in a month. Even though gatherings around sidewalks, street curbs and flower beds are not ideal, it is difficult to imagine where else the FDWs would be moved to if they are prevented from gathering even in these ‘leftover’ spaces.

While having lunch with some interviewees in the picnic spot behind Orchard Road, I found them speaking of the old Orchard MRT park nostalgically, as if it was a lost home. They spoke of the pleasantness of the area, equipped with concrete pavements for comfortable sitting and flower beds for enjoyment. It was “their” place. The current spot, which is jokingly nicknamed “the jungle”, pales in comparison, but they are grateful that they still have somewhere they can go. FDWs have a strong sense of ownership of public spaces because these areas offer FDWs their only opportunity to enjoy a sense of “privacy” away from their workplace in the domestic home. Each interviewee I have encountered has shown great appreciation towards the public spaces they frequented on Sundays and have expressed the importance of these places in helping them relax on their rest days. However, with their constant displacement, most feel insecure about the spaces they occupy, resulting in a low sense of ownership of the spaces and consequentially, the lack of collective social responsibility towards these public spaces.

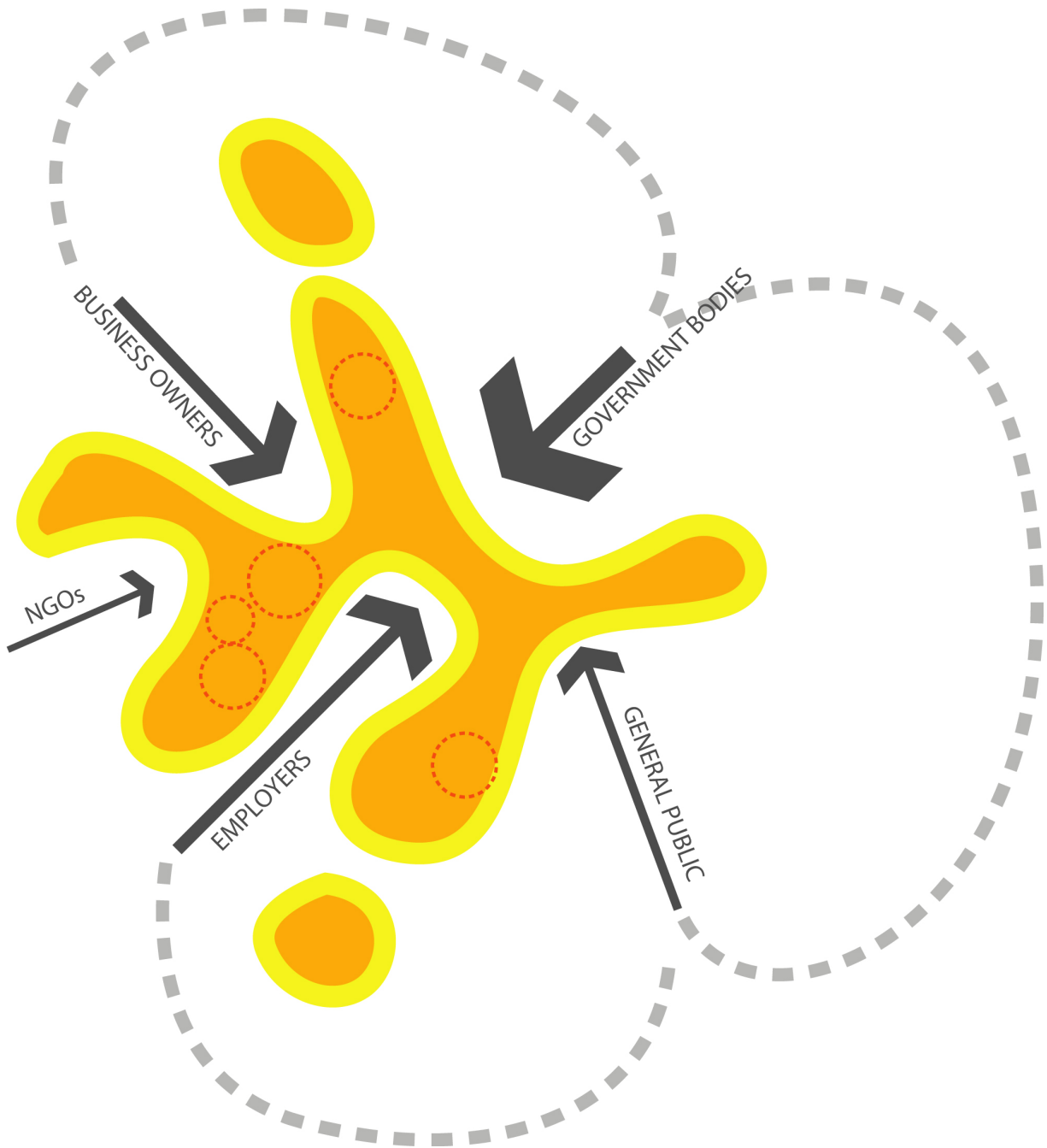


Figure 4.11: Forces that shape public spaces occupied by FDWs

4.5 Conclusion and Spatial Configuration

From the political and social conflicts described above, it is evident that Singapore's society has yet to reach a stage of accommodation towards FDWs that Hong Kong has achieved. Singapore is still in a state of resistance, unwilling to recognize their dependence on FDWs and to assume their full responsibilities in receiving this form of labor. The resistance by business owners, authorities and regulators as well as the general public causes the surprisingly fragmented public space consumption pattern. Groups of FDWs in Singapore are displaced and re-displaced in the course of space negotiations between parties. Ironically, this form of use of public space has evolved into an interesting pattern of program allocation and mental map formation amongst the FDWs around Orchard Road, Singapore. Figure 4.11 shows a diagram that depicts the forces that shape the resulting pattern of use of public space in the area. While the physical spatial negotiations are important, it will not be possible to discuss these spaces if employers continue to refuse FDWs their right to day offs and hence completely restrict their participation in the public realm.

Chapter 5

Kuala Lumpur, St John's Cathedral

Malaysia is one of the most important migrant labor receiving nations in the region, hosting approximately 330,000 Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) in 2007. While the actual number of FDWs in Kuala Lumpur is unknown, it is highly probable that more than half of the total FDW population is concentrated in the capital city where a majority of the higher income households reside.¹ Despite this overwhelming number of FDWs, only 5% of FDWs receive day offs during their employment. This is a result of a discriminatory policy practiced in Malaysia where Filipino FDWs are allowed day offs while the 90% majority of Indonesian FDWs are not granted this right.² Like Singapore, this discriminatory approach towards Indonesian FDWs is widely criticized by international media and human rights groups, who argue that the situation is a violation of basic labor, human rights and employment ethics. Some advocaters for universal rights for FDWs have even compared current practices in Malaysia to 'slavery' where the workers are treated like bond servants' (Vatsikopoulos, 2006). While the argument for days offs for FDWs are strong and valid, the stipulation of standard policies across societies of different cultural and social norms are controlling. In the following

¹Malaysian Immigration stipulates that the employer must have a minimum income of RM3000 to employ an Indonesian or Thai domestic worker and RM 10000 to hire a Filipino domestic worker

²Malaysia is the only case study where the Filipino:Indonesian FDW ratio is reversed as compared to Hong Kong and Singapore. Please refer to Table tab:GeneralInfo for actual ratios

section, we discuss the similarities between the Indonesian and Malaysian culture that calls for a different perspective on the construction of ‘home away from home’ for Indonesian FDWs in Kuala Lumpur.

5.1 Part of the Family

Advocaters of days off for FDWs have argued that the confinement of Indonesian domestic workers puts them under intense psychological and emotional pressure. Spatially confined, and constantly under the scrutiny of employers, FDWs do not have the opportunity to relax or to seek emotional support from friends and family during their time abroad. Also, with no communication with anyone except their employers, some FDWs lose touch with their own language, culture and identity (Divjak, 2004). Most importantly, the confinement makes it impossible for FDWs to seek help in the case of sexual or physical abuse. In Singapore, a large number of suicides amongst FDWs are linked to their perpetual confinement, which prevent them from seeking external social support and help to solve their employment or emotional issues (Ng, 2005). Despite these arguments for day offs, FDW recruiters, government officials and even the Indonesian Consulate think otherwise.

In an interview conducted by American Broadcast Company (ABC) with different parties involved on the issue of FDW rights, the Minister of Home Affairs at that time, Radzi Sheikh Ahmad, unabashedly announced that “Indonesian FDWs should not be given a day off” because “there are 320,000 Indonesian females in Malaysia. (Giving them a day off) will be difficult and will create alot of problems” (Vatsikopoulos, 2006). The problems that Radzi refers to include both public capacities for managing large numbers of individuals in the public space and social issues such as prostitution. This view is echoed by Mr. Poh Kok Kian, an owner of an FDW employment agency in Kuala Lumpur, who stated that “Malaysian employers do not want maids to go out, mix around, get influenced and lured

away by syndicates” (Star, 2005). Accordingly, Malaysian employers believe that Indonesian FDWs are not only incapable of self-protection against the ‘dangers’ of the city but might also place the employer and his or her family in a vulnerable position.³ This distrust in the FDWs’ ability to participate in the public space as responsible adults stems from the demographic characteristics of Indonesian FDWs, namely their younger age and rural background, which does not prepare them for the urban context. It is important to note that the age of Indonesian FDWs in Kuala Lumpur is relatively younger than those who work in Hong Kong, despite the 21 year old age restriction imposed by Malaysian authorities in recent years (Malaysia, 2009). Like Hong Kong, age falsification is rampant amongst Indonesian FDWs in Malaysia (Bernama, 2008). However, since most Indonesian FDWs would work a few years in Malaysia as a stepping stone before moving to higher paying cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong, using their experience and cultural adjustment in Malaysia as leverage for employment, Indonesian FDWs in Malaysia are considerably younger than their counterparts in Hong Kong (Ng, 2005). In addition to their younger age, the larger male to female migrant worker ratio in Kuala Lumpur also makes young FDWs more vulnerable to male predators in the city as compared to Hong Kong (Star, 2005).

Besides the male predation, Indonesian FDWs in public spaces in Kuala Lumpur are also often subjected to harassment by aggressive authorities in and around the city. On Sunday, April 8th 1994, a large number of police officials raided St. John’s Cathedral Church and arrested 1,200 Filipino FDWs in an attempt to weed out illegal immigrants in the city (Hassan, 1994). In the end, only 20 migrants were detained while the rest were either released with the presentation of proper documents or after employers were called upon to pick them up. After the incident, many Filipinos were quoted as being in fear of another arrest during their day offs while walking around the city (Times, 1994). Our interviewees noted that

³Due to the large number of male migrants in the city, many gullible FDWs had previously unknowingly become accomplices of crimes against their employers(Ariffin, 2001)

regular ‘checks’ are still performed today by Ikatan Relawan Rakyat Malaysia (RELA) and FDWs risk detention or harassment if they do not have their documents with them. Most importantly, if the employers are ‘troubled’ into retrieving them at the police station, they will be grounded at home and not allowed to claim their days off for a long period of time. While the harassments faced by Filipino FDWs are worrying, those experienced by Indonesian FDWs are far worse due to the large number of illegal Indonesian immigrants in the city ⁴

While the media and human rights groups have often discussed the day off issue in terms of the breach of human and labor rights, there is another side to the argument often put forth by those who agree to the practice. According to Poh Kok Kian, the confinement is not only motivated by the employers’ selfishness but also their personal obligation to protect the FDWs from the ‘dangers’ described above. He claimed that Malaysian employers tend to treat FDWs as ‘part of the family’ (Star, 2005). This view is echoed by Radzi who also quoted the ‘part of the family’ approach (Vatsikopoulos, 2006). Instead of leaving them out to fend for themselves amidst bad influences and harassment, employers are advised and encouraged to take their maids out for recreation, shopping and other activities to provide “psychological release” and to prevent them from being ‘cooped up at home’ (Star, 2005). However, no definition is given about this practice. Are they still obliged to take care of the children or hold shopping goods while enjoying their ‘day off’ with employers? There is a joke amongst Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong that to be ‘like a family member’ in the Chinese family is to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the family, which is to give up a off day to serve the family (Constable, 2007). The ambiguity of the status and role of live-in FDWs within the employers’ family hierarchy complicate expectations of work and responsibilities in the FDWs. However, successful execution of the ‘part of the family’ approach could be highly

⁴An Indonesian Diplomat’s wife was detained by RELA in October 2007 despite producing her legal documents. RELA is alleged of power abuse, especially against Indonesian women (Mydans, 2007)

rewarding for both FDWs and her employers.

Wati is a 34 year old Cantonese speaking Indonesian FDW who is working in a large extended Chinese-Malaysian family in Kuala Lumpur. She does not partake in the days off system. In an interview with her, I asked if she would like to spend time outside of her employer's house on Sundays and her reply was, "Why would I? Sunday is when everyone comes 'home'. I don't get to see them on other days." Wati's role in the family transcends that of just 'the maid', instead she claims a valid status in her employer's family. At home, she is referred to as *kakak*, which is sister in Malay and her housework in the home is often helped by the rest of the family when they are available. On her most recent birthday, her employers insisted on planning a surprise birthday party for her; Wati was deeply touched. While Wati's experience as 'part of the family' does not represent all Indonesian FDWs in Kuala Lumpur, her story is also not unique.

The practice of forbidding days off together and disallowing Indonesian FDWs the freedom to spend their day off away from their employers might be surprising to those unfamiliar with the culture. Malaysia and Indonesia share many similarities such as language, religion and customs. In addition, many of the cultural practices in Indonesia, including the male protection of females as well as family restrictions over single females, are very much practiced by both Muslim and non-Muslim families in Malaysia. While urban families do not confine their children at home, parents are often reluctant to allow daughters to leave home independently without precise knowledge of their whereabouts. In other words, many local single young women in Kuala Lumpur do not enjoy the same degree of independence and freedom enjoyed by same aged Indonesian FDWs in Hong Kong.

There are a number of distinct differences between Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong that make the accommodation of Indonesian FDWs in Kuala Lumpur more complicated than in Hong Kong. The social and cultural practices do not encourage of independence and unmonitored activities amongst single young women and both Indonesia and Malaysia make

it difficult to assert standard rights for FDWs in the employers homes. Secondly, despite the age limit, many Indonesian FDWs in Malaysia are in fact very young, making it difficult for employers to grant adult independence to someone whom an employer would considers a teenager. Lastly, there is a severe lack of support by authorities and public officials in securing FDWs in public space, making some employers reluctant to allow Indonesian employees to participate in the public spaces. As a result, we see only the participation of the minority Filipino FDWs in the public spaces of Kuala Lumpur.

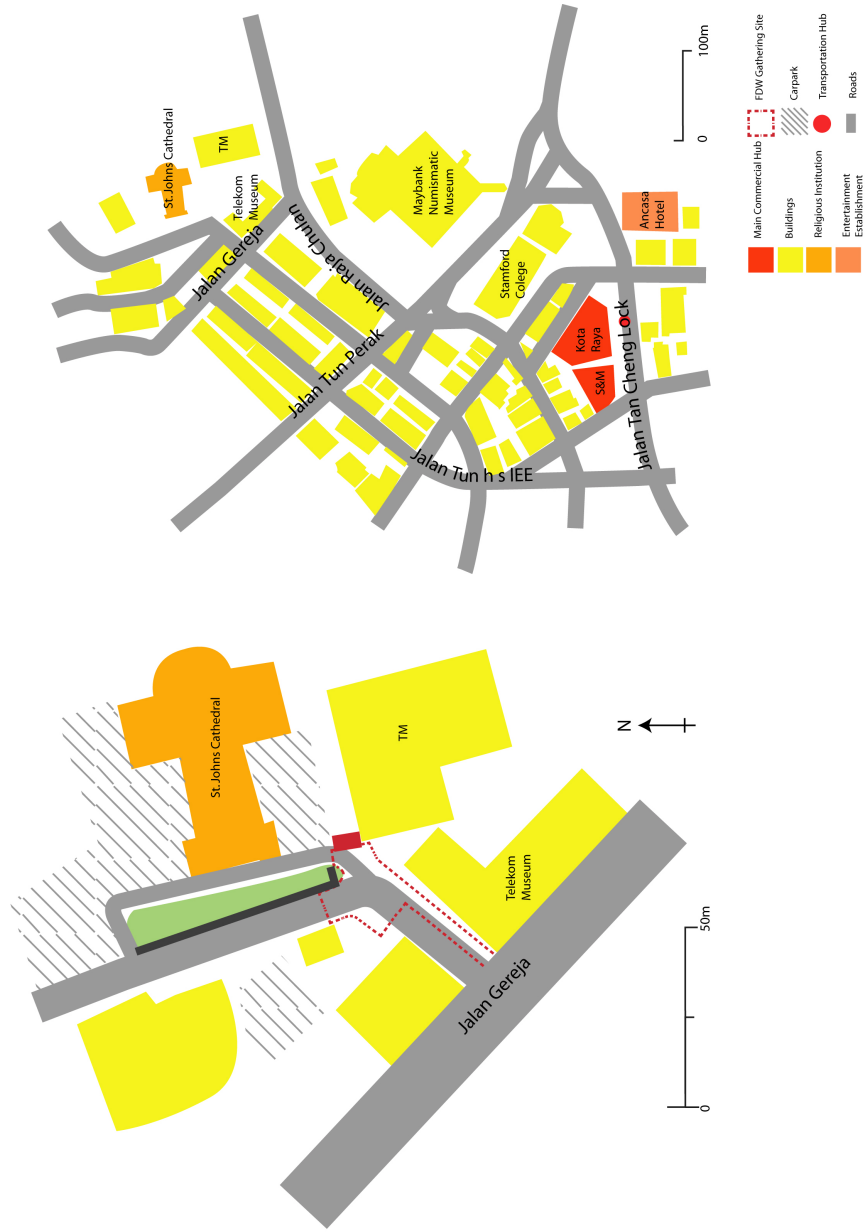


Figure 5.1: Map of St. Johns Cathedral and its relation to Downtown Kuala Lumpur



Figure 5.2: St John's Cathedral gathering space Kuala Lumpur, 20 December 2008

5.2 Observation of Downtown, Kuala Lumpur

The FDW gathering space in Kuala Lumpur cannot be compared to either Central, Hong Kong or even Lucky Plaza in Singapore since the population of FDWs that is allowed to consume public spaces is so much smaller than that of the other cities. Nonetheless, approximately 500 Filipino FDWs transform a small secluded space in downtown Kuala Lumpur every Sunday. The space is located at St. John's Cathedral, a Roman Catholic Church nestled in the Bukit Nenas Forest Reserve. Although the church is accessible by both the Light Rail Transit (LRT) and bus, most would find it difficult to reach the area by public transportation.⁵ The church grounds include two large parking areas and a pleasant green area located immediately in front of the church entrance. The road leading to the church is a narrow street with a sharp 90 degree turn into the church parking area, creating a nested

⁵The public transportation network in Kuala Lumpur is limited, leaving many suburban areas not included in the LRT network. Many Filipino FDWs arrive at St John's Cathedral by bus, which could take 45 minutes to an hour depending on the location of the employer's home

spot where FDWs can gather.



Figure 5.3: Hawkers selling food Outside at the church gate, 20 December 2008

The gathering spot is located immediately in front of the church entrance and abuts both the Telecommunications Malaysia (TM) headquarters office and its associated museum, which are closed on Sundays. The FDW gathering space consists of a dead end area, sidewalks of five to seven feet as well as along leftover spaces of monsoon drains. Here, entrepreneurial FDWs would set up food stalls and other businesses that cater for FDW patrons. Since the small area is often overcrowded at the end of the church service, some FDWs purchase food and consume the food within church grounds. FDWs here do not practice the picnicking and stationary camping seen in Singapore or Hong Kong. Instead, food stalls and other businesses would bring along stools, umbrellas and other amenities for FDW patrons. FDWs buy food from these caterers and consume the food sitting along fences, steps and road curbs while catching up with friends and family. Other than eating, chatting



Figure 5.4: Traders selling Filipino food, 20 December 2008

and minor personal grooming, FDWs do not perform other activities. The area is not only frequented by FDWs but also other opportunistic local traders who sell used clothes, toys and mobile phone credits to FDWs. Even though the area is made up of leftover spaces, it has a few amenities attractive to foreign workers. At one corner of the area, there are two telephone booths that are popular amongst Filipino males who use phone cards to make phone calls. During the observation study, none of the Filipino FDWs were utilizing the public telephones but one can be imagine that this must have been popular amenity before mobile phones became affordable to FDWs. ⁶

The Filipino FDW space is rarely interrupted by vehicular traffic except for two brief periods, when church members enter and leave the church. However, during these times, the large number of FDWs gathered barricade the church entrance and block vehicles from

⁶It is a norm for Filipino FDWs to have two mobile phones, one from the Philippines that is on international roaming and another one from Malaysia. Family from Philippines will text FDWs on their Philippines mobile and FDWs will reply using the Malaysian mobile. This way, they can communicate with their friends and family in Philippines through text messages and phone calls at the cheapest international rates

trying to leave church grounds. FDWs and traders are then forced to carry their goods and clear the area to allow traffic to pass. During this time, the stagnant group of FDWs is also briefly interrupted by waves of pedestrians passing through the church gate. These brief but necessary confrontations between locals and FDWs are not observed in other gathering spots.

During my observation study at St. John's Cathedral, many Filipino FDWs left the church service approximately 15 minutes prior to its end to change their attire.⁷ This is to avoid the long lines at the female washrooms at the end of service. Most linger in the gathering space for a brief period before heading to the commercial hubs, namely Kota Raya and S & M complex 10 minutes away. While the commercial hub is within walking distance, it does not about the Filipino FDWs' gathering spot in St. John's Cathedral. In other words, Kuala Lumpur is the only city amongst those studied where the Filipino FDWs' gathering spot is an extension of a religious institution instead of a commercial hub, mimicking the market places in front of churches and temples in ancient cities. Filipino FDWs carry out errands such as money remittances and package sending at Kota Raya. Here, there are also numerous banks, mobile service providers, phone card vendors, Filipino grocery stores and grooming services that cater for migrant workers in the city. After carrying out their errands, Filipino FDWs head to S & M, the adjacent complex that appears to cater for higher income migrant workers such as Filipino FDWs. Filipino FDWs, who receive an average monthly payment of USD 200 (RM 760), are amongst the highest paid migrant workers in Kuala Lumpur. Their Indonesian counterparts are being paid USD 120 (RM400) while the Indian migrant male construction workers are only paid USD 320 (RM 1200)(Ariffin, 2001). Soon, Filipino FDWs' salary will be doubled to USD 400 (RM 1400) to adhere to stadardized FDW salary

⁷According to Cita, FDWs would leave the employers home in a more conservative attire and would bring along a different and more feminine outfit to change after church service. They would change again before they leave to return to their employers' home at the end of the day. This routine results in the high demand of female public toilet facilities around mid-morning and late evening

stipulated by the Phillipines Government (Gabriel, 2008). Their relatively higher salary makes them more aggressive consumers as compared to their counterparts in Singapore and Hong Kong. Most stores in S & M cater to Filipino females, selling inexpensive garments, toys for children, cheap jewelry and some Filipino entertainment. Unlike Hong Kong's World Wide Plaza, S & M and Kota Raya are also frequented by locals during the week, making them non-exclusive commercial centers for Filipino FDWs. However, since locals do not visit S & M on Sundays, FDWs and the general public do not experience conflict in these spaces.

As in the other cities, Filipino FDWs long for a public area to conduct private social



Figure 5.5: Money remittance and package sending services in Kota Raya, 20 December 2008

activities such as chatting, eating and bonding with compatriots after their visits to the commercial hubs and the religious institution. In Hong Kong and Singapore, FDWs fulfill this need by picnicking in public spaces, rolling out mats and bringing food to consume in their 'home away from home'. This phenomenon is absent in Kuala Lumpur, and the difference can be attributed to various factors including the lack of a critical mass of Fil-

ipino FDWs in the city, making it difficult to ‘occupy’ a public space. Other possibilities include the lack of clean open space in downtown Kuala Lumpur, the aggressive prosecution by authorities in the area as well as Filipino FDWs’ relatively higher purchasing power that allows them to consume private spaces instead. The relative affordability of Kuala Lumpur’s private spaces in comparison to other cities could lessen their inclination to perform private activities in public spaces all day long. In any case, Filipino FDWs spend most of their time in open food establishments such as food courts and fast food chains where they can gather for long periods of time after making small purchases of food or drinks. Others gather in Filipino based businesses that provide some sitting areas for FDWs throughout the day. Occasionally, Filipino FDWs would frequent a ‘night’ club located opposite of Kota Raya, called Ancasa Hotel that is open from two to seven p.m. on Sundays to cater for migrant workers in the city. Here, FDWs will buy a drink and spend their afternoons dancing away, momentarily forgetting their maid alter egos. According to Cita, a Filipino FDW in Kuala Lumpur, FDWs spend an average of RM 25 to RM 30 during their day off in downtown Kuala Lumpur.

While there appears to be three distinct and separate areas that make up the ‘place’ for Filipino FDWs on Sundays, these areas are not set amidst spaces occupied by local citizens as seen in Singapore or Hong Kong. Instead, downtown Kuala Lumpur is a migrant concentrated town on Sundays, where different parts of the area are populated by different migrant worker groups including Indonesian, Indian, Vietnamese and Thai workers. In other words, Filipino FDWs are a subgroup amongst the thousands of migrants that take over downtown Kuala Lumpur on Sundays. Collectively, the ‘migrant town’ has characteristics similar to Central and Causeway Bay Hong Kong but the composition of the members is far more diverse both in nationality and gender, which makes Filipino FDWs’ need for place making only possible in small pockets within the area.

5.3 Role of Different Actors in Place Making

5.3.1 Government Authorities and Regulators

Filipino FDWs' gathering in Kuala Lumpur is the only case-study which currently experiences intense resistance from authorities or government officials. Our study found that both the gathering spaces outside St. John's Cathedral Church and other areas frequented by FDWs are often 'raided' or 'patrolled' by officials. City Hall officers are out to prosecute illegal hawkers while RELA is aggressive in its attempt to uncover illegal immigrants. Helen, a Filipino FDW who sells snacks and desserts outside St. John's explained that hawkers locate themselves on top of the sloping road in order to have a clear view of coming officials. This gives the hawkers the time to move into the church to avoid prosecution, as city hall officials cannot arrest FDWs on private property without a warrant. City Hall officials are only allowed to confiscate goods from illegal hawking but cannot arrest FDWs.

RELA are known to perform frequent raids in food courts, fast food chains and dance clubs frequented by Filipino FDWs to check for illegal workers.⁸ In an interview with Zara a Filipino FDW in Kuala Lumpur, she explained that most FDWs keep each other informed of the whereabouts of RELA and the police throughout their rest day. The effort is to avoid the embarrassment of being locked 'in the cage', referring to the practice of placing migrant workers in a 'wire grilled truck' to transport them to the police station. To protect their dignity, FDWs play a game of 'cat and mouse' with authorities despite their legal status and right to consume public spaces in Kuala Lumpur on their day off. This issue shows that the city's acknowledgment of the individual's right to consume public spaces depends upon his or her income, class, ethnicity and nationality.

⁸RELA is a group of volunteers that is authorized by the government to arrest and detain illegal workers or occupiers at a commission of RM100 (US27) per arrest. They are allowed to bear arms, enter without warrant, arrest on suspicion and detain suspects for 14 days before surrendering them to the police. Their power, which some argue exceeds law enforcers, is worrying to both the Malaysian public and international community (AMC, 2005a)

In Kuala Lumpur, the space consumed by FDWs is neither in a prominent financial area nor a high-end commercial area. Therefore, the ‘condition’ after gatherings does not receive much attention from the general public. Nonetheless, the Urban Services Department (ALAM FORA) is aware of FDWs’ weekly gathering outside of the church and would dispatch one cleaning staff to the area at the end of the gathering (at around noon). A cleaning staff equipped with one broom and one dustpan is responsible to clean up the area. Because FDWs’ activities in the area are concentrated around food consumption, a considerable amount of litter is produced after the gathering. Bags of trash are left out in the open and many dogs and birds, perhaps aware of the routine, feast on the leftovers when FDWs leave the area. The observation found that Filipino FDWs in Kuala Lumpur have yet to self-regulate their consumption behavior in these spaces every week.

5.3.2 Institutions

Since the gathering space in Kuala Lumpur is located at the gates of St. John’s Cathedral, the church automatically influences the gathering phenomenon. Often, church administrators act as mediators between local members of the church and FDWs while taking a neutral position. According to Helen, FDWs used to gather in the pleasant green area directly in front of the church steps. Unfortunately, due to the protest of a local food vendor operating within the church, FDWs are no longer allowed to gather within church grounds. The conflict between church members and FDWs only arises at the end of each mass, when local church members are blocked by FDWs gathering at the exit area while trying to leave the church grounds in their vehicles. Some are also frustrated with the littering by FDWs and are not shy to voice verbal abuses, showing that FDWs’ gathering is not welcomed. Despite these conflicts, church administrators do show small signs of support for FDWs. For example, the previously inadequate female washroom facility was recently renovated to cater for larger number of female patrons in the church every Sunday. While this appears to be a



Figure 5.6: Alam Flora Staff cleaning up the gathering space at the end of the gathering, 20 December 2008



Figure 5.7: New female toilet facility at St John's Cathedral, 20 December 2008

positive sign for FDWs, the religious institution's position and commitment to support their gathering is ambiguous.

Unlike other cities, NGO's participation in the issues of FDWs' days off and their use of public space use is minimal in Kuala Lumpur. However, perhaps aware of the social needs of Filipinos, the Philippine embassy has set up a Filipino Workers Resource Center (FWRC) that offers a variety of skill improvement classes to support its Filipino labor force in Malaysia. The facility is located adjacent to the Philippine embassy and acts as a community and support center for FDWs. While these spaces do provide support to the Filipino community, they do not provide the same experience of place making that FDWs enjoy in public space gatherings.



Figure 5.8: FDWs buying and selling food while catching up with friends, 20 December 2008



Figure 5.9: Trader setting up stall, 20 December 2008



Figure 5.10: Local telecommunications company's vehicle selling phone cards, 20 December 2008



Figure 5.11: Filipino Food at the gathering space, 20 December 2008



Figure 5.12: Local trader selling used clothes to FDWs, 20 December 2008

5.3.3 Business Owners

Filipino FDWs in Kuala Lumpur practice a higher level of public space entrepreneurship than FDWs in other cities. While Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong peddle books, pictures and small entertainment goods hidden in suitcases and bags, FDWs in Kuala Lumpur set up tables and fully equipped stalls. Despite the lack of public transportation, most come to the area bringing their goods via taxi or vans. In other words, their participation in the public space as business owners is far more permanent than that seen in other cities. Also, we see a far higher percentage of opportunistic local entrepreneurs' participation in the FDW gathering area, selling everything from phone cards and toys to used clothes. Besides peddlers, mobile communication companies also send vehicles to the area to service Filipino FDWs and to sell phone cards to the group. Other spaces such as Kota Raya and S & M are commercial hubs that are increasingly cater to migrant worker businesses instead of local patrons. Clearly, Filipino FDWs are considered important consumers in Kuala Lumpur, transforming the

FDW space into one focused on trade and business rather than a temporary home. Because of the booming trade in the area, business owners are strong supporters of FDWs' gathering spaces in Kuala Lumpur.

5.3.4 General Public

Other than the members of St. John's Cathedral that confront FDWs in these spaces, the general public is mostly ignorant of the existence of the mini Filipino gathering space in downtown Kuala Lumpur. The phenomenon is also rarely reported by local media or discussed by locals due to the small percentage of FDW who actually enjoy days off and the secluded nature of the gathering spaces. Besides these factors, a large number of middle class locals are suburbanized and frequent other commercial hubs that cater to their consumption needs. Since the general public and FDWs do not need to share public spaces, there is little or no conflict observed between the two groups. This spatial configuration makes it possible for FDWs to consume public spaces without the level of public resistance seen in either Hong Kong or Singapore. However, due to policies, lack of civil support and the reluctance of employers and government officials to grant days off, this dynamic place making ritual might disappear or be forced to retain the ambiguous 'migrant' identity seen today.

5.4 FDW ownership

In FDW gathering spaces in Hong Kong and Singapore, we evaluated FDWs' 'sense of ownership' by observing their behavior within the space as well as the overall spatial organization. In Kuala Lumpur, it is difficult to evaluate both since FDWs do not 'privatize' public spaces by picnicking or camping in these areas. In other words, they do not establish the 'home away from home' seen in other cities discussed in this thesis. However, the gathering spaces do exhibit a weak spatial logic throughout the location of the businesses in the area. Food

businesses appear to be located closest to the entrance, followed by toys, entertainment and clothes and finally mobile communications companies and phone card vendors. The location of the businesses are semi-permanent, where hawkers return to approximately the same spot week after week. This form of spatial logic resembles flea markets around the world and the weekly night markets or *pasar malam* culture practiced in Malaysia.⁹ Since FDWs are friends with certain Filipino business owners, they tend to cluster around the stalls, chatting and helping out at the same time. Therefore, the gathering also exhibits a weak social organizational. While some FDWs perform slightly private activities such as putting on make up and trying out clothes sold in the area, their occupancy of the space is not permanent.

Besides the observed behavior and spatial layout, Filipino FDWs I interviewed in Kuala Lumpur also did not express ownership of the space. They did not once in all of the interviews refer to the space at St John's Cathedral as 'our place' or 'home', as FDWs did in Hong Kong and Singapore. Instead, most FDWs in Kuala Lumpur regard the space as a 'Filipino market' that caters inexpensively for their cravings for Filipino food and goods. They do not however, consider the space 'theirs'. Interviews also did not mention the need or preference for a place exclusively for Filipino FDWs. There are several possibilities that could explain this weak sense of ownership despite the concentration of Filipino FDWs and the recurrence of this spatial transformation every Sunday. Firstly, the number of Filipino FDWs that visits the space every Sunday have not yet reached the critical mass needed to claim and defend a private space for the group. Secondly, it is possible that the availability of alternative private spaces in the downtown area such as food courts, fast foods chains and night clubs at a relatively affordable price might encourage FDWs to patronize those spaces instead. Thirdly, the inconvenient public transportation network might discourage

⁹ *Pasar malam* is a weekly night market held in each neighborhood in Kuala Lumpur and throughout Malaysia. The market sells everything from food and groceries to clothes and entertainment. Vendors are licensed and return to the same spot week after week, as determined by communal consensus, making it possible for customers to locate businesses.

the Filipinos from carrying food and personal belongings needed to settle in a public space on crowded busses. Finally, it is possible that the regulators' aggressive prosecution and discrimination against migrant workers prevent Filipino FDWs from 'overtly' asserting their presence in the public space. While the reasons are unclear, it is evident that the FDWs' 'sense of ownership' of this space is weak despite the uniqueness and dynamism of the space transformation that takes place week after week.

5.5 Conclusion and Spatial Configuration

The place making process at St. John's Cathedral in Kuala Lumpur bears little resemblance to the phenomenon observed in either Hong Kong or Singapore. The gathering space transformation involves a smaller number of FDWs and the activities that unfold in the area also differ significantly. The space features a unique concentration of FDWs, a distinct smell and taste of food, availability of Filipino goods and entertainment as well as sound of Tagalogs in the air. However, none of the picnicking or 'home away from home' observed in other cities is found in this gathering space. In Kuala Lumpur, we found that the usual actors in FDW space transformation, namely the general public, government bodies, employers and NGOs, are ignorant of the phenomenon and do not participate physically or politically within the space. Regulators, on the other hand, are very aware of FDWs' routine on Sundays and strongly assert their influence in these spaces. The only strong supporters of the place transformation are local and Filipino business owners who capitalize on the Filipino FDWs' purchasing power. Lastly, the church is a neutral member in the process, neither strongly resisting nor accommodating the phenomenon. Often, the church plays a mediator role to avoid conflict between FDWs and church members who share the space every Sunday. The resulting spatial configuration is an FDW space that mostly evolves around business ac-

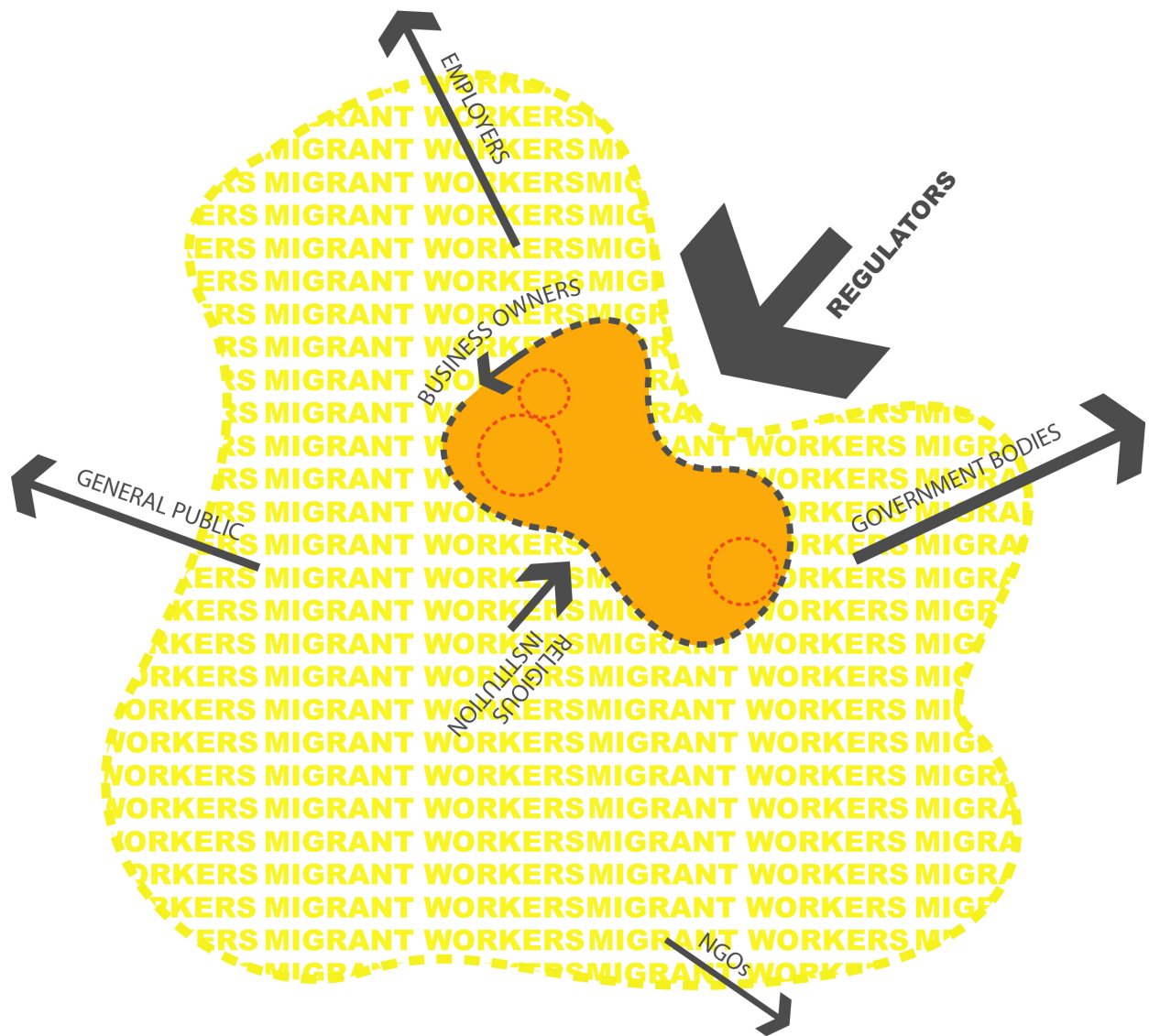


Figure 5.13: Forces that limit and ignore FDWs' space occupancy in Kuala Lumpur

tivities; one that faces little resistance or support from various groups other than regulators. Since Filipino FDWs make up a relatively small number amongst the migrant community in Kuala Lumpur, this gathering space is a subsection of the overall public space occupied by migrants in the downtown area every Sunday. Figure 5.13 diagrammatically illustrates the spatial configuration of the FDW gathering space in Kuala Lumpur.

Chapter 6

Comparative Analysis

In the previous chapters, we examined four separate case studies in detail, noting and observing circumstances that resist and assist the FDW space transformation every Sunday. Here, we provide a comparative analysis of the case studies in order to gain a strong understanding of the impacts of different factors on the FDW gathering spaces across all three cities. First, we will compare and contrast the physical spatial observations in each case, namely the public facilities, groups present and activities performed in the gathering space. We will try to understand the effectiveness of these features and their role in the FDWs' gathering in the public space. Then, we will examine the role of stakeholders in the cities. Through this exercise, I hope to understand the various ways in which the actions and positions of different groups impact the physical gathering space. Then, we will discuss second degree factors such as demographics, labor economics and culture that indirectly affect the spatial consumption patterns in the FDW gathering spaces. Finally, we will compare and contrast the spatial products across all four gathering spaces to understand the spatial consequences of cities at a different stage of accommodation towards FDWs' gathering in public spaces.

6.1 Physical Spatial Characteristics

The physical observable aspects of all four case studies can be divided into three categories, namely public facilities, people and activities. We see that all four spaces feature a vibrant commercial hub. However, other amenities such as public toilets and sitting benches are not found in all FDW gathering spaces. In successful picnicking areas such as Central Hong Kong, we find features such as hard sitting surfaces, greenery and shelter, which are absent in St. John's Cathedral in Kuala Lumpur and Orchard Road Singapore. Because FDWs prefer to remain in one spot after setting up their 'home' in a picnicking area, it is important to find a sheltered spot to avoid the rain or sunlight. Unfortunately, it is in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur where they are most exposed to treacherous tropical rain and sun that FDWs do not find sufficient shelter to carry out their activities.

FDW gathering spaces in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur also feature sufficient public toilet facilities and trash bins, which not only service the needs of FDWs but also help avoid conflict between FDWs and business owners or the general public. The availability of these amenities directly improves the physical condition of the gathering spaces as well as the FDWs' relationship with other users of the public space, thus avoiding conflict and extra measures taken to restrict access to public amenities, as seen in the case of Singapore.

Surprisingly, certain amenities that are generally important in public parks such as sitting benches and tables serve as obstacles instead of supportive elements during FDWs' gatherings in these spaces. This is because permanent park furniture are inflexible and do not allow groups to aggregate, disintegrate and morph throughout the day. The limited availability of sitting furniture also makes it difficult for FDWs who are sitting on them to communicate with those standing or sitting on the ground to communicate with each other at eye level. Therefore, FDWs would often choose relatively flat areas that are free of park furnitures to gather. Sometimes they would bring along their own small chairs to their picnicking spots as

Physical Spatial and Social Characteristics Observed on the Day of Study

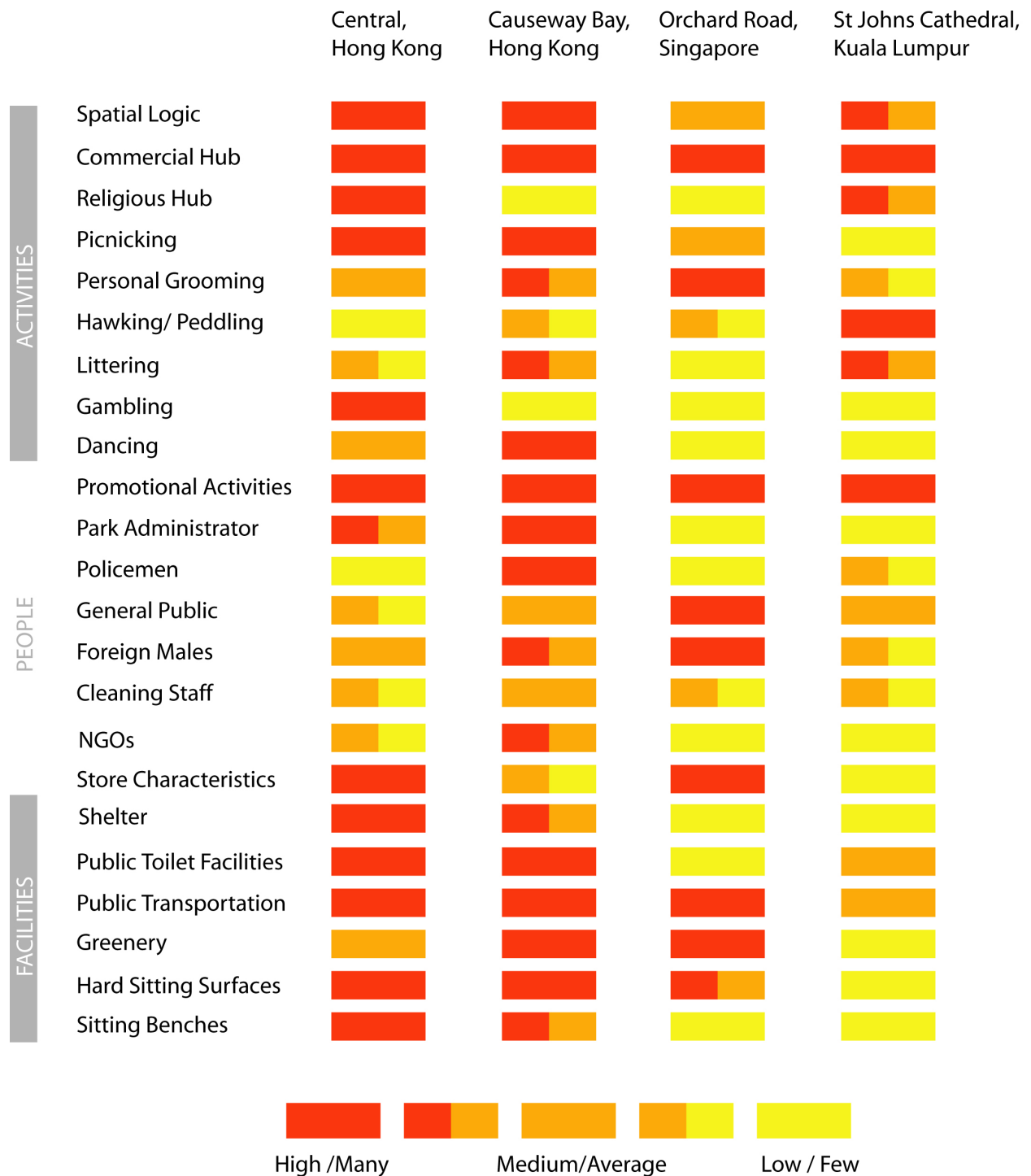


Figure 6.1: Spatial characteristics found on the day of observation

shown in Figure 6.3. While unsuitable in picnicking areas, sitting furniture might be useful in waiting areas. Currently, FDWs are forced to sit along window sills and flowerbeds in and around meeting points due to the lack of sitting furnitures in those areas. The issue is most prominently seen in Orchard Road Singapore, where any available sitting furniture is perpetually occupied by FDWs, as seen in Figure 6.5.



Figure 6.2: FDWs sitting on the ground instead of benches, Hong Kong Victoria Park, 11 January 2009

Besides facilities, the presence of groups other than FDWs also affects the behavior of FDWs and shapes the space that FDWs occupy. In general, the presence of park administrators and cleaning staff are signs of support by authorities in these spaces. Even though park administrators in Victoria Park Hong Kong also limit and control the gathering spaces, they do not resist or prevent FDWs from the gathering in these public spaces. In all four cases, cleaning staff are present, but the largest number of staff is stationed in Victoria Park Hong



Figure 6.3: FDWs sitting on their small chairs, Central Hong Kong, 11 January 2009



Figure 6.4: FDWs sitting on the edge of the fence, St John's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur, 20 December 2008



Figure 6.5: FDWs waiting for friends in a sitting area, Lucky Plaza Singapore

Kong. Besides park administrators, we see that the general public and foreign males are the next most common groups found in FDWs gathering spaces. As observed in the case of Singapore, the presence of these two groups in FDW gathering spaces increases the level of resistance towards this phenomenon. The general public disapproves of the open display of private activities and the large number of foreign males surrounding FDW gathering spaces, often suspicious of the activities carried out by these groups in public spaces.

While the general public does not physically shape the space, their social and cultural judgment towards the phenomenon could trigger real political consequence that could influence the physical space. Finally, we see that policemen or regulators act as both supporting and resisting agents of FDW activities. In Hong Kong, policemen in Victoria Park support and monitor FDW activities in the public space, while policemen prosecute illegal hawkers, acting as a preventive force to ward off ill intentioned males targeting the young Indonesian FDWs. On the contrary, the city officials in Kuala Lumpur act as the solely resistive force

that aggressively disperses FDWs' groups to discourage their gatherings in public spaces. The two case studies show that the number of policemen on-site does not reflect the degree of resistance to FDWs. Instead, it is the role of regulators and the aggressiveness of their acts that determine their impact on the space. Since Causeway Bay Hong Kong is the only case study where Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) are physically present, it is difficult to evaluate NGOs' impact on FDW gathering spaces. Nonetheless, the YMCA'S support in sustaining the Indonesian 'shopping area' in Victoria Park continues to assist the park's transformation into the Indonesian town every week. While groups in all four spaces generally play comparable roles in the space negotiation process, their impact and influence differs depending on cultural and political conditions in each city.

All four case studies also feature a range of private activities that are openly performed in the public spaces. Personal grooming, picnicking, and praying are the more private activities observed in FDW gathering spaces such as Central and Causeway Bay, Hong Kong as well as Orchard Road Singapore. Figure 6.6 and Figure 6.7 show FDWs offering eyebrow trimming, pedicure, manicure and hairdressing services to compatriots in Singapore and Hong Kong. Praying in public spaces is more prominent in Orchard Road Singapore and Causeway Bay Hong Kong due to the lack of religious hubs in the area. Other activities include dancing, shopping and campaigning, which are observed primarily in FDW gathering spaces in Hong Kong. Perhaps this is a result of the larger concentration of FDWs in Hong Kong as compared to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur on any particular Sunday. The larger concentration of FDWs makes it possible for special interest groups to emerge and carry out specialized activities in these spaces.

Illegal activities such as hawking, littering and gambling are observed in all gathering spaces. Hawking is most prominent in gathering spaces in Kuala Lumpur despite the frequent raids by city officials. On the contrary, illegal hawking is less apparent and better concealed in Central Hong Kong even though no police or officials are present on-site. This

observation suggests that illegal hawking in FDW spaces is directly influenced by the legal consequences of the offenses instead of the presence of regulators on-site. In Malaysia, illegal hawking merely results in the confiscation of goods, while a similar offense would result in the termination of the FDWs' contract or a short jail term in Hong Kong (Benitez, 2004a). Perhaps unwilling to risk deportation, hawking by FDWs in Hong Kong are better concealed. Also, littering appears less rampant in Central Hong Kong as compared to other areas. As previously discussed, I believe that this increased public responsibility and self-maintenance amongst FDWs is a result of Filipino FDWs' sense of ownership of the space. Gambling, which is an illegal activity unless performed privately, is only seen openly practiced in Central Hong Kong amongst the four gathering spaces studied. This indicates the higher level of public space privatization in Hong Kong as compared to other cities. ¹



Figure 6.6: Eye brow trimming on Orchard Road, 27 December 2008

¹Filipino FDWs appeared extremely protective over the gambling activities. They warned me against taking pictures while gambling was taking place, and some FDWs erected plastic sheets and umbrellas around the space to conceal the activity.



Figure 6.7: A FDW's hairdressing facility in Victoria Park, 11 January 2009

From our comparative analysis, we see that FDW spaces in Hong Kong offer better amenities and support for FDW groups, which result in more variety of activities in the FDW gathering space. Besides these features, gathering spaces in Hong Kong also show better established underlying spatial logics as compared to other cities, where FDW groups are either organized by their ethnic origin or their special interest activities. This feature is weakly observed in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. As discussed in each case study chapter, the emergence of the sophisticated spatial organizational logic in Hong Kong is not only a function of the number of FDWs in the space, but also the role and position of different stakeholders within the space. In the following section, we will compare and contrast the role of stakeholders in managing and shaping the gathering spaces across all three cities.

6.2 Role of different stakeholders in Place-making

In the previous section, we noted the impacts of different stakeholders when they are physically present in the FDW gathering space. Here, we discuss the way in which different groups in the city shape the public space through their social and political views as well as policies regarding the management of FDWs employment and their use of public spaces. As previously mentioned, Hong Kong is the only city where authorities show strong support towards FDWs' gatherings on Sundays. Not only did the authorities refuse to reopen Chater Road despite the pressure from influential landowners, but they also continue to support and provide FDWs their spatial needs in the public space. More importantly, as detailed in Table 6.1, the Hong Kong government stipulates mandatory weekly rest days for all FDWs irrespective of their nationality. On the other hand, Singapore authorities not only refuse to make rest days compulsory but also exercise various methods to disperse FDWs from their gathering sites. This strategy is evident in their recent sale of Filipino FDWs' Orchard Park to private developers, which disregards the needs of Filipino FDWs who live in the city (Sua, 2007). Government authorities in Kuala Lumpur are also unabashed about their opposition towards granting FDWs rest days, claiming that "320,000 Indonesian FDWs would create a lot of 'problem' if they are all allowed day offs on a regular basis" (Vatsikopoulos, 2006). Besides discriminatory policies, prominent leaders like the prime minister of Malaysia also legitimize unwarranted prosecutions as seen in the case of St John's Cathedral's raid in 1994 (Hassan, 1994). Certainly, all three cities view domestic labor and the rights of FDWs differently, resulting in different strategies and policies to accommodate the groups.

From Figure 6.8, we see that the general public's position on FDWs is very similar to that expressed by government authorities. In Hong Kong, where authorities have legitimized and accommodated FDWs in the public space, we see that the public has also adopted an accom-

Support and Resistance of Stakeholders in FDW Public Spaces

	Central, Hong Kong	Causeway Bay, Hong Kong	Orchard Road, Singapore	St Johns Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur
Authorities	SUPPORT	SUPPORT	RESIST	RESIST
General Public	SUPPORT	SUPPORT	RESIST	NEUTRAL
Business Owners	RESIST	SUPPORT	RESIST	SUPPORT
Employers	SUPPORT	SUPPORT	RESIST	RESIST
Religious Institutions	SUPPORT	RESIST	NEUTRAL	SUPPORT
NGOs	SUPPORT	SUPPORT	SUPPORT	NEUTRAL
FDW Government Bodies	SUPPORT	RESIST	SUPPORT	RESIST

Figure 6.8: Support and resistance of stakeholders in FDWs’ gathering spaces

modative approach, often expressing empathy towards FDWs. They have said that “FDWs too need a place to meet friends and family on their off days.” On the contrary, Singapore’s government’s implementation of security bonds to discourage employers from granting off days has fueled the general public’s suspicion and distrust towards FDWs’ activities on their days off. The general public’s disapproval of FDWs’ gathering is openly expressed in the local media and Internet forums in Singapore (Times, 2008). Since members of the general public are also FDWs’ employers who control FDWs’ right to day offs, negative public perception would undoubtedly affect FDWs’ chances of negotiating for contractual day offs thus causing a catch-22 situation for Filipino FDWs. Perhaps fortunately, most of the general public in Kuala Lumpur is ignorant of FDWs’ activities on Sundays due to the spatial distance between the gathering site and employer’s home as well as the suppressed reports in the media. Their ignorance of the subject lends neither support nor resistance to FDWs’ groups. Comparing authorities’ position in all three cities, we see that the general public’s opinion of the gatherings are highly influenced by the leadership of government authorities

in the issue.

Business owners' attitude towards FDWs and their gathering depends on several factors namely the type of business owned and the purchasing power of FDWs in the city, which determine if FDWs are seen as potential patrons of these businesses. From Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.8, we see that the higher-end stores in Central Hong Kong and Orchard Road Singapore practice stronger resistance to the lower income FDWs as compared to mid and lower-end stores in Causeway Bay Hong Kong and downtown Kuala Lumpur. Since the purchasing power of FDWs in each city differs, we see that Filipino FDWs in Kuala Lumpur are more welcomed than Indonesian FDWs in Causeway Bay despite FDWs' higher salary in Hong Kong. Clearly, perception of the gathered groups as obstacles or customer traffic is dependent on the FDWs' purchasing power.

Institutional support mostly originate in religious institutions and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in the cities. Religious institutions and NGOs provide different types and levels of support to FDWs in the gathering space. Filipino FDWs in Central Hong Kong receive the strongest support from churches and officers such as the Catholic priest, Fr. Robert Reyes, who offers religious services on the streets of Central. Second in line are Filipino FDWs in Kuala Lumpur who gather in the immediately outside of St. John's Cathedral. Here, church administrators express their sensitivity towards FDWs' gathering on their church grounds by providing better toilet facilities to avoid conflict between FDWs and other church members. Next are Filipino FDWs in Singapore who receive little if any support from churches which are both physically and meta-physically removed from the FDW gathering spaces along Orchard Road. Finally, Indonesian FDWs in Causeway Bay Hong Kong not only receive no support from Islamic institutions in the city, but even Muslim leaders have actively opposed initiatives to provide religious facilities such as a 'women only mosque' for FDWs in the area (Clem, 2006a).

The level of religious institutional support experienced by FDWs is strongly related to

the foothold of the religious establishments in the city. For example, due to the extended British rule, Christian institutions have a much longer and stronger presence in Hong Kong, allowing them to provide better support for the dominant Christian Filipino FDWs in the city. This level of support is not seen in the religiously and politically constricted Singapore as well as the Muslim dominant community in Kuala Lumpur. Similarly, since the large concentration of Muslim females is a recent phenomenon in Hong Kong, Islamic institutions in the city have yet to understand or develop strategies to meet FDWs' needs. This has resulted in the comparatively weaker support and occasional conflict between FDWs and Islamic institutions in the city.

NGOs in Hong Kong have been supporting FDW activities in both Central and Causeway Bay since the Battle of Chater Road in 1992. NGOs today such as Bayanihan Trust and Passi City (Iloilo) Association assume the task of organizing events to enrich the activities and physical spaces of FDW gathering spaces (Lau, 2008). On the other hand, in more resistive cities such as Singapore, NGOs such as United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics (HOME) and Transient Workers Count Two (TWC2) are busy advocating day offs for all FDWs in the city through the Day Off Campaign (BBC, 2006). While the efforts of NGOs in Hong Kong and Singapore do directly or indirectly relate to FDW gathering spaces, NGOs in Kuala Lumpur are more occupied with issues related to FDW abuse cases and have not initiated efforts to advocate FDWs' day offs or their public space consumption in the city.

Features	Hong Kong		Singapore		Kuala Lumpur	
	Central	Causeway Bay	Orchard Road	St. Johns Cathedral		
Nationality	Filipino	Indonesian	Filipino	Filipino		
Year of Entry	1970	1990	1970	1980		
Number of FDWs in the City	140,000	110,000	100,000	6,000		
Security Bond / Fee	N/A	N/A	USD 3282 (SGD 5000)	USD 150 (RM750)		
Maid Levy per month	USD 51 (HKD 400)	USD 51 (HKD 400)	USD 174 (SGD 265)	USD 27 (RM100)		
Average Salary	USD 450 (HKD 3,670)	USD 260 (HKD 2,000)	USD 229 (SGD 350)	USD 200 (RM 760)		
Average Day Off per month	4	2.6	1	2		
Percentage with Off Days	100%	94%	75%	80%		
Commercial Hub	WorldWide Plaza	Sugar Street	Lucky Plaza	Kota Raya		
Average Official Age	33	27	35	30		
Minimum Age	25	18	23	25		
Male to Female Ratio	3:97	6:94	3:22	71:29		
City Density (persons per km ²)	6,420	6,420	6,814	5,500		
Placement fee on FDW	USD 450	USD 1827 (IDR21,000,000)	USD 229 (SGD 350)	USD 200 (RM 760)		
Length of stay	8	5	6	>1		
Total FDWs in City	226,000	226,000	150,000	330,000 (Malaysia)		
Percentage Earning Saved	80%	61%	80%	75%*		
Monthly Personal Expenditure	USD 90	USD 104	USD 46	USD 50(RM200)		
Purchasing Power (Meal/ Expendable Income)	5.56%	4.81%	6.52%	2.00%		
Ratio Filipinos to Indonesian FDWs	14:11	14:11	4:3	1:18		

Table 6.1: General Information of FDWs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia

Second Degree Factors Influencing FDWs' Use of Public Space

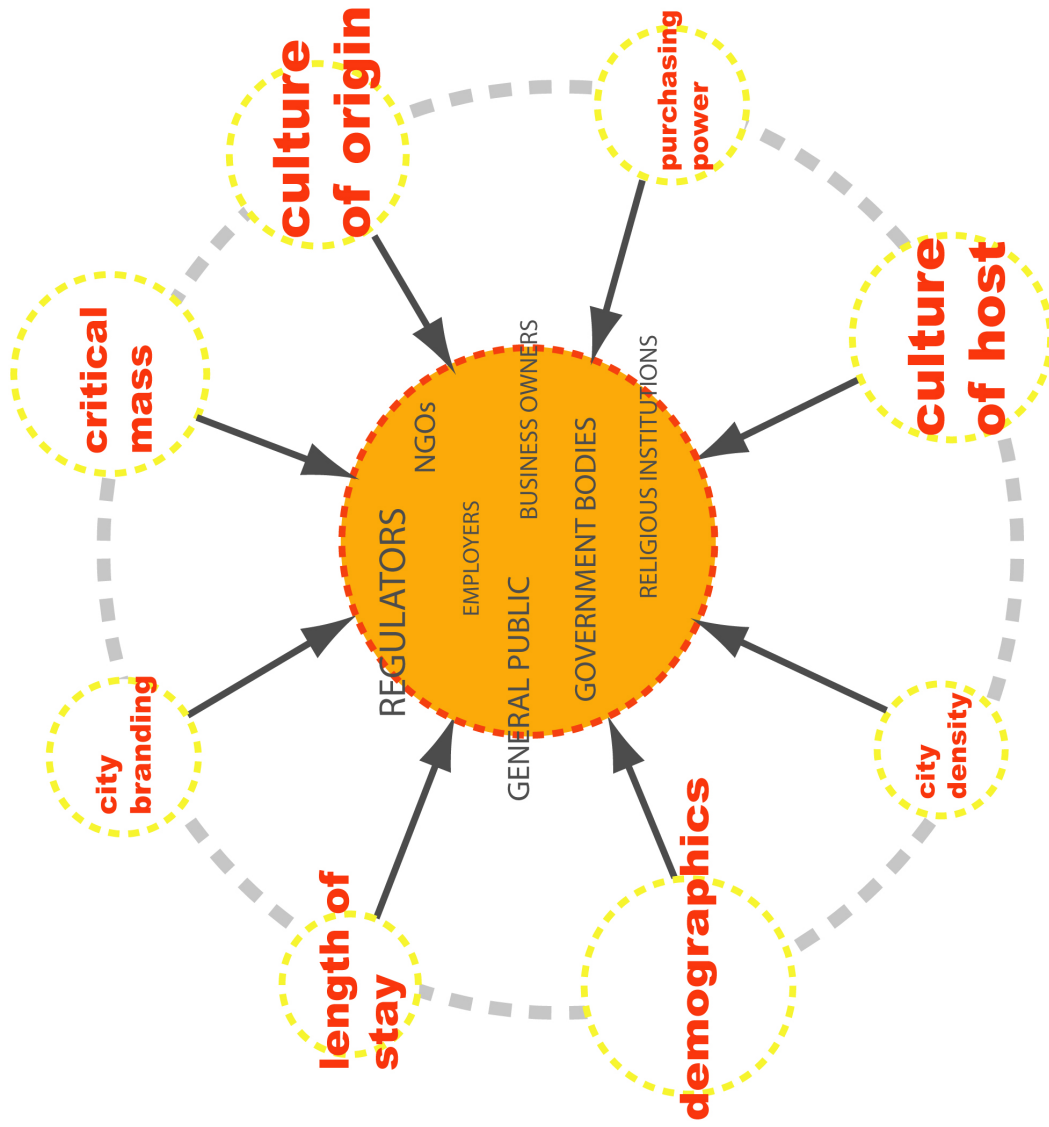


Figure 6.9: Second degree influential factors on FDWs' use of public space

6.3 Second Degree Influential Factors

In the previous sections, we compared the physical features and the role of different stakeholders in shaping the FDW gathering spaces. In addition to these factors, there are also indirect influences that shape and influence both the stakeholders and the physical FDW gathering space itself. Here, we refer to these influences as ‘second degree factors.’ From the four case studies, I have identified eight main second degree factors, namely FDWs’ demographics, FDWs’ length of stay in the host city, culture of FDWs’ place of origin, culture of host city, host city branding, host city density, FDWs’ purchasing power and critical mass. These factors are shown in Figure 6.9 and detailed in Table 6.1.

6.3.1 Demographic Characteristics

As seen in the case studies of Hong Kong, FDW groups of different demographic characteristics result in highly contrasting spatial configurations and dynamics within these public spaces. Details of the demographic characteristics of each group are given in Table 6.1. Firstly, even though both Filipino and Indonesian FDWs occupy public spaces for private activities, we saw that the younger Indonesian FDWs are less likely to ‘recreate home’ as compared to the older Filipino FDWs. Instead of being a replica of Indonesia, Causeway Bay Hong Kong is a venue where FDWs are allowed to behave and carry out activities that they cannot back in Indonesia. As a result, the spatial organization in Causeway Bay Hong Kong is based on special interests such as dancing and political activist groups instead of the regional and dialect associations seen in Central Hong Kong. Secondly, the younger age of Indonesian FDWs coupled with their lack of formal and sex education also make them more vulnerable targets of male predators in the city. This results in the ring of males seen surrounding Victoria Park, which consists of males attracted to the area and policemen who

are present as a preventive measure. This configuration is absent in Central where the more matured and urbanized Filipino FDWs are more skilled at protecting themselves from the ‘dangers’ of the city. Thirdly, the younger and less educated FDWs are less experienced in financial management, making them more aggressive consumers as compared to their Filipino counterparts despite their lower average salary. This results in the stronger commercial presence and activity in Causeway Bay Hong Kong. Indonesian FDWs’ habit of purchasing picnicking essentials, such as takeout food and plastic picnicking sheets, instead of bringing them from home also produces larger amounts of litter and trash as compared to Central Hong Kong. Lastly, Indonesian FDWs’ rural background does not prepare them for certain regulations of civic behavior in urban settings. Some FDWs do not understand the consequences of littering or illegal hawking in these foreign cities, which not only stresses the urban management services in these public spaces but can also result in severe consequences on the part of FDWs. This is also shown in the case of an Indonesian FDW who was jailed for six weeks for selling a HKD 10 lunch boxes in Victoria Park (Benitez, 2004a). While age and education affect the FDW behavior in public space, these factors also determine FDWs’ chances of obtaining day offs in some cities. In Kuala Lumpur, employers grant Filipino FDWs their stipulated day offs but deny Indonesian FDWs the same right, using the Indonesians’ age and relative vulnerability in urban settings as reasons behind this discriminatory approach.²

6.3.2 Culture

In the process of accommodating large numbers of FDWs in a city, cultural differences between FDWs’ place of origin and the host city also motivate stakeholders to undertake different positions in the space negotiation process. This effectively alters FDWs’ spatial experience in the gathering space. In particular, differences with respect to the independence

²Interview with Joyce Chow, Zara’s employer

of women in public spaces in both the receiving and sending societies complicate efforts to standardize policies and strategies in dealing with FDW rights and needs in gathering spaces within different cities. Because the Phillipines and Hong Kong practice similar cultural norms regarding women in public spaces, Filipino FDWs are able to behave as they normally do back in the Phillipines without much resistance. This cultural similarity also introduces fewer cultural conflicts between the sending and receiving societies. On the other hand, Indonesian FDWs, especially those from rural backgrounds, originate from a far more repressive cultural background in regard to women's independence in public spaces. Back at home, it is not possible for young Indonesian FDWs to frequent karaoke establishments, night clubs, shopping malls and even public parks without the supervision of family members. It is even more uncommon for lesbian FDWs to declare their unorthodox sexuality and display their affections publicly as they do in Victoria Park. According to Indonesian FDWs, "they would be killed by their mother if she knew they behaved this way and visited these places" (Ma, 2006). Recently, the level of protectionism of young women in Indonesia has heightened. In the town of Tangerang 35km West of Jakarta, "women can now be arrested as prostitutes just for being out alone in public spaces (after dark)" (Chew, 2006). This difference in cultural practices is the reason behind the recent protest by Indonesian Parliamentary members against the perceived "casual lifestyle" and "unacceptable behavior" of Indonesian FDWs in Victoria Park (Ma, 2006). Not only are tens of thousands of women roaming around in public unsupervised and unprotected, but their unorthodox behavior is seen as a threat to the cultural norms back in Indonesia. In addition to cultural differences, the opportunity to consume also affects Indonesian FDWs' total remittance back to Indonesia. In a recent study, it is found that on average Indonesian FDWs only save 61% of her earnings as compared to 71% in Singapore and 77% in Malaysia (Rahman, 2007). Clearly, the spending of Indonesian FDWs might be correlated to the probability of their receiving day offs in each city. The Indonesian government's reactions show that policies and stan-

dards such as mandatory rest days welcomed by one sending country might not be favored by another. While the Indonesian consulate members cannot change FDW related policies in Hong Kong, they can increase their physical presence in these spaces by placing counselors to Victoria Park and organizing concerts and prayer sessions to ‘correct’ Indonesian FDWs’ behavior in public spaces (Ma, 2006). Malaysians are less conservative as compared to their Indonesian neighbors but nonetheless, the culture of male protectionism does exist to protect single young women. Young women in Kuala Lumpur are often supervised by family members when in public spaces. This similarity in cultural practices coupled with the relatively younger age and vulnerability of Indonesian FDWs in the city discourage Malaysian employers from granting FDWs day offs without supervision. On the other hand, matured or married women in Malaysia are not subjected to this level of protectionism. Therefore, Filipino FDWs in Kuala Lumpur are more likely to be allowed to explore the city unsupervised as compared to their Indonesian counterparts.

6.3.3 Branding

Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur are all ambitious cities striving to attain or maintain a global city status in the 21st century. The aggressive competition between cities calls for proactive city branding initiatives in order to attract both capital and talent into the respective cities. A popular strategy is to brand the city as a welcoming ‘cosmopolitan’ a welcoming place for global citizens. However, the term ‘cosmopolitan’ is often loosely defined in these city advertising campaigns to accommodate both the promotional agenda and cultural background in the city. Since the immediate period after its handover to China in 1997, Hong Kong was been eager to distinguish itself culturally and politically from China and to sustain its image as a democratic state. To carve this image, it attempts to realize cosmopolitanism in its truer sense by promoting a civic society that celebrates all differences

in the city instead of merely multiculturalism; a global place that is not ‘just another Chinese City.’ With the world at watch, Hong Kong is careful not to appear oppressive or to evoke the horrid memories of Tienanmen Square in China.³ Therefore, an inherent part of Hong Kong city branding is to distinguish itself from this memory of China’s public spaces, to prevent the memory of the Tienanmen incident to permanently change the dynamics of Hong Kong public spaces. These goals motivated the Hong Kong authorities’ accommodative strategies in dealing with public conflicts seen in the case of FDWs’ gathering spaces.

Singapore also strives to be a cosmopolitan city but only for the international elite. Its city branding goals are clearly iterated by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in a recent speech when he promised that

“in the 21st century, Singapore will be a great cosmopolitan city. A vibrant economy. Good jobs. Cultural liveliness. Artistic creativity. Social innovation. Good schools. World class universities. Technological advances. Intellectual discussion. Museums. Night-clubs and theatres. Good food. Fun places. Efficient public transport. Safe streets. Happy people.” (Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong; <http://www.mica.gov.sg/>).

This city branding strategy aligns with its image as the ‘air-conditioned’ city; an engineered, controlled and pristine city in which the “dirty, dangerous and difficult” low skilled migrant workers should preferably be invisible (Yeoh, 2004).⁴ In other words, Singapore would become a perfect cosmopolitan city for the elite and managerial talents of the world minus the low class, low skilled migrant workers whom the city builds itself upon.

³In the discussion of Tienanmen Square Herskhovitz note that “No matter how temporary the appropriation, or how permanently its traces are eradicated, the very fact of its existence, the memories and associations it evokes permanently changes the face of the place in which it occurred” (Law, 2002)(Herskhovitz, 1993). Law argues that the incident’s influence extends itself to Central Hong Kong

⁴A recent book by Cherian George (2000), a Singapore journalist, argues that Singapore is best likened to an air-conditioned nation designed first and foremost for the material comfort of its inhabitants by means of a highly fine-tuned, infrastructure-intensive, central control system (Yeoh, 2004)

These different city branding strategies and goals motivate authorities to undertake different positions and activities towards FDWs' gathering spaces in the city. Hong Kong authorities adopt an accommodative approach towards FDWs' in Central and Causeway Bay to reinforce the notion of the city as a truly cosmopolitan and advanced global civic place. On the other hand, Singaporean authorities continue to resist FDWs' participation in the public space to prevent them from polluting its 'social landscape' and tarnish its image as the developed and affluent world class city for the affluent (Yeoh and Huang, 1998). While Kuala Lumpur is too involved in their own city branding scheme, it is under significantly less pressure to behave in accordance with the standards of a global civic society. This is probably related to its lower ranking in the world city hierarchy, making it less visible to the international community ⁵

6.3.4 Density

Other conditions of the receiving city that influence the FDW space transformation process include the city density and FDWs' purchasing power within the respective cities. As previously mentioned, amongst the FDW groups studied, even though Filipino FDWs in Kuala Lumpur receive the lowest salary, they have the highest purchasing power amongst the groups studied, as shown in Table 6.1. In other words, Kuala Lumpur is more affordable to FDWs as compared to Singapore or Hong Kong. FDWs' ability to consume private spaces such as coffee houses, fast food chains and others might make them less likely to privatize public spaces to carry out similar activities. In an interview with Zara, a Filipino FDW in Kuala Lumpur, she mentioned her monthly habit of singing in a karaoke box. She reported that this service is popular amongst FDWs as it allows them to sing to their hearts' content

⁵World cities are ranked as alpha, beta and gamma cities in accordance to the producer-services such as financial and banking in the city. Hong Kong and Singapore are a alpha city whereas Kuala Lumpur is only a gamma city (Sassen, 1994)

for a small fee. A similar facility in Hong Kong would not be affordable to most FDWs. While FDWs need to locate alternative venues to carry out their activities in expensive cities, similar activities can be carried out in private spaces. This makes FDW gathering spaces in inexpensive cities less interesting, featuring less diverse programs in the gathering space.

Amongst the three cities studied, Kuala Lumpur is the only city that is not on an island. Kuala Lumpur has a significantly lower population density of 5,500 persons per square km² as compared to the highly dense island cities of Hong Kong and Singapore, where each boasts a population density of approximately 6,500 (Table 6.1). Non-island cities, in general, do not have the spatial pressure that is found in island cities. The larger space allows the general public and FDWs to occupy different public spaces, resulting in less conflict between the two groups. The separate spatial consumption also lowers the need for authorities to accommodate the needs of different groups within the same area. Unfortunately, this also keeps the general public in Kuala Lumpur ignorant of the phenomenon of FDWs' Sunday gatherings. Besides the actual use of public spaces, island communities also perceive public spaces differently from non-island communities. Because space is seen as a scarce commodity in island communities, large-scale public space colonization by FDWs might evoke a sense of defensiveness amongst the general public. Traces of this behavior are found in public debates in the Hong Kong and Singapore media, where some residents voice strong oppositions over the gatherings even though they do not personally utilize these public spaces. While the effects of this island psychology are unclear, the lack of confrontation and spatial conflict in low density cities like Kuala Lumpur appears to retard the process of accommodating FDWs in the city.

6.3.5 Turnover

The FDW gathering space is not only affected by the conditions of the receiving city and the characteristics of the FDW groups. More interestingly, these places are also influenced by the dynamic flow of domestic labor in the region. In particular, we see that the length of stay and number of FDWs in each city, which are determined by the regional forces of supply and demand, affect the FDWs' sense of ownership, usage and occupancy patterns in the gathering space. In Hong Kong, Indonesian FDWs' length of stay in the city is significantly shorter than that of Filipino FDWs, where Indonesian FDWs only stay for five years while Filipino FDWs stay on average for eight years (ADB, 2006). This trend is related to the conditions of supply and demand of domestic labor in the region. Since Filipino FDWs are better educated, they are more capable of landing their first employment in higher paying cities such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. Indonesian FDWs, on the other hand, are normally first placed in Malaysia and then to Singapore to gain 'working experience' before earning the opportunity to work in Hong Kong. In a recent survey, it is found that 45% of Indonesian FDWs in Hong Kong have previously worked in Malaysia or Singapore (AMC, 2004).⁶ As a result, the Indonesian FDWs' experience abroad is spread across two or three cities throughout her employment as a domestic worker. The short experience in each city coupled with the lower average number of day offs result in a higher 'resident turnover' in the Indonesian gathering spaces. This turnover weakens the communal strength and sense of ownership within these spaces and limits the groups' ability to sustain and support special interest activities. Nonetheless, while the Indonesian FDW gathering space appears less permanent as compared to the Filipino town in Central Hong Kong, it is far more established than the Filipino FDW gathering spaces in Orchard Road Singapore. The number

⁶It is also important to note that working in higher paying cities not only increases FDWs' income but also boosts their 'maid resume'. FDWs with work experience from Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan command approximately 10% higher salary than those with work experience from Malaysia or the Middle East (www.maidcity.com)

of Indonesian FDWs in Hong Kong is comparable to Filipino FDWs in Singapore, where each group totaled a staggering figure of 100,000 in 2008. However, due to day off policies, there are currently approximately 60,000 Indonesian FDWs gathering in Hong Kong's public spaces and only 25,000 Filipino FDWs in Singapore on any given Sunday.⁷ The smaller net number of FDWs in Singapore's public space could explain their weaker resistance against their displacement from Orchard Park and plazas in Singapore. Perhaps, a critical number of FDWs are needed before sufficient negotiation power can be derived to defend these spaces from authorities and business owners. Besides power relationships, the number of FDWs also affect the transformation of the space as well as the activities carried out in the area. For example, the lower net number of FDWs at St. John's Cathedral Kuala Lumpur reduces the opportunity for singers, dancers and other special interest groups to congregate. It also fails to generate the interesting spatial organization logic seen in FDWs gathering spaces in Hong Kong and Singapore.

The effects of second degree influential factors are indirect but important in shaping FDW gathering spaces. However, their presence is not always apparent or observable in the physical space, making it difficult to identify these influences independently. Fortunately, through a comparison study, the characteristics of these factors begin to surface, making it possible to gain a stronger understanding of their impacts on the spatial transformation process in public spaces.

⁷There are 38.4% of Filipino FDWs who receive one day off per month and 29.1% who receive two days off per month in Singapore (Yeoh and Huang, 1998) In Hong Kong, 39.1% of Indonesian FDWs receive two days off per month and 39.1% receive 4 days off per month (Sim, 2007)(AMC, 2004)

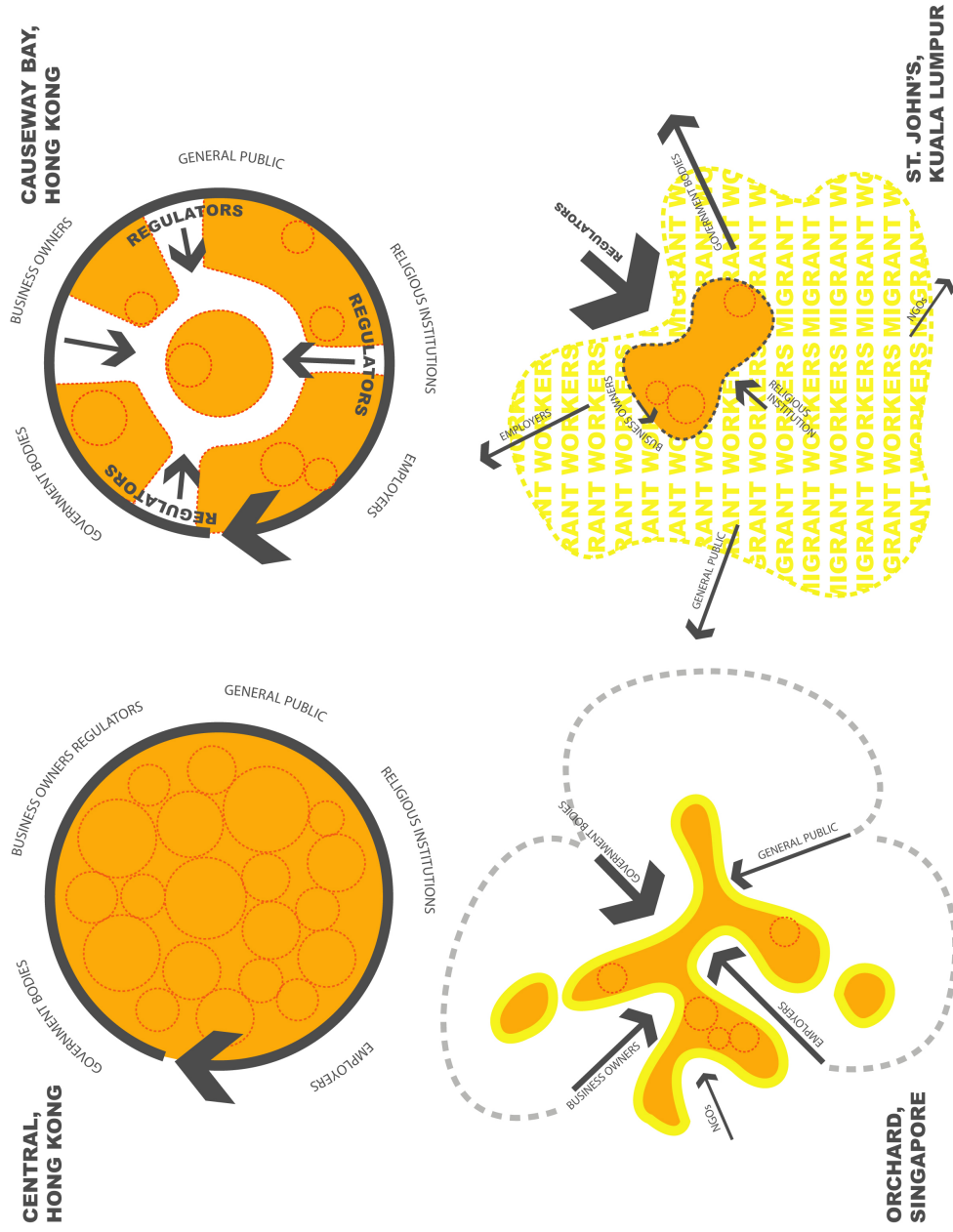


Figure 6.10: Spatial Configuration of FDW Gathering Spaces in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur

6.4 Spatial Configuration Comparison

At the end of each chapter, I summarized the spatial dynamics of the case studies in a simple diagram. Here, I compare and contrast these spatial products by aggregating these diagrams in Figure 6.10. From the diagrams, we see that the FDW gathering spaces in Hong Kong is both limited and protected by a strong boundary. This boundary is formed through the support and accommodation of other stakeholders in the city. On the contrary, the FDW gathering space in Singapore is an ever-changing amoeba whose shape and form depends on the resistive force exerted by the stakeholders who refuse to accommodate their presence in the city. Finally, the FDW gathering space in Kuala Lumpur mimics an egg yolk of a fried egg as it is a subset of another layer of migrant workers in the city. The space receive little or no support from other groups, giving it a weak boundary that is easily shaped by regulators in the city.

The diagrams also show the the behavior and FDW gathering characteristics within these spaces. In Central Hong Kong, the different sized groups of FDWs are internally organized according to the region of their origin or dialect, generating a highly logical spatial distribution pattern that help organize the FDWs in the space. Causeway Bay Hong Kong also shows some signs of self-organization where special interest groups are located in specific areas in Victoria Park. This is also the only case study where regulators take on the responsibility of physically organizing FDWs within the gathering space. While spatial organization in Hong Kong is a product of the FDWs' use of public space, FDWs' location in Singapore is dependent on other stakeholders in the space, where FDWs have no choice but to gather in the pockets of public spaces that they could find. Finally, the gathering space in Kuala Lumpur is too small to subdivide into a clear spatial organizational pattern even though Filipino FDWs as a whole act as a subgroup in the migrant community.

Through the comparison of these diagrams, it is clear that Hong Kong has reached the

‘accommodation’ stage in the process of managing FDWs’ use of public space in the global city. Judging from its accommodative strategies and its continuous effort to search for appropriate approaches in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong is clearly experienced and willing host to these marginalized groups in its public spaces. On the contrary, Singapore remains in the ‘resistance’ stage of this process. Not only does the city continue to restrict the physical spaces that FDWs occupy in Singapore, but it has also continues to exert control over the space remotely by instigating bias policy measures. Kuala Lumpur, on the other hand, is stagnant in the stage of ‘ignorance’ where most stakeholders are still unaware of this phenomenon in their backyard. Considering the spatial layout of the city and the dwindling number of Filipino FDWs in the city, this phenomenon might not survive to proceed to either the ‘resistance’ or ‘accommodation’ stages.

6.5 Conclusion

Our examination and observation of the different case studies have found that the physical characteristics of the public spaces consumed by FDWs in all three cities are generally similar, with few varying attributes in terms of facilities and relative location within the city. The study has also found that FDWs not only perform similar activities but also have the same wants and needs across all three cities. Despite the common attributes of both the environment and subjects, the three case studies exhibit contrasting patterns of public space consumption by FDWs on Sundays. Through careful analysis, the author concludes that these differences are a result of the different strategies in which the cities currently adopt in dealing with the large numbers of FDWs in their public spaces. The three different strategies are ignorance, resistance and accommodation. While these are active positions in which the city undertakes, they are also stages of adaptation in dealing with a significant change in the social composition of society within the public space. Hong Kong was a case study that

underwent all three stages before arriving at the stage of accommodation. That being said, our analysis has found that the stage of accommodation is not merely a factor of time but highly dependent on other factors such as influential actors within in the host city.

While there is a large number of different parties that plays a part in shaping the public space, we found that government bodies of receiving cities have the strongest influence in changing the overall strategy towards FDWs' consumption of public spaces and subsequently their consumption pattern within these spaces. In our case studies, we saw that cities that adopt policies and regulations that are more accommodative to FDWs are more likely to form a public space with less conflict and less management issues as compared to cities that adopt a more resisting approach. In particular, we found that government bodies which express their accommodative approach through the establishment of physical boundaries are very successful since the act signals an informal recognition of FDW's temporary occupancy of an area, therefore increasing their sense of ownership within these public spaces.

Even though the "sense of ownership" is abstract and cannot be objectively measured, we found it to be a strong factor in this phenomenon, resulting in significant differences in patterns of consumption within different cities. Spaces where FDWs have a strong sense of ownership exhibit an internal logic of real estate permanence, underlying rules of privacy as well as a shared sense of responsibility towards their weekly "home". The contrary is observed in spaces where FDWs feel unwelcomed or expect constant displacement. As a result, regulators found that spaces exclusive to FDWs require less maintenance than those areas where FDWs are required to share the public space with local residents. During interviews with FDWs in different cities, FDWs expressed the ideal facilities they hope to have in the public spaces that they visit on their rest days. While they detailed their need for facilities such as restrooms, hard floor surfaces and shade, most felt that it is most important for cities to provide FDWs with a secure space where they can gather and relax without harassment.

While most of the arguments presented in this chapter have been explicitly and implic-

itly stated in previous chapters, a comparison of the features analyzed in FDW gathering spaces further highlights the similarities and differences in the characteristics observed in each space. The comparison not only increased my understanding of each space but revealed the importance of second degree influential factors across the cities, thus revealing the regional forces that influence these transnational public spaces. Through these analyses, I gained a stronger understanding of the varying degree of influence that different factors impose on the public space in each city, showing that transnational public spaces that host dynamic phenomenons such as FDWs' gatherings cannot be easily summarized, generalized and standardized in all global cities.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

“That is where we make friends. We gather at the place that we met for the very first time. It has a special place in our heart.” (Law, 2005)

Traditionally, international labor migration is a tangible process where the individual or group is first detached from the physical and social place of origin and then reattached to the landscape and social network in the place of arrival. The process involves the construction of a ‘home’ in the foreign place, a spatial act of settlement that allows the migrant to develop the necessary social and physical needs to survive in the new environment. Without a ‘home’, the FDW cannot complete her migration process which leaves her detached physically, socially and emotionally from both her place of origin and place of arrival. However, FDWs’ working conditions deny her the opportunity to construct a ‘home’ in the traditional sense. Therefore, we see an emerging new phenomenon where FDWs have begun colonizing public spaces on their days off to construct their ‘home away from home’.

FDWs’ need for a ‘home’ in a foreign city receives strong recognition in Hong Kong. Most local interviewees during the observation study were quick to note that “FDWs need a place to go to meet friends and family, just like everybody else”. Perhaps this understanding has allowed Hong Kong to emerge as the most successful city in accommodating FDWs in the

region. Not only have the city instigated day off policies that provide FDWs the opportunity to consume public spaces but the city has also supported the spatial needs of FDWs as they transform public spaces into temporary homes on Sunday. Their accommodative policies is highly praised and appreciated by FDWs. In almost all my interviews in Hong Kong, FDWs have noted the benevolence of Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank and the City Government in allowing them to occupy public spaces on Sundays. Hong Kong's policies are famous amongst FDWs in the region, where FDWs in Singapore and Malaysia also speak of the opportunities in Hong Kong with envy.¹ While the positive effects of Hong Kong's accommodative approach are immeasurable, it is clear that FDWs derive much joy from having a place that they can call 'home'.

Unlike Hong Kong that prefers to manage the chaos and complexities in the city in a *laissez faire* manner, Singapore's solution to unwanted features is often a campaign of 'suppress and remove' to retain the city's pristine order. Instead of understanding the basic needs of FDWs in the city, employers and the general public are often quoted saying that "they (FDWs) are here to work, not to socialize" (DOC, 2009). Statements like this shows that FDWs are considered first and foremost not as employees but washing machines, vacuum cleaners and dishwashers. This mentality has stemmed the widespread denial of FDWs of their days off and consequentially their construction of 'homes away from home' in the city. By denying them space in the city, Singapore exerts control over FDWs' social behavior. This strategy robs FDWs the opportunity to assume their other identities as mother, sister, wife, daughter and friend and reduces them ultimately to 'the maid'. With no physical spatial footprints on the city's landscape, they become an invisible force that turns the wheels of development; they become 'ghost workers'. Singapore's mission to suppress this migrant need to 'settle' will soon prove unsustainable and even disastrous as the city becomes more diverse and further linked to communities of different income, race and religion around the

¹Interview with Cecile and Cita

world.

On the surface, Malaysia's attitude towards FDWs is far worse than Singapore, where only 5% of their FDWs are allowed to enjoy days off and to consume public spaces. Even so, their construction of 'homes' in the public space is considerably weaker than that observed in Singapore or Hong Kong. On the other hand, in considering the need to provide the FDW with social and emotional supports to survive in the foreign city, FDWs in Malaysia might fair better than its counterparts in Singapore. Similarities in language, food, religion, cultural norms and race allow the Indonesian FDW to construct her 'home' in her employer's household. The challenge is thus to transcend the barriers of education, class and nationality, which cause worrying Indonesian FDW abuse cases in Malaysia. If the FDWs can be successfully assimilated socially in the employer's family, is there a need for a separate 'home away from home' in the public space?

Through this thesis, I have gained a stronger understanding of the relationship between spatial and social needs of global nomads such as FDWs around the world. The spatial social consequence and circumstances of FDWs are unique and complex, requiring different strategies and approaches depending on a variety of factors including the characteristics of the FDWs and the cities that host them. As I write the final sentences of this thesis, I wonder if these FDW gathering spaces can be planned, designed and constructed in the traditional sense. Nonetheless, with the current exponential growth of transnational foreign domestic labor in the region and world, cities can soon no longer ignore or resist FDWs' spatial needs in these cities. Hopefully, with the lessons learned from Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, planners will be able to contrive sustainable humanitarian strategies in accommodating foreign female domestic workers in globalizing cities around the world.

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