

Migrant Networks and Gender Issues Among Migrant *Nayu* Workers to Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper examines how gender relations influence and are influenced by migrant networks. It argues that within migrant networks there are differences that exist between men, “Kathoeys” (transgendered persons or effeminate gay males in Thailand), and women in terms of their positions in the networks and their access to networks that exist separately for men, Kathoeys, and women on the basis of sexual difference. In addition to the gender structures of the migrant networks, the spatial patterns of male, Kathoeys, and female workers and their leisure time after work are examined.

Keywords: Migrant Networks, Gender, Migrant Workers, Malaysia

1. Introduction

The majority of international labor migration studies on Thai workers focus on the economic aspects of migration. This literature shows that economic aspects are major determinants of migration. However, economic factors alone are insufficient to explain migration and the behavior of individuals during the process of migration. There are important reasons why scholars need to understand both economic and noneconomic factors from an interactive and interdisciplinary perspective at the macro level (the role of the state), meso level (social relations and ties between individuals), and micro level (individual motivations and experiences). Migration is affected by social and cultural factors as well; hence, it is important to draw attention to these factors too (Hugo 1981).

In addition, informal migrant networks play a significant role in the migratory

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process. These networks provide resources for the migratory process and link migrants and nonmigrants together both within and between origin and destination countries (Massey, Alarcon et al. 1987; Gurak and Caces 1992). This network approach is interdisciplinary and is based on an analysis of the social relations and ties between individuals along the migration path. It also includes the historical aspects of migration between countries in a particular geographical region. However, to date, studies of migration networks have not shed much light on gender relations. In particular, studies have not focused on migration between Southeast Asian countries.

In addition, Thai migration studies, with a few exceptions, fail to significantly examine gender relations. Studies regarding Thai migrant workers have mostly focused on migrant workers in general (Warm Singh 1998; Chantavanich, Germershausen et al. 2001; Hewison 2004) or on male migrant workers (Wong 2000; Kitiarsa 2006). Although international migrants are still predominantly male, the number of female workers who work outside the country is growing as migration becomes increasingly feminized. Studies have paid attention to the general aspects and problems of international migration. Some have focused on female migrants in order to explain female migration (Wille 2001; Ruenkaew 2002; Klanarong 2003), but they have not examined gender relations for either female or male migrants, and little attention has been paid to the differences between men and women that are set up by social and cultural forces. In short, past studies have tended to be blind to the gendered practices inscribed in power, access to resources, and the sexual division of labor, and to the gendered nature of decision making.

*Nayu*¹ migration flows to Malaysia are not a new phenomenon: there has been cross-border mobility of family and relatives throughout history, both before British colonialism and after Malaysian independence. In 1940, during the British period, there was an agreement that allowed traffic between British Malaya and Thailand. Since Malaysian independence and the increase in economic growth in Malaysia, there have been flows of low-skilled workers from deep southern Thailand to meet Malaysia's labor demands, especially in the low-paid service sectors of the economy, which in turn has led to an increase in *Nayu* irregular migration. This study involves an investigation of *Nayu* irregular workers from deep southern Thailand, and their border crossing to Malaysia, which shapes their experiences as temporary workers.

In filling these gaps, the paper provides a detailed ethnographic investigation of migrant workers from deep southern Thailand who work in Malaysia. It examines the social and cultural context of international labor migration and provides a greater understanding of two key social and cultural elements in international migration—migrant networks and gender relations. The objective of this paper is to investigate the operation of migrant networks among *Nayu* migrant workers, with a particular focus on Tom Yam

restaurants in Malaysia, which serve as the main source of employment for *Nayu* working in Malaysia. Migrant networks impact and are affected by gender relations, which are a principal factor shaping the social life of *Nayu* men and women.

2. Data Collection

This study uses an ethnographic approach to understand social reality on its own terms, based on the understanding of the participants themselves and on observations of their interactions in natural settings (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). Ethnographic methods allowed me to access the inner reality of human experience because they emphasize the importance of examining social phenomena from the point of view of the participants. Moreover, Fetterman (1998) and Berg (2004) recommend using a variety of methods to gather data because it encourages rigor. All research methodologies have their limitations, but by using a variety of methods, the negative effects of each can be minimized. Accordingly, this study obtained primary data via in-depth interviews, but I also studied documents and used direct observation.

The snowballing interview technique was important because a large majority of the *Nayu* workers was working irregularly, and hence, were unauthorized. Given that there were no records on irregular workers to be used as a sampling frame, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is a sampling procedure that engages a few respondents who meet the criteria and who accidentally come into contact with the researcher, and it takes perspectives from different respondents. Snowballing would also help me uncover and effectively delineate the networks that these workers are a part of. I identified five key characteristics, which I used to select my purposive sample: (1) I wished to exclude seasonal workers, and therefore, decided that respondents must have lived and worked in Malaysia for one year or more; (2) they must come from the deep southern provinces of Thailand (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, and Songkhla); (3) they must be *Nayu* who speak Malay dialect; (4) they must be currently work in Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur, the main occupation of Thai workers; and (5) they must be irregular workers. I specifically wanted to study networks of irregular workers not those of documented workers or employers. The respondents were asked to further recommend people who would meet the purposive criteria. Finally, I conducted interviews with sixty workers and their employers based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, between November 2008 and April 2009.

3. Findings

In Thailand, as elsewhere, patriarchy dominates other social relations, restricting women to the household and limiting their access to the public sphere. Women in the household, particularly single daughters, are not independent of the rule of the father. The traditional system of the father's authority in the household rules more over single women than over young men. As patriarchal relations dominate personal life, single daughters are not free to choose to migrate. Unlike single men, the migration decisions of women occur within the traditional patriarchal system of gender roles that dictate that women should stay in the household with their parents. This gives men access to the public sphere and restricts women to the private realm, and thus, men also control women's access to the migration process and to paid work in Malaysia. Studies of international workers have established that making the decision to migrate to work overseas is different for men and women. Male migrants make their own decisions to migrate to work overseas, whereas female migrants are not as independent when it comes to making decisions to migrate because of their family's restrictions on their movements (Klanarong 2009; Rudnick 2009).

The Gendered Nature of Migrant Networks

Migrant networks play an important role in migration to Malaysia, and men and women are likely to access different networks when they first migrate. Men are offered help for their trip, through their multiple social ties, from men and women who are family members and from relatives, friends, villagers, and restaurant owners. In contrast, almost all women receive help only from very close contacts in Thailand, such as relatives who have experienced work in Malaysia. Although all women make their own decision to migrate, they need permission from their parents, because the migration journey and social life in Malaysia are regarded as risky for women. Normally, parents allow them to migrate only with people with whom they have close ties and in whom they have a high level of trust.

Experienced migrants must agree to accompany and take responsibility for new women migrants during migration so that their parents will trust them and allow their daughters to go there with them. In addition, those who offer them work sometimes allow the women's parents to travel to Malaysia with them in order to protect them from risks during migration. However, a few women receive help to cross the border from people who are not close relatives, such as friends and restaurant owners from their villages. This is a big deal for these women, for they risk refusal from their parents. In this respect, a nonrelative who has power and is respected in the village must ask permission from the

parents. Mostly, this mission is done by female *Nayu* restaurant owners who, while asking for permission, have to guarantee the safety of the daughters in Malaysia. The more trustworthy the person is, the higher the chances are that the parents will allow their daughters to migrate with nonrelatives.

Male migrants, in contrast, can receive help from a variety of social contacts in the migrant networks. They enter the migration process through any social tie that can offer them help when they need it. Consequently, male workers have more opportunities to enter the labor market in Malaysia when jobs are available. It is easier to persuade men than women to become migrant workers. There is no need for a third person to ask permission from their parents, as men themselves tend to ask permission from their families when they receive an offer to cross the border. Male migrants' networks include friends, villagers, and restaurant owners who do not necessarily have close or strong relationships with their families. Usually their parents are not worried about the person with whom their sons are going to migrate with because of the greater freedom men enjoy in both Malaysia and Thailand. They are not controlled and restricted by social norms and traditions like women are.

Male migrants can receive help from a variety of social contacts in their villages. This may be because men take part in activities outside the home. They meet up with friends at local coffee shops in the village and hang out in town, but women's activities are more confined to the household and neighborhood, as women are not allowed to go far away from their guardians. As Lertit (1992, p. 22) notes, "Malay Muslim women often stay at their homes, but the men have more chance to go into the public realm within and outside the villages."

This means that *Nayu* women receive less help from social contacts than men do, as men have a greater number of social contacts among friends and villagers than women do. In addition, the roles and status of women limit them to the home, and they are subordinate to family members, in particular, to the father and the husband. Nevertheless, women have developed strategies to work in Malaysia. They use social contacts with whom they have close relationships and who are more trusted by their families.

Women's Networks and Female Subordination

In their first migration, female workers tend to rely on strong female relationships. Like *Kathoeys*² workers, they have been drawn into the foreign labor market of Tom Yam businesses by other women. Almost all persons who offer women help to work in Malaysia are women from the same village who are restaurant owners or experienced migrant workers. These women make the proposal to work in Malaysia to women in their villages when they come back to visit their parents on holiday. Mostly the recruited women tend to

be family members. However, if nobody close to them is available, the recruiters then look for women in the villages who are unemployed. In some cases, female friends who are former migrant workers persuade nonmigrants to work in Malaysia. However, their friends who are the same age as they are do not have enough credibility in their parents' eyes and usually are not successful in persuading them. As a result, the friends of nonmigrant women have to go with female restaurant owners to ask for permission from the girls' parents.

Young nonmigrant men, however, are not dependent only on male migrant networks for their first migration to Malaysia. Any former migrant of any gender is able to offer them help to work in Malaysia. Nonmigrant men have multiple options to access the labor market in Malaysia. In addition, the people who offer them help can be the same age or even younger. Their opportunities are greater because, according to the perceptions of people in their culture, they face fewer risks by migrating and living far away from home. The multiple ties available to young men mean that a greater number of male than female migrants work in Malaysia.

Like young women migrants, Kathoey workers in their first migration to Malaysia have fewer opportunities to receive help than male workers do. However, they still have some labor market opportunities in Malaysia. All of them that I spoke with were offered a job by women restaurant owners who were relatives, and they followed villagers who knew them. These restaurant owners are not upset by the sexual identities of the Kathoey workers whom they employ. Like most young male migrants, after they were invited to migrate and work in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia, they made the decision by themselves without asking permission from their parents.

There is a strong demand for cheap labor in Malaysia, and there is a special demand for Nanyu workers in Tom Yam restaurants because Thai *Halal* cuisine is served, and the workers must be Muslim and must have Thai national identity to cook and serve Thai cuisine. Nanyu workers play a significant role in the Tom Yam restaurants in which their "Thai-ness" transcends their gender. The demand for workers in the Thai Halal food business in Malaysia draws Nanyu migrants into the labor force in Malaysia, irrespective of their gender.

Although the traditional Nanyu social and cultural norms control women within the household and village, the high demand for Nanyu workers encourages female Nanyu to obtain work away from their households. Almost all Nanyu workers are invited to work, but this is particularly so for female and Kathoey Nanyu workers. Young women and Kathoey workers are more dependent on gender-based migrant networks than their male counterparts are. They rely almost exclusively on other women with whom they are closely connected. Female Nanyu workers use these migrant networks strategically to seek work in Tom Yam

restaurants away from their villages where they are unemployed or work as unpaid labor in the home. Social ties to migrant networks through close relatives and ties to *Nayu* women who are powerful and trustworthy help them negotiate the traditional social and cultural norms that restrict them to the household and block their access to the labor market and public life. Although both men and women *Nayu* use migrant networks for their first migration to Malaysia, female and Kathoey migrant networks are more significant for them because they are usually accompanied to Malaysia by close personal contacts and are more dependent on gender-based migrant networks when they arrive in Malaysia.

Gender, Networks, and Movement within Malaysia

Once they have settled in the new job, male workers move more frequently to find a new workplace within Malaysia than their female and Kathoey counterparts do. Men's access to labor market opportunities is still dependent on their peer networks there, but they tend to depend on them for information about available jobs and then they contact the owners of the possible restaurants themselves: they do not need to have their contacts working in the new restaurant. They are able to transfer to any restaurant where a position is available and in which they are content to work. When transferring, male workers tend to consider wages, job positions, and workplace locations. They do not worry so much about the dangers of staying in a new workplace in an unfamiliar environment.

When I was bored with working for the first shop, my friend called me and told me that someone needed a chef and gave me the phone number. I didn't know that guy first and my friend didn't know that guy as well because my friend got the information and contact from another friend. I had no idea how it would be, but I called that number to ask for information—where the job was and how much I would get So, I decided to quit my relative's restaurant and go to work there. [Single, Male]

However, female workers do not move as frequently as male workers do, despite their access to labor market opportunities through their networks in Malaysia. Migrant women differ from their male counterparts in that they do not use their networks to seek information about available jobs and contacts with restaurant owners no matter how many connections they have. Migrant women usually stay in their workplaces for a long time before they consider moving to a new workplace. Having close contacts in new workplaces is more important for migrant women. Almost all female migrants have their established contacts whom they trust and workers they are familiar with in new workplaces. Women

are thought to be at higher risk, and therefore, they need to establish close ties to protect themselves, which takes some time. Hence, moving within Malaysia is not easy for women. Despite the labor market opportunities available to them, female Nanyu workers are less prone to transfer to new workplaces than their male counterparts are.

Migrant men are not dependent on close male social ties for their first migration to Malaysia. However, it is different when moving to new workplaces within Malaysia, where both male and female migrants depend on gender-based peer ties. Small Tom Yam restaurants usually employ workers of the same gender, whereas larger restaurants have both female and male employees. However, even in mixed workplaces, workers tend to establish their closest social ties in their workplaces on a same-gender basis. After working for a while, both male and female workers have established their own networks within Malaysia, mostly made up of peers of the same gender and age, usually ex-workers from the same workplace or friends of friends. Their networks are able to provide them with information about jobs and contact details of restaurant owners when there are employment opportunities in Malaysia.

Kathoey workers also depend on their own gender-based peer ties for transferring to a new workplace within Malaysia. Transsexual migrants working in Malaysia depend on their friends of the same gender to find employment. Moreover, this group of migrant workers very strongly prefers working with their friends. When Kathoeyes go to work in Malaysia, they get to know new Kathoey friends through their Kathoey friends who are already working there. After they get to know each other and become close friends, they are likely to follow their Kathoey friends to find work together. It is not easy for a Kathoey to get a job in Malaysia. Teh (2008) found that most Malaysian transsexuals are unemployed, as they are not well accepted in Malaysian society, so Nanyu Kathoeyes nearly always depend on their Kathoey contacts for employment. Their contacts in the new workplace have already established that their new employers are open to employing them. In this study, two restaurants have Kathoey workers who openly display their sexual identity. Putra Tom Yam restaurant and Jaya Tom Yam restaurant both employ two Kathoeyes who are respondents in this study.

I have both Kathoey and women friends, but mostly I went to work with my close Kathoey friends. I met my Kathoey friends through other Kathoey friends who introduced us. The Kathoey friends of my Kathoey friends became my friends when we met each other. We would move to work together. I always move to work in another place with my Kathoey friends. When there is a job vacancy, I invite my Kathoey friends [who already work within Malaysia] to work with me. I came to work in this restaurant the first time with two Kathoey friends and then invited

another Kathoey friend to work here. Now, the three Kathoey friends work together with me in the same workplace. The shop owner asked my Kathoey friend to come to work with him at the Tom Yam restaurant here; so my friend invited me to work together. We always move together. It is not lonely, which is good because we cannot stay alone. We have to have Kathoey friends living together. [Single, Kathoey]

Kathoeys do not change jobs as frequently as young male migrants do, and they also differ from young female migrants in this respect. Malaysia is an Islamic country, and Muslim Malaysians make up fifty-one percent of the population. Kathoeys are discriminated against in employment in Malaysia. It is quite difficult for Kathoeys to work and live in Malaysia because homosexuality itself is considered irregular (Berman 2008), and gays and lesbians are not socially accepted in Malaysian society (Baba 2001; Teh 2008). Under The Minor Offences Act 1955, a person who is effeminate or who cross-dresses, like Kathoey workers, can be arrested by the police and fined. Further, if he is Muslim, he is also sent to the Syariah Court for offences against the Islamic law, for a fine or imprisonment or both (Teh 2008).

Kathoey workers in Malaysia are often doubly irregular—both as transsexuals and as irregular workers. Most work in the kitchen as a chef or kitchen hand. However, some Kathoey workers who are effeminate but do not cross-dress are able to work in other positions, as waiters, for example, because they do not display their femininity to the customers. In addition, some employers, such as the owner of Putra Tom Yam, employ Kathoeys but do not allow them to dress as women. They make them wear male clothing, not women's clothing, and hide their long hair. However, Jaya Tom Yam's owner accepts their "Kathoey-ness" even at work. By cross-dressing, applying cosmetics, and showing off their long hair, these Kathoeys come out as completely transsexual, but they seldom work in the front area of restaurants. To come out as transsexuals in Malaysia is difficult for *Nayu* Kathoey workers; even local gays in Malaysia, both Muslim and non-Muslim, seldom come out to family, friends, and their communities (Baba 2001; Teh 2008).

Both Islamic and Malay cultural norms in Malaysia do not welcome Kathoey behaviors and lifestyles. However, Kathoeys can obtain employment with some employers without harassment about their sexual identity. Some owners stipulate conditions for the employment of Kathoey workers. They may not allow them to cross-dress as females and wear make-up while working, or reveal that they are transsexuals other than in the kitchen, that is, not in front of customers. However, they are relatively free to display their own sexual identity after working hours and in their free time.

My working life was difficult because many people didn't like me because I am a Kathoey. Once, I worked at a Mama Tom Yam shop. The shop owner had me on probation for four months and paid me daily, but at last, he decided not to employ me because he thought that his customers didn't like me. They didn't like me because I am a Kathoey. In some shops where I worked, I was required to dress like a man. It was because of a religious principle that only a man or a woman could cook food. I was not either. Thus, when the customers saw me, they didn't like eating my food. The shop owners, then, wanted me to dress like a guy, or I could dress however I wanted but I had to remain in the kitchen. I had to stay only in there and stay away from the customers. For some of those shops, I couldn't do that. [Single, Kathoey]

Like both men and women workers, Kathoey workers get bored and lonely. They have very limited opportunities for leisure and recreation. They are at greater risk than heterosexual males if they venture out at night, and are more likely than women workers to be apprehended by the police when they travel to the border to renew their visas. To survive in Malaysia, Kathoey friends must work and live together.

Most workers, both men and women, were offered help from their kin in their first migration. Particularly in the case of women, they nearly always have to work with close relatives throughout their period of migration; therefore, they feel a lack of freedom in Malaysia. They have to ask permission from their relatives to visit friends in other places, to hang out with friends, or to return to Thailand. Female workers seek to move to work in other restaurants within Malaysia as a means to escape from their kin ties there. They are likely to move from their kin ties in their first restaurant to contacts in other restaurants. Interestingly, Nayu migrant women do not ask their parents for permission when they would like to move, but they inform their parents of their decision after they have already transferred to a new restaurant. They are afraid that their parents will not allow them to work in other restaurants without the company of their kin or close contacts whom their parents trust. Moving to work with peers without the permission of their parents is the Nayu women's strategy to become independent in their daily life. After they separate from their relatives in Malaysia, they are free to do things they want in their daily life, without the restriction of the social norms and traditions enforced by their parents and relatives. They are able to hang out with their friends, to visit their friends over night, and to have boyfriends.

I worked with my relative for two years Anyway, I didn't want to work there, as in my opinion, I was not independent. I needed to be independent and didn't want to be

under anyone's control. I just wanted to do whatever I wanted. Being with my relative, it was quite uncomfortable for me to do anything. [Single, Female]

Nayu workers' gender-based peer ties are mostly built in Malaysia. After they receive a job offer from another restaurant through these networks, women are likely to move to find freedom and to escape from the control of their close kin. After moving to work with their peers, they have more freedom in Malaysia, as they are far away from their relatives who have controlled their daily life. Men have more freedom in Malaysia even when they work with their close kin. After work, male *Nayu* are able to hang out with their friends overnight without having to ask permission from their kin. Men are thought to face less risk in the way they behave and live.

Helping New Migrant Workers

After newcomers have been working in Malaysia for a while, they become experienced migrant workers within established social networks, from which they get information about the labor market. Almost all new workers get offered a position through their migrant networks before following their social ties across the border to work. However, *Nayu* women workers are likely to be more careful than men in deciding whom they choose to help.

Male migrant workers tend to offer people from their villages help with migration and find jobs for them in Malaysia. As experienced male migrants have information about labor market opportunities from their employers, they are likely to make a job available to nonmigrants in their villages. Female *Nayu*, in contrast, are not likely to offer to help new migrants by getting them opportunities to work with them even though they could get a job for people from their village. In particular, single migrant women do not want to work with those coming from the same village, as they are afraid they might face restrictions on their social life in Malaysia. If experienced migrant women offer to help nonmigrants from the same village to work with them, they may be subject to gossip among the villagers. As *Nayu* social norms do not easily allow unsupervised single women far from their homes, they would not only be expected to act *in loco parentis* but also their own behavior would be open to (ill-informed) criticism.

These risks are real and high, because the single women who journey to work far away from parents who supervise their daily behavior frequently do not obey the social norms and customs as strictly as they did at home.

Fatimah: I brought a sixteen-year-old girl to work with me. I took that girl to get her passport and paid the fee for her. After working for one month, she mentioned

that she wanted to go home. I asked if she had come to work or just to travel. She replied that she had come to travel; so, I allowed her to go back home. I gave her money after I took out money for her passport and transport. I felt that it wouldn't be a good idea to keep this girl working for long, as only one week after starting work, this girl went to see a male worker in his room. And when this girl arrived home, she told her parents and villagers that I was not a good person and didn't treat her well. Then her parents believed their daughter. [Married, Female]

Single female Nanyu workers in Malaysia protect themselves from malicious talk by not offering to help nonmigrants from their village by getting them opportunities for work. However, male migrants are not so controlled when they are far away from home. As a result, men like to help nonmigrants from their villages obtain work with them because they do not have to fear gossip and social ostracism and they like to build their social networks because they realize that the more extensive their networks, the greater their opportunities for work and travel.

Although they help each other within Malaysia, Kathoey workers, in contrast, seldom assist in the process of the migration itself. Their networks do not seem to extend across the border, and their employment contacts are mostly female shop owners in Malaysia or female relatives.

Sharifah: I never helped anyone from Thailand obtain work in Malaysia. My Kathoey friends too were not asked to work here. In my opinion, it was hard to work here as they couldn't express themselves much. They were not able to show that they were Kathoey. And working in Malaysia was tough and difficult. If my friends worked in Thailand, it would be more comfortable. Although I never took anyone from Thailand to work here, I helped my Kathoey friends who worked here look for another job. [Single, Kathoey]

Although homosexuality, transvestitism, and transsexualism are forbidden by Malaysian laws and cultural norms, life in the big cities in Malaysia is relatively more liberal, less pressured, and less oppressive than in the rest of the country, but is still much more restricted than in Thailand (Baba 2001). Many queer people appear to migrate to an environment where they can be anonymous, to be free of the social and cultural norms of their family and village. When Kathoey Nanyus work at the Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, and Alor Star, they can more openly display their sexual identities, as they feel some degree of freedom from the pressure of discrimination and disapproval. Thailand, in contrast, is without legal injunctions against the practices of

nonheterosexuals. Kathoeys and other queers are free of legal discrimination, and Kathoeys are commonly found throughout Thailand, including in small towns, in both urban and rural areas (Jackson 1997; Jackson 2004). Even Muslims display their sexual identities as Kathoeys in the cities and villages of the far south (Sanguankaew 2002).

Social Activities, Gender, and Networks

In comparison to *Nayu* male workers in Malaysia, migrant *Nayu* women have fewer opportunities for social activities outside the workplace or accommodations. Male workers have as much freedom in daily life in Malaysia as in their home villages. They take part in plenty of social activities with their peers in Malaysia. After work, they like to participate in social activities and gatherings, for example, meeting over a drink with their male *Nayu* friends from other restaurants, visiting their friends overnight at their accommodations, or playing soccer with other male *Nayu* migrants at night. This enables them to extend their networks in Malaysia: they can meet and make friends with their friends' friends. After having met for the first time, they develop their social relationships through social activities and by cell phone. These new social ties may become close to them, and they may offer help with employment opportunities.

Nayu women workers, however, have fewer chances for social activities in Malaysia after work. Without exception, outside of work, women are still expected by their families and relatives to be confined to the household in Malaysia, where they are still controlled by their relatives. They do not enjoy social activities in public at night. As they work from the evening to 3 a.m. every day without any days off, they also do not have any free time for social activities in the day time and on weekends. Although they might have a little free time during the day, *Nayu* women workers are not likely to engage in social activities at night. They usually stay in their accommodations instead. Some women go out to visit their friends at their places, but the social activities they have with a friend or with a limited circle of friends seem to be rather private. This limited social activity means that migrant women meet fewer women and establish fewer social ties in Malaysia than male workers do.

Most of the girls don't like to go out; they like to work and save money for their family. That's the ideal girl. But not the young men. They have friends and always they go out with their friends. They also ask for advance pay. [Married, Female]

When they have free time after work, Kathoeys workers are likely to socialize with women and with Kathoeys friends in their restaurants and accommodations. Although some Kathoeys live and work with heterosexual men, the heterosexual men prefer to

socialize with other men. Men's networks are based on male contacts, whereas Kathoey workers are involved in both women's and Kathoey networks. Nayu men like playing soccer and watching it on television, whereas Kathoeyes and women both like watching Thai soap operas. However, surprisingly, Kathoey workers undertake more public and social activities than women do, and they visit their Kathoey friends and women friends in other restaurants more frequently than women workers do.

We go to hang out sometimes. I ride my motorbike to visit my friends in other shops. I know Kathoey friends who are working around here from other friends. I knew Pa and always go to visit her at her shop as one of my friends introduced us to each other when I came to work around here the first time. My friends told me that she has Kathoey friends who work here; so, I went to see her there. We are easygoing and became close friends, as we are very similar. [Single, Kathoey]

4. Conclusion

This paper focused on gender and the migrant networks and processes of Nayu workers who temporarily move from deep southern Thailand to and within Malaysia for paid work in Tom Yam restaurants. Migrant networks play a vital role in migration to Malaysia. Male, female, and Kathoey workers have their own distinct networks, and they obtain help from their migrant networks in different ways. Because of patriarchy in the household and the village, women are less free to move and work away from their parents than men are. Many single young women migrate with help from migrant networks with close women-based ties to find work in Malaysia. Moreover, they also use a female migrant network to move within Malaysia to lead a more independent life and improve their working conditions and wages. They follow their trusted female peer contacts and move, seeking freedom and an escape from the control of their close kin. Female workers, in addition, are not likely to offer to help migrants obtain work with them. Single female Nayu workers in Malaysia protect themselves from malicious talk at home by not offering help to nonmigrants from their village obtain work with them.

In contrast, Nayu men are offered help for their first migration through a variety of social contacts, from both men and women in their migrant networks. Consequently, new male workers have more opportunities to enter the labor market in Malaysia. In addition, men move more frequently to find new workplaces within Malaysia by using male peer networks, which are quite often based on the contacts that they have established. Kathoey migrants, unlike men, use only close women restaurant owners in their first migration to Malaysia. Kathoeyes do not change jobs frequently, like men do, because they are

discriminated against and oppressed in Malaysia and because their networks are quite limited, comprising mainly other Kathoeys.

Gender determines the spatial patterns of Kathoeys, men, and women as well as their leisure time after work. As men and women are gendered subjects, they create and reproduce their time and space in order to meet their own needs and desires. Social space is usually created through the patriarchy, which puts men into the public sphere and women into the private sphere, generally the household. Gender forms Kathoey, men's, and women's migrant networks separately, and they strongly impact the opportunities for work and travel and the number of social contacts with others within Malaysia. Kathoey workers are involved in limited ways in women's networks. They are likely to socialize with women, but mainly they socialize with Kathoey friends in their restaurants and accommodations. Kathoey workers undertake more public social activities than *Nayu* women do, and they visit their Kathoey friends and women friends in other restaurants more frequently than women workers do. *Nayu* men tend to have more social contacts and a greater range of social relations, including relations with nonworkmates and with both *Nayu* men and women, whereas *Nayu* women tend to have mainly female social contacts based on the family and the workplace. This limited social activity means that *Nayu* women make fewer contacts and form fewer new social ties in Malaysia than their male counterparts do.

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Notes

- 1) *Nayu* refers to Malay people who speak the Malay dialect and have been living in the lower southern provinces of Thailand. *Nayu* is the word that Malay people use to refer to themselves. Accordingly, it is the word that I use in this paper to refer to them.
- 2) *Kathoey* in this study refers to people whose sex was male but who identify themselves as female by cross-dressing in the course of their daily lives, and who alter their bodies through medication and surgery.

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