Labour Migration, Remittances and Development in the Myanmar-Singapore Corridor

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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Declaration

I, Alex Khai Sun Ma, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Alex Khai Sun Ma
Acknowledgements

This thesis was supervised by Professor Claire Dwyer, Dr Ben Page, and Professor Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. I would like to thank them for their continued academic and moral support throughout my studies. The success of this thesis depended on the goodwill of those I’ve been fortunate enough to call my participants, mentors, collaborators and friends.

During my research exchange in Singapore, I received supervision from Associate Professor Shirlena Huang at the National University of Singapore (NUS). I was also graciously received by the team at NUS’ Asia Research Institute, who was always welcoming during the regular conferences and workshops they held. These were important sources of intellectual and social stimulation and helped shape the direction of my research. Outside of academia, the Humanitarian Organisation for Migrant Economics (HOME) and Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) provided me with critical assistance during research design and implementation. I would like to thank Mr Jolovan Wham (HOME) and Mr John Gee (TWC2) for their support. Volunteers from HOME – Daw Khin Lay, U Tin Maung Win, and Dr Thein Than Win to name just a few – were indispensable in helping me to design, test, and execute surveys and interviews. They did not just open the doors of the Burmese community to me but were a wealth of knowledge and feedback. I always felt supported along the way and they never hesitated to help. Elsewhere, U Soe Aung and Dr Lin Htet Aung also helped me to build relationships with workers, without which I would not have been able to collect the data I did.

In Myanmar, the Migration Governance Team at the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) helped me find my footing in a new environment and gave me great technical insight into the lives of the people I tried to understand. Researchers from the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank were also of great assistance. My experience in Myanmar was daunting and relied a great deal on serendipity. Though I sought no formal affiliation, the Geography Department at Yangon University and the International Relations Department at the University of East Yangon (UEY) were welcoming and patient as I sought advice and consultation. I thank them for their knowledge and hospitality. To my friends with whom I studied Burmese at the French Institute – Jean-Francoise Gine, Morgane Dussud, James Barklamb – I thank you for all the funny anecdotes that made the rainy season in Myanmar a little more bearable.

Last but not least, I would like to thank May Maung Zaw (NUS), Min Thurein Aung (UEY), Kyaw Zay Hein (UEY), and Hseng Leng Wann (Green Mountain College) my four research assistants who were critical to this thesis’s research efforts. Their insight was indispensable and their continued support and belief in the project made it worthwhile despite the hurdles along the way. Thanks for all your patience and support.
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Abstract

This thesis explores the impacts of labour migration on development in Myanmar. The central ambition of this thesis is to challenge existing work on the ‘migration-development nexus’ by analysing the context-specific factors that structure and effect particular ‘outcomes’ of migration. In particular, I pay attention to the role of migration pathways, intermediaries, household structures, and migration policy in producing particular types of migrants.

To do this, I adopted a ‘follow the people’ and ‘follow the thing’ methodology, which relied on survey (n=459) and interview (n=71) data. Both involved Burmese migrant workers across the income spectrum, but interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders, such as remittance recipients in Yangon, Myanmar, employment agents, multilateral organisations, and non-governmental organisations. This multi-sited methodology allowed me to track migratory and remittance-sending practices across space, grounding findings in verbal reconstructions of pre-migration livelihoods, everyday practices of migrants in Singapore, and finally through remittances back to the household in Myanmar.

Using Bourdieu’s theory of practice to dissect migrant and household behavioural drivers, this thesis demonstrates how the relationship between migration and development is not straightforward but results from dynamic livelihood strategies and demands. Issues around employment rights in Singapore, social protection in Myanmar, household cultures of filial piety, and communal structures of risk-sharing and donation are particularly salient. I found that migration and remittances do have a positive effect on households, but they fail to address underlying livelihood constraints. In turn, this thesis contributes to an emergent literature on migration, precarity and temporality.

Word count: 95,066
Impact Statement

The findings and analysis generated by this thesis contribute to broader conversations within migration and development by examining the ways in which labour structures and individual behaviours contribute to particular development outcomes. These outputs will primarily be of interest to academic and policy actors who are the key stakeholders that are principally interested in examining the relationship between migration and development.

First, within academia, I had established working networks with other key scholars within the Southeast Asian region. Directly prior to fieldwork, I had completed an internship with the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. Engaging with their Migration Research Cluster, I was able to share preliminary findings from my research to engage in the emergent conversations both within the discipline and the region. Findings were also presented in key international academic conferences. Empirically, Myanmar is an increasingly important exporter of labour within the region. This thesis contributes to an urgent examination of how migration relates to broader issues of household livelihoods in a context of rapid social, economic, and political transition. Theoretically, this thesis also points to the need to take a mixed-method, transnational frame to understand how imminent processes of ‘development’ play out ‘on the ground’.

Second, leveraging these connections, I also developed significant networks with leading advocacy and policymaking institutions. In Singapore, I provided informal consultations to key migrant non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Humanitarian Organisation for Migrant Economics (HOME) and Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), both of whom provided important support to this thesis’s data collection. In Myanmar, outputs from this thesis were also used to inform data collection during my involvement as a consultant for a British Academy-funded project, which was implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), that looked at the role of labour brokers in labour trafficking systems. Similarly, I also presented my findings to key audiences in policy and advocacy. In Singapore, I presented in TWC2’s monthly Research Forum, which publicises cutting-edge work that looks at migrant rights and protections. In Myanmar, I produced and presented at a policy workshop in Yangon, which included two other presenters from the World Bank, and HelpAge International, a leading NGO. The event was funded using a research grant from the Royal Geographical Society’s Slawson Award, and brought together an audience of 50 NGO, civil society, and research stakeholders. I also published an article in the Migration Policy Institute’s online journal, reviewing key trends in Myanmar’s labour migration outflow and policy.

This thesis yields empirical and theoretical outputs, which have important policy implications. Migrants are intended to be the primary beneficiaries of this thesis and dissemination has focussed on areas of policy, advocacy, and awareness where migrant issues can be raised to better protect and advance their interests.
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<tr>
<td>AEAS</td>
<td>Association of Employment Agents in Singapore</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asia Nations</td>
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<td>HOME</td>
<td>Humanitarian Organisation for Migrant Economics</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organisation for Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMK</td>
<td>Myanmar Kyat</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOEAF</td>
<td>Myanmar Overseas Employment Agency Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOLIP</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (Myanmar)</td>
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<td>MOM</td>
<td>Ministry of Manpower (Singapore)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>SGD</td>
<td>Singapore Dollar</td>
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<td>TWC2</td>
<td>Transient Workers Count Too</td>
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Administrative Map of Myanmar

Bamar people are the dominant ethnic group in Myanmar. Generally speaking, Regions denote administrative units that host a Bamar majority whereas States denote areas which host a non-Bamar ethnic majority. Nay Pyi Taw (also spelt Naypyidaw), the capital, is considered Union territory and thus falls in neither category. Regions: Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Yangon. States: Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan.

\[1\] Bamar people are the dominant ethnic group in Myanmar. Generally speaking, Regions denote administrative units that host a Bamar majority whereas States denote areas which host a non-Bamar ethnic majority. Nay Pyi Taw (also spelt Naypyidaw), the capital, is considered Union territory and thus falls in neither category. Regions: Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Yangon. States: Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan.
1. Introduction

This thesis is about journeys: why people make them, how they make them, and the effects these journeys have. The rate at which people move is increasing. In 2017, the United Nations (UN, 2017) estimated the total stock of international migrants to be 258 million, a 17% increase from 2010. Where people move, money does too. According to the World Bank (2018: xi), ‘remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries... are expected to reach $528 billion in 2018’. This represents a 54% growth from 2010. The growth of these flows has led many to speculate about a relationship between migration and development. Though the roots of this speculation extend back to the 1950s and 1960s, it was not until the last two decades that these interests have crystallised into a distinct ‘nexus’ of research and policy debates.

The so-called ‘migration-development nexus’ is twofold: on the one hand, studies have attempted to examine the relationship between migration and various factors of development: poverty, investments, economic growth, and more. On the other hand, the nexus is comprised of various actors and perspectives including policymakers, multilateral organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), activists, and scholars. Nexus rhetoric in recent years has taken a noticeably more interventionist tone. Where early research was more discursive and academic in nature, nexus proponents have increasingly advocated ‘capturing’, ‘harnessing’, and ‘leveraging’ the returns from migration – principally workers’ remittances – to fund various development objectives, primarily at the scale of the nation-state. Fuelled both by the growth of migration, and by the increasing availability of data, migration and remittances are increasingly couched in technical terms removed from the social realities of their production.

This thesis reconnects remittances with the motivations and experiences of migration. Beyond the rhetoric, why do people migrate? Why do people send money? And why do remittances have the impact they do? Bringing together perspectives from development studies, migration studies, economics, sociology, and geography I interrogate the place of journeys in the ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller, 1993). Specifically, I focus on the Myanmar-Singapore migration corridor to examine drivers and practices of migration, remittance sending and management, and the role of market and governance structures to examine whether they are able to effect ‘development’.

The Burmese Way to Development?

Around the aged mall, posters of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi plastered every shop window. The excitement was palpable. In the lobby, a small group of activists gathered, urging passers-by to vote. Although there had been false starts on the road to democracy before, the growing impatience with the military junta that had ruled the country for over half a century could no longer be contained. The pleas were heeded and, by the time I returned to London, photographs had
begun to circulate on social media showing hundreds of people queueing to vote at the Burmese Embassy in Singapore. A small converted house a short walk away from one of Singapore’s major shopping districts became inundated with migrants who were desperate to have a say in the future of Myanmar. Despite the gates and heavy security, the incumbent regime could no longer hold back the tide of popular dissent.

Memo, July 2015

This timing of this thesis is serendipitous. In the summer of 2015, I completed an internship at the National University of Singapore’s Asia Research Institute. Alongside my internship, I conducted fieldwork for my master’s thesis, which looked at domestic workers’ social mobility. Every Sunday, I would interview workers through a local NGO, which provided education classes to domestic workers. One Sunday, I was asked to cover for an English teacher who had fallen ill. Faced with a class of a dozen students, mostly Indonesian, I did my best to improvise the material. As the class nodded along, I noticed three young Burmese women who remained quiet throughout the hour. Discussing this with fellow volunteers afterwards, I was told that this was normal: not only is there a growing number of Burmese domestic workers in Singapore, but also that NGOs have been struggling to provide appropriate services for them due to the language barrier. I decided to learn more about this growing, yet ‘silent’, population of workers that enjoyed an uneasy presence in Singapore. Initially interested in researching the role of migration in reshaping household dynamics in Indonesia, I revised my thesis proposal upon my return to London in September. Two months later, on 8th November 2015, Myanmar held its first contested democratic election since 1990. The National League for Democracy (NLD), headed by the charismatic Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, stormed to victory, taking 86% of the seats in the Assembly of the Union, Myanmar’s bicameral legislature. The results were lauded both domestically and internationally; spectators heralded a new chapter in Myanmar’s history, one that promised peace, democracy, and prosperity. The Burmese community in Singapore was brimming with excitement, certain that the NLD would bring about change after decades of military authoritarianism. Though this optimism is often attributed to the NLD’s victory, the prologue to this new chapter of Burmese history had already been written five years prior. Headed by U Thein Sein, an ex-military leader considered to a progressive reformist, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) (2010-2015) had laid the groundwork for much of the key reforms we see today. Under Sein, Myanmar’s media restrictions were relaxed, some political prisoners were released (including Suu Kyi herself from fifteen years of house arrest), and plans were developed to bolster economic growth. Concurrently, international relations, especially within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc, began thawing (Haacke, 2016). In 2012, the banking industry was liberalised and the national currency – the Myanmar Kyat (MMK) – was floated on the free market (Turnell, 2014). Archaic agricultural landholding and property trading laws of the socialist era
were also reformed, and a new microfinance law was introduced to foster rural credit and investment (Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), 2016b).

To understand why these reforms were so important, one must understand the history of Myanmar. Initially ruled as a province of India under the British Empire, Burma, as it was known until 1989, gained independence in 1948. Aung San (1915-1947), father of Aung San Suu Kyi (1945 –), is widely credited for brokering independence from the British, but was assassinated six months before independence was declared (Charney, 2009). Historically, Burma was ruled from a centre-periphery model with a strong colonial presence in ‘ministerial’ Upper and Lower Burma, versus quasi-autonomous ‘Frontier Areas’ (Charney, 2009; Lamb, 2014), which contributed to longstanding ethnic tensions. With the loss of Aung San as a unifying figure, conflict soon re-emerged. In 1948, U Nu (1907-1995), an ally of Aung San, became the first Prime Minister of the Union of Burma. However, internal instability saw U Nu cede power to Ne Win, then General of the Burmese Army to head a ‘caretaker government’ from 1958 to 1960 to restore peace and order. Many considered this to be a ‘dress rehearsal’ for what would eventually lead to formal military rule (Charney, 2009); although U Nu returned to power upon re-election in 1960, Ne Win staged a coup in 1962.

Under Ne Win, a devastating socioeconomic and political project – the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ – was launched (Aung-Thwin and Myint-U, 1992). The military monopolised every aspect of Burmese life: independent newspapers were banned, mobility was restricted, and dissent was quashed, driving Burma’s political and economic isolation from the international community (Charney, 2009). Burma’s experiment with socialism proved ruinous and plunged one of Southeast Asia’s wealthiest countries into despair. Economic output plummeted and collectivised agriculture encouraged the development of black markets for staples, driving inflation (Horsey, 2008). By the mid-1980s, the public sector was the largest formal employer in Burma, but wages did not keep up with inflation (Charney, 2009; Horsey, 2008). In September 1987, the government abruptly demonetised all 25-, 35- and 75-Kyat notes without compensation, wiping out citizen’s savings, which were mostly held in cash; two months later, the UN designated Burma a ‘Least Developed Country’ (Charney, 2009). Economic mismanagement and military brutality led to widespread strikes and protests across the country that peaked on August 8th, 1988, known as the ‘8888 Uprising’. It was during this time that the first large-scale migrations took place, as conflict and destitution drove hundreds of thousands across the border to Thailand (Aung, 2014; Chalamwong et al., 2012; Dudley, 2011; Eberle and Holliday, 2011). Though the 8888 Uprising led to the resignation of Ne Win, the military establishment lived on through the founding of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), crushing any hopes of a democratic future. It was also during this period that the military regime renamed Burma ‘Myanmar’, Rangoon ‘Yangon’, and various other place names

2 ‘Frontier Areas’ comprised territory which covered areas of modern-day States of Chin, Sagaing, Shan, and Kayah.
across the country. This back and forth, between hope for change and disappointment, continued for another two decades until 2010.

Through decades of military authoritarianism, livelihoods have been undermined. Outmigration must be understood as the product of historical-structural challenges, the legacies of which persist to this day, and which prompts citizens to organise livelihood strategies at numerous scales, often in subversion of the state (South, 2012; Mahn et al., 2008; Aung, 2014). Migration is rooted in the collective memories of hardship and state failure (McCarthy, 2017). There are reasons for optimism. Between 2004 and 2015, the poverty rate in Myanmar declined from 32.15% to 19.4% respectively (World Bank, 2017a). Nonetheless, rural poverty is persistent and the World Bank (2017b) estimates that 38.8% of the rural population is ‘poor’ versus just 14.5% of urban residents. Moreover, rural livelihoods are multiply constrained by ecological, political, and economic turmoil (Kurosaki, 2008; Myint and Bauer, 2001; Rammohan and Pritchard, 2014; Soe, 2004; Webb et al., 2014), driving both internal and international migration (LIFT, 2016a). Though Myanmar has shown promising signs of economic growth in recent years, migration has also grown. Given the dynamism of Myanmar’s economic and political landscape and changing household strategies that must now adapt to change, both policy and data has yet to account for the complex relationship between migration and development.

Recently, international attention has focused on the Rohingya refugee crisis. This ‘crisis’ is not discrete; even prior to Western media coverage, the Rohingya population was considered one of the most persecuted minorities in the world. A Muslim-majority ethnic minority that reside in Rakhine State in north-western Myanmar, the Rohingyas are a stateless population that is not recognised by Myanmar’s 1982 Citizenship Law (Alam, 2017). Moreover, successive laws have rendered the Rohingya exempt from state protection and services, whilst subjecting the population to violence and displacement (MacLean, 2018). Recent violence has crystallised around faith- and ethnic-based tensions between ultra-nationalist Buddhists and ‘foreign’ Muslim Rohingyas (Weber and Stanford, 2017), notably in 2013, which displaced up to 140,000 people (UNHCR, 2013). By 2015, growing instability drove 94,000 to flee into neighbouring countries by sea, many of whom became stranded when neighbouring Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand refused entry and Myanmar refused to re-admit them. This was the first time that Western media had reported on the Rohingya ‘boat people’ at length, but it wasn’t until 2016-2018 that the crisis reached a flashing point. Skirmishes between Rohingya militants in 2017 and the Tatmadaw prompted a bloody crackdown. Between August and September 2017, thousands of Rohingyas were killed in response to militant attacks on a military base and 30 security outposts in Northern Rakhine. The Tatmadaw response, according to an OCHCR fact-

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3 In everyday spoken language, both ‘Burma’ and ‘Myanmar’ are used interchangeably. For clarity, this thesis will refer to the country as ‘Myanmar’ but use the demonym ‘Burmese’ to describe workers, remittances, and so on.
4 The ‘major national ethnic races’ comprise Bamar, Shan, Kayin, Kayah, Chin, Kachin, Mon, and Rakhine people. As the Rohingya is not recognised as a national race, the official position is that the Rohingya are illegally occupying land in Myanmar.
5 The Tatmadaw is the official name given to the Myanmar armed forces.
finding mission, was ‘immediate... brutal and grossly disproportionate’ (OCHCR, 2018: 178). Soldiers conducted a ‘clearance operation’ that razed over 37,700 homes across 392 villages, and perpetrated indiscriminate violence, killing, and rape; by the end of the mission, at least 10,000 were estimated to have been killed in the violence (ibid). In addition, an estimated 730,000 Rohingya fled into neighbouring Bangladesh (ISCG, 2018) and another 120,000 were displaced internally (Bolopion, 2017). The shocking violence perpetrated in the Rakhine has undermined the optimism with which Western governments regarded the rule of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. Once celebrated as a champion of human rights, Suu Kyi has been widely criticised for her muted interventions into the crisis (cf. Rudd, 2017).

This thesis does not examine the Rohingya crisis, displacement, or forced migration. Instead, I am interested in labour migration from a development perspective. Across interviews with migrants and households, I found no evidence of conflict-driven migration. By the nature of the Myanmar-Singapore corridor, migration is generally orientated towards economic narratives rather than conflict-driven displacement (see Chapter Four). Focussing on interviews in Singapore and Yangon, the ethnographic reality that migrants and households face are far removed from the terrors in northern Rakhine, and respondents were more interested in addressing livelihood concerns. For most of my interviewees in Singapore and Yangon, they seemed disinterested and perhaps inured to the representation of Myanmar in Western media and life continues as normal. In turn, this also drove me to focus on working with organisations such as the IOM, ILO, local Singaporean activists and NGOs, and migrant services providers such as employment agencies. Conversations centred on labour issues and any humanitarian discussions on refugee flows tended to be tangential and coincidental.

By sidestepping the Rohingya crisis, this thesis does not seek to condone nor trivialise the criminal violence we continue to see in the Rakhine. Myanmar may be a space of humanitarian crisis for hundreds of thousands, but this thesis’s contribution focuses on Myanmar in the context of ‘development’ for millions of others. This thesis contributes to the migration literature beyond issues of refugees and displacement, with which Myanmar has become synonymous, without undermining the severity of the various humanitarian crises, not just in the Rakhine, that have been so widely documented. Moreover, this thesis’s data sample is dominated by Bamar-Buddhist respondents, which reflect the broader ethno-religious composition of Myanmar (see Chapter Four). Though this limits the degree to which minority groups can be represented, it does allow us to examine the experiences of the majority, whose voices have been overshadowed by extant works on minority ethno-religious groups (Dudley, 2011; Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012; Weber and Stanford, 2017; South, 2012; South and Jolliffe, 2015; Alam, 2017).

6 Of 33 migrant interviews in Singapore, only one respondent was from Rakhine. However, the interviewee was from Kyaukphyu, which is located in central Rakhine and is insulated from the conflict in the north.
Decades of political isolation has meant that very little information exists on Burmese labour migration, especially outside of the Thai-Myanmar border. As I review later, the last two decades have seen huge investment into migration data collection and monitoring. However, infrastructural incapacity and the dominance of informal migration and remittance flows mean that Myanmar remains a conspicuous blind spot, although this is starting to change (see 2.2.1). Where the NLD had prioritised government restructuring, economic reform, and ceasefire agreements in conflict regions, migration policy has been of low priority. However, there is evidence that the administration is increasingly interested in its population of overseas nationals and in reforming its outdated migration policies (ILO, 2017). In 2016, for example, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi visited Singapore and held a rally where she vowed to tackle labour migration issues and implored skilled workers to return home to contribute to national development. Similarly, Figure 1.1 depicts a billboard that urges residents in Yangon to report unfair employment practices and misconduct. Labour relations, both domestic and international, are set to occupy greater political attention in the coming years.

![Figure 1.1: Labour Policy Advertisement in Yangon, Myanmar](image)

This thesis’s case study contributes to a re-evaluation of Burmese labour in the region, and the place of migration and development in transitioning livelihoods. Intraregional migration within the ASEAN has grown significantly in the last 20 years, transforming countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore into major migrant labour hubs (UN, 2015). Within the region, Myanmar is the single largest exporter of labour, accounting for 33% of all intra-regional migrants. The majority are found in Thailand; according to International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2019) estimates, there are two million Burmese working there, primarily in the garment, manufacturing, and food processing industries. In contrast, this thesis estimates there to be around 120,000

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7 This figure describes the number of workers who had obtained some form of documentation. The true figure, which includes irregular migrants, especially those in nearby border towns, is likely much higher.
Burmese labour migrants in Singapore. As ASEAN experiences greater economic integration, which includes the free movement of skilled workers, migration is likely to increase further still (Testaverde et al., 2017). At the beginning of this research, there were an estimated 40,000 Burmese domestic workers in Singapore. As of 2018, that figure is 50,000 (Htwe, 2018a). Aggregated, Myanmar received US$3.5bn in remittances, the equivalent of 5% of gross domestic product (GDP), though due to the prevalence of informal channels, the true figure is likely to be ‘significantly larger’ (World Bank, 2016a). Despite its small share of migrants, Singapore is a compelling destination because of the wage differential it offers. According to the ILO (2014), of major Burmese migrant destinations within ASEAN, Singapore offers the largest wage differential available to workers: wages there are about six times higher than in Malaysia, and eight times higher than in Thailand. On a per capita basis, migrants in Singapore wield a disproportionately powerful stake in migration-led development. This thesis estimates the total remittances sent home by Burmese migrants in Singapore to be in the region of S$1bn, or US$765m (see Chapter Six). This is more than Myanmar’s annual health budget in 2017-2018 (Htwe, 2017). Moreover, survey findings reveal an average eightfold wage differential between pre-migration and current migrant incomes.

This thesis hopes to do more than to ‘fill a gap’ on missing data. Instead, socioeconomic change within Myanmar, and the under-researched Burmese community in Singapore affords a novel interrogation of orthodox nexus thinking. Methodologically, this thesis traces the social contexts of remittances across the migration chain, from the original motivators for migration, through migration processes and experiences, to the actual sending, receiving, and management of remittances at the household level. This is actioned through a mixed methods approach, comprising surveys (n=459) with migrants in Singapore and interviews (n=71) with remittance-sending migrants in Singapore, remittance recipient households in Myanmar, as well as stakeholders such as employment agencies. Theoretically, this thesis analyses development outcomes as a product of practice and process. Using a Bourdieusian theory of practice, I analyse how migrant behaviours are borne of both structure – pre-migration livelihoods, labour market conditions, migration regimes and immigration systems, industry-specific migration pathways and brokerage – as well as habits, grounded in normative aims of ‘supporting the family’, filial piety, and religiosity.

This marks a scalar and temporal departure from orthodox nexus methodologies that prioritise the macro, quantitative, and discrete, in favour of situated, holistic, and dynamic perspectives. Where nexus theories hold wage differentials to be a key factor for migration (Stark and Bloom,
1985; Stark and Levhari, 1982; Stark and Lucas, 1988), this case study interrogates the degree to which migration decisions are solely compelled by economic considerations. Similarly, owing to Singapore’s sophisticated immigration system – border and law enforcement is strong, and low-wage migration is often brokered through agents – the type of migration that workers can undertake is very different. Far from contemporary studies that look at Myanmar as a case of conflict-driven migration, this thesis demonstrates how our understanding of ‘development’ in Myanmar can be advanced beyond the remit of ‘refugee’ or ‘forced migration’ studies (Dudley, 2011; McConnachie, 2018; South, 2012). As this thesis examines the entire Burmese population in Singapore, establishing different typologies of migrants allows us to disaggregate insights to understand how the migration-development process is differently experienced in practice. Moreover, this thesis insists on understanding the processes of migration and how they produce certain outcomes. The role of the ‘migration industry’ in facilitating movement and structuring the returns to migration is of particular interest.

This thesis finds that migration is driven by different visions of development. Although workers appeal to economic impulses to migrate, these are couched in structural-historical livelihood challenges that has inculcated in millions of Burmese a disposition towards migration. Importantly, ‘development’ is narrated differently. For poorer households, development means meeting basic needs, such as food and shelter. For the better off, it means social mobility, career development, and experiences of modernity. Individuals migrate for different reasons, which in turn drive different practices, and produce different impacts. Nonetheless, migration comes at a cost, which may be direct or indirect. The migration industry levies a premium for mobility, which is shouldered disproportionately by certain workers and genders, notably female domestic workers.11 The way one migrates is a function of pre-existing resources – wealth, education, and social networks – but also structures pathways into the future, owing to restrictive labour and immigration policies. Those reliant on brokerage are disproportionately exposed to precarious working situations and labour market insecurities, which undermine their ability to generate returns from migration. Deficiencies in governance create further distortions in regulatory and market spaces that subject workers to risks. Returns are not assured but are contingent and temporally dynamic.

Finally, though remittances have a positive impact on recipients, this is a factor of households’ pre-existing financial conditions, which determine how remittances are brought into the fold of everyday finance and livelihood strategies. Whilst remittances increase household incomes and offers some resilience against shocks, the absence of durable, non-remittance safety nets mean that ‘development’ impacts tend not to be sustained. Instead, households are generally unable to accrue meaningful savings or investments in the short- and medium-term because remittances are redirected to shock and survival expenditures, notably healthcare and debt repayments. Qualitatively, remittances are not simply material transfers, but are couched in

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11 In the context of Singapore, all domestic workers are female (see 5.2).
emotional and cultural ideas around family solidarity, filial piety, and lifestyle. Accordingly, they do not respond to economic rationalisation, which explain the enduring role of informal remittance services despite attempts to liberalise financial services in Myanmar. Finally, one novel finding to emerge related to narratives of religiosity; remittance-funded donations represent an important resource of local risk sharing during crises.

This thesis argues for a complication of nexus thinking to incorporate structural, qualitative, and temporal perspectives into understanding the relationship between migration and development. Histories, processes, culture, motivations, practices, spatiality, and time matters. Neither migration nor development just ‘happen’ but are produced through immense complexity. The project to uncover this complexity is an urgent one. Since this project was first proposed in 2015, Myanmar has seen an exponential increase in mobile phone subscribers, bank and ATM branches, and even fintech companies. In 2018, Wave Money, a fintech joint venture between Yoma Bank and Telenor, a mobile phone network, cleared over US$1.3bn of domestic remittance transfers across seven million customers (Wave Money, 2019). In February 2019, Wave is also collaborating with an NGO to trial a pension disbursal programme (Soe, 2019). Elsewhere, competitors are eyeing the vast remittance market. As poverty declines and connectivity increases, there is a possibility this will further catalyse out-migration (see also Bylander, 2013). The fabric of Myanmar culture is also changing. Within the space of a few years, Yangon has become littered with glitzy new mall and residential developments, notably from Singaporean investors. These have engendered new tastes and the younger generation are keen to consume more of overseas culture. Ed Sheeran singles are played on loop in almost every supermarket. Politically, there is a growing appetite for stronger labour protection standards, both within Myanmar and overseas, and the new administration has publicly punished brokers who flaunt regulations (Phyo, 2017), although, as I will discuss, to limited effect.

Myanmar was, and continues to be, an exciting country on the cusp of change, not all of it positive. As NGOs, multilateral organisations, and aid donors rush to contribute towards migration policy research, reform, and implementation, from both a development and humanitarian frame, it is critical that we prioritise the perspectives of beneficiaries to understand how migration can be made to work for them and their self-defined objectives. This thesis, I hope, will put us one step closer in the right direction. The next section in this introductory chapter will outline the specific research questions that this thesis seeks to answer. This is then followed by a summary of this thesis’s chapters to provide an overall schematic of its theoretical and empirical trajectory.

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis is structured around four interlocking research questions that interrogate the relationship between migration and development in the Myanmar-Singapore corridor. Moreover, questions were structured to reflect the spatial and temporal dimensions of migration as surveys
(n=459) were conducted before interviews (n=71) in order to inform the latter’s theoretical construction. The empirical data speak to one of this thesis’s core contentions: why and how migrants migrate has a direct impact on the likely development impacts that remittances produce. To test this, this thesis examines the Burmese population in Singapore as a whole. However, I also create a set of migrant typologies based on migrant visa categories with which to organise analyses (see Chapter Four). This allows me to examine the diversity of experiences and narratives whilst also paying attention to group and structural factors. Analytically, I use Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Wacquant, 1989; Walther, 2014), which I review in Section 2.5, to understand how behaviours are informed by habits, resources, and structures. Figure 1.2 sets out the schematic of the key areas of analysis, which are crystallised into this thesis’s four key research questions.

**Figure 1.2: Thesis analytical framework and diagram**

**Research Question 1: What are the baseline characteristics of the Burmese population in Singapore?**

This thesis’s mixed methods approach speaks to the need to combine nuanced insights of experiences and practices against group structures and collective trajectories. Question one is quantitative and serves three purposes. First, to establish an understanding of the demographics, migration pathways, remittance habits, and household backgrounds of migrants; second, to use those insights to formulate more targeted interview questions; and finally, to re-embed qualitative insights back into macro group data to juxtapose individual experiences with broader
narratives. Outputs from this question are introduced in Chapter Four but are referred to across all analytical chapters to ground insights into their statistical contexts.

Research Question 2: How can the factors driving labour migration from Myanmar be understood as a practice between social structure and human agency?

Within nexus literature, there is an implicit assumption that migration is primarily economically motivated. I am interested in challenging this notion. On the one hand, not all migrants are poor. On the other hand, the contextual reasons behind why one migrates would also mediate the type of migration and remittance practice one would have. Better-off workers, for instance, would be less compelled to migrate out of material necessity, and their remittances are less geared towards ‘survival spending’ but towards other activities. Question two is primarily qualitative and seeks to understand the narrative of migration to explain why people do what they do, both as a result of agential-structural interplays, and how this relates to the dominant interpretations of migration as an economic enterprise. This question is discussed in Chapter Four, where I examine pre-migration livelihood contexts and motivations, but I also show how motivations and meanings are temporally dynamic across the migration chain. In Chapter Five, I look at how the meanings around migration change. In Chapter Six, I complicate this further by looking at the diverse meanings around remittances.

Research Question 3: How do variations in the migration process shape migration outcomes?

Nexus discourse tends to present migration as an abstract action that just ‘happens’. Though the broader literature has looked at the role of brokers in mediating precarious migration experiences, these rarely link back to how such conditions impede ‘development’, and the generation of remittances. I am explicitly interested in how workers experience the migration process and how they are more or less able to realise returns from their migration across time. Qualitatively, interviews reveal workers’ experiences of migration and how these differ over time. Quantitatively, survey data also describes the prevalence of certain migration pathways and experiences. These issues are discussed in Chapter Five where I examine how migration pathways, brokers, and governance regimes variously enable and constrain migrants’ ability to earn and send money.

Research Question 4: What are the impacts of remittances on households?

Household-level impacts of remittances are analysed last because they represent the last stage of the migration-remittance trajectory and, as this thesis argues, their impacts must be understood through the practices and experiences incurred in the rest of the migration chain. This is both a qualitative and quantitative question. On the one hand, this thesis does not discard
the need to understand the material impacts of remittances. In particular, I am interested in how remittances are able to alleviate livelihood constraints and fund household spending. On the other hand, I am also interested in the narrative behind remittance sending and how these structure particular dispositions of money management. This is discussed in Chapter Six where I explore how remittances are brought into the fold of household finances and beyond.

1.2 Thesis Outline

This thesis traces migration and remittances through space and time. Analytical chapters are structured sequentially, following a before-migration, during-migration and after-migration trajectory. In practice, this began with interviews in Singapore to gather reconstructions of pre-migration livelihoods in Myanmar, followed by analyses of the migration process and work in Singapore, then finally through to household interviews with remittance recipients in Yangon, Myanmar. Before that, two chapters foreground the conceptual and methodological boundaries of this study.

Chapter Two reviews key research in the ‘migration-development nexus’. I begin with an overview of early nexus theories and the ‘New Economics of Labour Migration’. I follow this with a more detailed review of current directions in the field, notably the increasing availability and reliance on statistical data within analyses of migration and development outcomes. germane to this thesis’s critique of the nexus ‘orthodoxy’ are critical development theories that emerged in response to failed multilateral interventions in the 1980s and 1990s. These attacked the purported neutrality of ‘development’ and instead analysed interventions as political ideologies. This dovetails into studies that looked at how policies seek to exert control on the growing international flows of people and their money. On the former, works have highlighted how policy is interested in ‘managing’ people on the one hand, and marketising labour on the other. Literature on migration governance and labour brokerage are particularly relevant. On the latter, I examine research on remittance management. Ideas around ‘productive’ versus ‘unproductive’ remittances, a growing securitisation agenda, and the marketisation of remittances are discussed. I then segue into a review of migration studies in the broader social sciences. Ideas around responsibilities of care and altruism marks a departure from economic conceptualisations of behaviour and are particularly relevant to this thesis’s discussion on migrant practices. Also important are ideas around precarity. In particular, the growing corpus of work on brokers will be reviewed to examine their place in facilitating migration, and its potential repercussions on development. Finally, the chapter looks at the works of Pierre Bourdieu, whose theory of practice is the central analytical framework of this thesis. I discuss some of his core concepts and how it will be applied throughout analytical discussions.

Chapter Three details the methods I used to collect data in Singapore and Myanmar. These comprised surveys (n=459) and interviews (n=71). The former were conducted with migrant workers in Singapore. The latter were conducted with workers in Singapore, remittance-
receiving households in Myanmar, and relevant stakeholders such as employment, migrant NGOs, and multilateral organisations. The chapter details the processes of research design and how it relates to the four overall research questions. This thesis uses a ‘follow-the-thing’ methodology to trace remittances across space, and I detail the spatial-temporal dimensions of fieldwork, including the challenges I faced such as cultural and language barriers, but also spatial access and timing. I end the chapter on discussions around the ethical implications of reliance on community gatekeepers, commercial informants, and the politics of representation inherent in writing.

Chapter Four looks at life before migration and workers’ motivations to migrate. It starts out by presenting findings from the migrant survey data to set up a typology of different migrants. I segment workers by visa categories to examine the trajectories of different groups: where they come from, why they migrate, how they migrate, and how remittances affect each group differently. I then use this typology to look at the key livelihood challenges that workers and their households face. Amongst low-income households, I find that pre-migration livelihoods were generally unstable due to insufficient income that cannot guard against shocks, a common bind amongst rural agrarian households. There is a pervasive language of ‘worry’, especially around insufficiency, which is shared by high-income households. Critically, what people worry about is different. Whilst low-income households faced existential crises, high-income households were more concerned with attaining education, skills, and social mobility. What constitutes ‘progress’ or ‘development’ is subjective, and the experiential factors that compel migration are narrated differently. Similarly, although debt was common amongst all households, these ranged from deleterious agrarian debt cycles for the rural poor, to more ‘virtuous’ debts associated with education and investments amongst the urban middle-class. A path dependency is thus evidenced in the spatiality of pre-migration households, which translate into particular types of migration. Theoretically, I analyse the motivations to migrate as a result of structural deficiencies that, over time, distil to a migratory habitus.

Chapter Five examines how motivations manifest in the practice of migration. Building on the typologies established in the previous chapter, I look at how different migration pathways are a product of pre-migration contexts; where people come from structures where they go. Low-wage workers are more likely to rely on debt-financed migration, whereas high-wage workers chiefly rely on social networks. Three key findings emerge from this chapter that have implications for how we theorise the relationship between migration and development. First, brokers are an important element of migration and mediate the likely returns workers are able to accrue during their migration. Domestic workers’ reliance on debt-financed migration renders them more ‘precarious’ than other groups. This, I argue, not only reduces her capacity to generate remittances, but also exposes her to exploitation that undermine the rhetoric of ‘development’. Second, current migration governance does not exist to protect workers or to help them realise returns from migration. Instead, Singapore’s migration policy is interested in securing flexible labour through a private sector of brokers. Similarly, Myanmar lacks a coherent
migration policy and its ban on domestic worker migration has further undermined worker protections. The interests of the state and the ‘migration industry’ are stacked against the migrant. Finally, temporality is an important aspect of migration. Despite precarity, workers are not consistently free or unfree. Instead, monetary returns, for example, are dynamic, social mobility pathways are differently pursued, and the narratives around the motivation to migrate change over time. Chapter Five demonstrates the need to complicate conceptualisation of both ‘migration’ and ‘development’. On the one hand, migration is not a straightforward, discrete action, but a process where returns fluctuate over time. On the other hand, just as ‘development’ is not a singular narrative amongst workers, so too are the key stakeholders of migration – brokers and governance regimes – generally unconcerned with migrant interests. Instead, divergent interests between workers and households versus state visions of ‘national development’ are oftentimes contradicting and ineffectual.

Chapter Six traces remittances back to recipient in Myanmar to examine their impacts on the household. First, I look at how remittances are sent. There is growing interest amongst policymakers to formalise remittance flows. However, I demonstrate how remittances are social, both in the terms of their transmission and the meanings they represent. Instead of just monetary resources, remittances are a source of pride, identity, and meaning for migrants as they fulfil obligations of filial piety. Importantly, such obligations can also undermine the freedom of the migrant to pursue her own self-defined ambitions. Again, temporality is an important factor and the migrant lifecourse also plays a role in structuring the intra-household politics of distribution. Remittances are finite and migrants must prioritise some ends above others. I find that remittances have a positive impact on households and allow them to meet the material needs that, in many cases, compelled migration in the first place. Crucially, however, they are generally unable to guard against more systemic issues, such as healthcare, eldercare, and inflation. The absence of social protections in Myanmar play a large role as households shoulder the risks associated with everyday risks. Moreover, the risks associated with migration are inherited by the household; both household and migration debt determine the degree to which households are able to save over the medium- and long-term. A novel finding relates to the use of remittances for donations, which are usually channelled to local places of worship. Donation is near-ubiquitous, sums are significant, and may contribute towards local resilience as group members intervene during periods of hardship.

Chapter Seven concludes this thesis by synthesising core findings across analytical chapters and what they mean for our understanding of the nexus. This thesis set out to trace remittances across time and space to see how these private capital flows are generated and managed to achieve ‘development’. Conceptually, this thesis finds the migration-development nexus not to be objective science, but a loose set of political and ideological ideas that inherit the conceptual

12 Five years since the domestic worker ban was first introduced in 2014, Myanmar has since lifted the ban as of 26th April 2019 (Straits Times, 2019). Given how recent this policy was announced, the implications of this change are still unclear and are, therefore, not discussed in this thesis.
shortcomings of the development doctrine more generally. Though development is a political construct, the drivers, processes and effects of development are considered not to be. Pre-migration, during-migration, and post-migration experiences are structured by political and market interests which are conveniently omitted from nexus rhetoric. This depoliticisation undermines the legitimacy, efficacy, and coherence of policies that variously try to ‘capture’ of ‘leverage’ remittances to achieve abstracted notions of ‘progress’. In the process, the role the state and market plays in *increasing* precarity is excused through structural and temporal agnosticism. Empirically, findings demonstrate how development impacts are not discrete, but produced through evolving migrant imaginations and livelihood realities, modes of governance, relations of brokerage, and mechanisms of social obligations. ‘Development’, couched in exposure to precarity and self-defined ‘worries’, does not straightforwardly follow migration. Instead, the relationship between the two is tenuous, context-dependent, and complex. For most workers, ‘development’ is not a static state that is achieved, but denotes only *temporary* periods of relief from hardship, especially in the short- and medium-term. Migration, in general, produces a net-positive return for households, who are able to renegotiate their relationship with constraining livelihood structures, but does not itself alter those underlying structures. Remittances, for the most part, superimpose onto existing patterns of expenditures, tastes, and lifestyles. In the same vein, findings demonstrate the power of structures - development effects largely correspond to a set of migrant-household *typologies*. Though agential breaks are possible, these should not be romanticised to the extent we ignore the path-dependent futures that have been established long before the worker even leaves Myanmar.

This thesis principally contributes to the field of migration and development, but findings will also be of interest to Myanmar studies. As the incumbent government wrestles with social transformation, reform, and liberalisation, outmigration is also increasing, enabled by ASEAN integration and foreign demand. Critically, thawing international relations and growth in multilateral assistance means there are valuable opportunities to define a new migration-development vision from the ground up. This thesis’s findings are valuable not only as a theoretical rebuff to nexus orthodoxy but contribute rich empirical understandings of evolving Burmese livelihoods and the place of migration within them. Although nexus rhetoric commands significant power within the politics of intervention, this thesis helps to complicate our understandings of what ‘development’ means to those that policy aims to assist, and how it is best achieved. Migration policies, agrarian livelihoods, social protections, and financial market reforms intersect to create new social configurations with important repercussions for migrant households across time and space. This thesis hopes that grassroots voices will be better incorporated into these conversations to protect civilian interests. Across analytical chapters, I demonstrate how migrant narratives and experiences are elided within broader frames of governance and marketisation. This thesis upholds an ethical obligation to re-embed the migrant and her dependants into hitherto unequal discourses of development; despite much fanfare, the much feted ‘triple win’ has yet to materialise.
2. Literature Review

This thesis builds on a rich literature that investigates migrants and their money, the evolution of policy, tensions and negotiations between agency and structure, the role of the market, the spatiality and temporality of social processes, and how these factors combine to effect ‘development’. This chapter reviews the key debates within the migration-development nexus and migration studies more generally to set out the conceptual framings of this study and to identify the conversations that I build upon.

The migration-development nexus describes a diverse literature that ties migration with various aspects of development, usually defined in economic terms. de Haas (2012) offers an instructive overview of the complex trajectory of the nexus as a theoretical construct, historically rooted in development economics of the 1950s. The migration-development nexus is not a distinct field, but an amalgam of migration and development studies, a product ‘of various academic traditions, where each discipline brings ‘its own epistemological orthodoxy, scale of analysis and privileged types of data’ (King, 2012: 10). Though the nexus has seen numerous theoretical reinventions, contemporary nexus discourse largely ‘mirrors the dominant development paradigm, namely that of economic development’ (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012: 65; Hatton, 2014; Easterly, 2002; Thorbecke, 2006). Rhetorically, migration is feted to bring benefit to worker, labour sender, and recipient: a ‘triple win’ (Wickramasekara, 2011). This thesis challenges these claims by critically examining how migration is experienced and practiced to particular ends that may or may not resonate with ambitions of ‘development’. To do this, this literature review presents work from both in and outside of nexus research, and development studies more generally.

This review finds the migration-development nexus theoretically limited. This is inherited from the methodological and discursive boundaries of economics, where nexus thought is rooted, and the nexus’ disengagement with broader social sciences. In turn, migration drivers, processes, practices, and development outcomes are narrowly theorised. First, orthodox nexus theories variably describe migration to be compelled by wage differentials (see 2.1.1), and household survival strategies (see 2.1.2); motivations are economic in nature. Second, until recently, nexus research has ignored how workers actually migrate; movement is taken for granted and is not assumed to play a significant role in development. In the Myanmar-Singapore corridor, increasing attention has been paid to migration ‘barriers’, such as cost (Testaverde et al., 2017), but these offer little insight into how migration is experienced. Finally, the normative ambitions of the nexus are to leverage migration – more specifically remittances – to achieve development goals, such as poverty alleviation and economic growth. This is couched in a managerial vocabulary to ‘control’, ‘harness’ or ‘leverage’ migration and remittances (Ratha, 2007). This is actioned through policies such as the formalisation of migration and remittances, and the financialisation of capital flows. Analytically, nexus arguments appeal to an econometric methodology of ‘if/then arguments’, i.e. if a country receives this amount of remittances, then
we expect poverty to decline by this much. Although useful in understanding the macro-level dynamics of migration outcomes, these methods are limited by their explanatory power as studies rarely delve into local-level contexts to understand why phenomena are a certain way.

In sum, nexus orthodoxy is narrow both in terms of its conceptual frames, but also in the normative goals it hopes to achieve. This literature review brings together tangential research to bring greater nuance to the conversation. First, studies have examined how migration may be compelled by non-economic factors, such as social mobility, household obligation, and self-defined ambitions for experiences. Second, there has been increasing work in examining how migration processes play out and are experienced by migrants ‘on the ground’. Issues of precarity and migration brokerage are particularly important elements of this thesis but are rarely conceptualised as a development issue within orthodox nexus thought. As interdisciplinary interest is increasingly captivated in this ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller, 1993), perspectives from the broader social sciences will help challenge the normative assumptions that migration leads to equitable development. Finally, critical development theories are useful in unpacking the apparent neutrality of development discourse to understand how policy may harbour divergent interests that undermine the coherence and legitimacy of the ‘development doctrine’ (Thorbecke, 2007). As Raghuram (2009: 106) notes, ‘while there is broad agreement on the need for development, the forms of development being sought are not adequately interrogated’. This forces us to confront the binaries within nexus discourse: ‘economic’ versus ‘non-economic migration’, ‘productive’ versus ‘unproductive’ remittances, and ‘free’ versus ‘unfree’ labour. In doing so, the nexus’ constituent parts – migration and development – can be better theorised. On the one hand, migration is a complex human process that cannot be fully comprehended through abstract methods; workers and their families do not understand, experience, or narrate migration and development in the same way that nexus theorists assume they do. On the other hand, development does not straightforwardly follow from migration, and nuance must be sought from the beneficiaries that policy purports to assist. It is this uncertainty in the aims of policy and of development outcomes that this thesis seeks to clarify.

This literature review is structured to trace nexus thinking across time. The first half is interested in the theoretical foundations of the nexus, whereas the second half will discuss how the nexus is actioned, incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives from tangential fields. Interwoven are examples specific to the Myanmar-Singapore corridor. The first section begins by discussing this thesis’s interpretation of ‘development’, before moving onto an overview of core concepts within the nexus. Particular attention is paid to the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM). In the second section, I review contemporary nexus literature, looking at the generation of migration and remittance data, and how these have been deployed in analyses. The third section introduces perspectives from critical development theorists to dissect what development discourse entails in practice and how the rhetoric of migration-led development is actioned. Attention is paid to how migration is managed in the Myanmar-Singapore corridor, and how remittances are leveraged to different ends. The fourth section expands the review to include
perspectives from the broader social sciences. Of particular interest are ideas around transnationalism, social studies of the household, migration motivations, and care. Moreover, I discuss the role of precarity in migration processes and the implications it has on ‘development’. This thesis uses Bourdieu’s theory of practice as the key analytical framework for its empirical data. The penultimate section will review some of Bourdieu’s key theoretical concepts and how I use them to structure and present my findings in subsequent analytical chapters. I end on a synthesis of this chapter’s main findings, how this informs the direction of this research, and how this research can contribute to broader conversation on the relationship between migration and development.

2.1 Migrating to Development?

The migration-development nexus shares roots with the founding of development as a distinct discipline in the 1950s, even if it was not referred to as such until the 2000s. In this section, I selectively draw upon key theorists to highlight the conceptual terrain of the nexus and how it has evolved through the decades. As two core concepts that I refer to throughout this thesis, I conceptualise ‘remittances’ and ‘development’ narrowly to sidestep more contentious debates within the social sciences.

First, I am interested in how remittances enable households to achieve various ‘development’ objectives. In this thesis, remittances are defined simply as international cash flows that are sent from one place to another. Although the World Bank (2016a) enumerates both cross-border flows and the wages of seasonal workers, I am interested in personal cash transfers. Finally, although work has examined flows of intangible goods, such as information, tastes, and culture (Levitt, 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2010; Lacroix et al., 2016), this thesis is principally interested in economic remittances, even if monetary remittances often carry non-monetary meanings and emotions, as I explore in Chapter Six.

Second, I take a pragmatic approach to understanding ‘development’ in both etic and emic terms. The theoretical history of ‘development’ as a contested term is too vast to review here. Instead, I offer a brief synopsis of the discipline to guide how it will be deployed through the rest of this thesis. The establishment of development as a distinct academic field is usually attributed to post-war reconstruction in the 1950s (see Thorbecke, 2007 for an overview). During this period, policy intervention was principally interested in economic growth. This macro-level emphasis continued into the 1960s, but it wasn’t until the 1970s that theorists and governments became more interested in ideas around income distribution and poverty alleviation. In turn, this drove the implementation of deleterious structural adjustment policies to orientate economies towards industrialisation, export, privatisation and bolster economic efficiency (Hart, 2001; Thorbecke, 2006; Williamson, 2008). By the 1990s, ‘development’ became more interested in governance, institutions, and market-orientation to achieve ‘growth’. These objectives were further
elaborated upon in the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the turn of the century, and a new set of vocabulary around ‘vulnerability’ or ‘resilience’ emerged (Rigg and Oven, 2015). Along the way, theorists also came to ‘discover’ elements of development hitherto ignored in mainstream discourse. From the ‘birth of gender’ in development debates in the 1970s came successive attempts to harness the economic productivity of the female workforce (Boserup, 1970). Etic visions of development are conventionally interested in economic growth, poverty alleviation, market orientation, and financial development. These have been imported into the migration-development nexus that this thesis hopes to disrupt (see 2.3).

Conversely, theorists have critiqued the normative goals of development (Piper, 2008b; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012; Bastia, 2013). Sen’s (1999) Development as Freedom is one of the most widely cited works that challenges the notion that development is an end in itself. Instead, Sen suggests that the goal of development is to achieve freedom; growth, is not a meaningful objective, instead it serves to grant the individual freedom from poverty, hunger, and want. This is referred to as the ‘capabilities approach’, whereby development is principally concerned with expanding the capabilities of individuals to achieve self-defined goals (Sen, 1999; 2004; 2005). This resonates in broader literature, especially in gender and development, where women’s empowerment – the ‘expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them’ (Kabeer, 1999: 437) – is cited as a normative goal of development. Moreover, there is greater emphasis on recognising local, grassroots understandings of development: what it means and how it could be meaningfully measured. This is actioned through ‘participatory development’, where beneficiaries are involved in the research, formulation, and implementation of policy (Pieterse, 1998; Williams, 2004; Asis et al., 2009) (see 2.3). Although participatory development has attracted its own criticism (see Williams, 2004), this thesis sets out to understand development from both etic and emic terms. On the former, I am interested in the economic impacts of migration, as in household spending, poverty, and financial precarity. On the latter, I also pay attention to self-defined nuances that sustain migration motivations, narratives, and impacts.

2.1.1. Early Theoretical Roots

Though human migration long predates contemporaneous attempts to study it, it was only in recent decades that we have witnessed an extraordinary boom in international mobility. The global migrant stock in 2017 reached 258m; nearly 50% more than in 2000 (UN, 2017). The scale and growth of such movements compelled scholars and policymakers to study and harness human mobility to achieve ‘development’ goals such as poverty alleviation and economic growth (Piper, 2008b; Skeldon, 2008; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002; Bastia, 2013; Faist, 2008). As de Haas (2007) notes, the theoretical precursors of the so-called ‘migration-
development nexus’ is traceable back to Ravenstein’s (1885) ‘Laws of Migration’, which holds that economic factors were the primary cause of migration. Such theories would see increasing uptake in post-war neoclassical economics of the 1950s as interests in migration coincide with broader notions of international development (see also Cowen and Shenton, 1995; Easterly, 2002; de Haas, 2012; Thorbecke, 2007).

At the macro scale, early research believed migration to be compelled by inequalities in the spatial supply and demand of labour (Massey et al., 1993). One of the most influential models – the Lewis Model (Lewis, 1954) – analysed migration as the segmentation of capitalist and subsistence sectors; the former is typified by higher fixed wages and greater demand for labour, the latter is typified by unproductive labour or unemployment, compelling labour transfers from agriculture to capitalist sectors such as manufacturing. Migration is thus a prerequisite for development through the reallocation of labour from ‘unproductive’ to ‘productive’ sectors (Ranis and Fei, 1961; Todaro, 1969). Globally, the South-North labour transfers were considered key for redressing spatial inequalities of development. Workers in low-wage economies with labour surpluses migrate to high-wage economies with labour shortages, in turn creating labour scarcity at origin, which inflates wages and relieves the incentive to migrate (Massey, 1993). Rooted in development economics, theorists were optimistic that ‘the developmental role of migration is entirely realised through this process of factor price equalisation’ (de Haas, 2007: 4). At the micro level, authors similarly analysed migration as rational choices informed by cost-benefit, ‘push-pull’ calculations (Lee, 1966), and wage differentials (Harris and Todaro, 1970; van Hear et al., 2017).

By the 1970s, a new of school of nexus thought typified by macro-level structural analyses emerged (de Haas, 2007). This shift resulted from increasing wariness of the benefits of migration given global economic downturns and restructuring in the 1970s (de Haas, 2005). Informed by dependency theories of global capitalist development, migration, it was argued, would entrench inequality between core-capitalist and non-/pre-capitalist societies, rather than alleviate it (see Frank, 1966; Wallerstein, 1974). Piore’s (1978) dual labour market theory emerged as one of the most influential outputs of early historical-structural literature. The dual labour market is segmented between the primary sector, typified by formal, skilled, high-income jobs with favourable long-term prospects, and the secondary sector, characterised by informal, unstable, low-income and low-prestige jobs.

This bifurcation of labour is problematic. On the one hand, migrants are overrepresented in menial jobs rejected by the native population, but such jobs may still represent a better economic opportunity than pre-migration. On the other hand, migrants are dehumanised, reduced to variable capital-like stocks and flows that can be manipulated according to the market on a use-and-dispose basis (Woolfson and Likic-Brboric, 2008; Massey, 1993). Although attention had been paid to remittances, such capital flows, it was argued, was primarily spent on repaying migration-related debts or ‘conspicuous consumption... to reinforce [social] status’ (Lipton, 1980:}
12), and ‘non-productive’ expenditures such as housing, imported goods, and subsistence (Rubenstein, 1983; Lewis, 1986; Massey, 1990). Though scholars have criticised how remittances are abstracted from local contexts, thus failing to explain why some remittances are more ‘productive’ than others (Taylor et al., 1996), it did mark the increasing mainstreaming of remittances into development parlance. Similarly, although the negative impacts of remittances have been contested, prescriptions of how remittances ought to be spent retains currency in contemporary policy discourse (Clemens and Ogden, 2014; Brown and Jimenez-Soto, 2015; Ratha, 2007; Bakewell, 2008b) (see 2.3.2).

Early nexus thought was preoccupied with the economic and statistical (see Hatton, 2014 for a more comprehensive overview). Indeed, it is arguable that migration, labour, and employment were tangential factors that development economics was interested in, rather than the primary factor of analysis (see Thorbecke, 2007). To an extent, elements of these frameworks still finds purchase in contemporary analysis. In the context of Burmese workers in Singapore, domestic and construction work is often conceptualised as a ‘3D’ occupation: dirty, dangerous, and difficult (Hugo, 2009; Bylander, 2014; Baey and Yeoh, 2015; Chalamwong et al., 2012). The juxtaposition between 3D occupations on the one hand, and high-value, skilled migration on the other is particularly salient in disaggregating sectoral experiences of migration (Yeoh, 2006). Similarly, as I explore below, ideas around the ‘productivity’ of remittances remain a staple in policy discourse. What is conspicuously missing from these analyses are the voices of migrants themselves. Methodologically, early nexus frameworks are built on assumptions of behaviours that may not hold true in practice. The repercussions of this are discussed in Section 2.2. Moreover, Chapter Four will interrogate in greater detail the human factors of migration. Far from a purely economic account, I demonstrate how migration is driven and narrated through social frames of understanding, which explains why particular development outcomes are more likely than others.

2.1.2. New Economics of Labour Migration

One of the most influential theories to emerge from the migration and development literature, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) informs a significant part of the conceptual basis for this research (Stark and Levhari, 1982; Stark and Bloom, 1985; Stark and Lucas, 1988; Taylor, 1999). Building on its predecessors, NELM sparked three key innovations.

First, where early frameworks conceived of migrants as ‘atomistic, utility maximizing individuals’ and tended ‘to disregard...migrants’ belonging to social groups’ (de Haas, 2010: 231), NELM focussed on migration as a household strategy of income generation (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999). This focus on the household is a theoretical redress, reconciling the passivity of migrants in historical-structural frameworks with neoclassical self-interestedness. Following NELM, the household emerged as the de facto unit of analysis within contemporary nexus
NELM is not without its detractors. The focus on household welfare maximisation, for example, has been criticised for reducing migratory behaviours to economic rationality: Abreu (2012: 48) sees few distinctions between NELM and its neoclassical predecessors, instead offering only ‘peripheral concessions and readjustments’. From a feminist perspective, NELM has been criticised for under analysing intra-household differences (Folbre; 1986; Silvey, 2004b; Chant, 1998). Under NELM, the household is uncritically conceptualised as a coherent unit presumptively devoid of internal difference and individual interests (Folbre, 1986). By conceptualising migration as a household strategy, internal power structures and relationships are disguised (Hoang and Yeoh, 2015). Subsequent studies have thus sought to flesh out how migratory decisions and practices may be multiply intersected by issues of gender, culture, and lifecourse, which I explore further in the next sections.

Second, NELM incorporates theories of information and risk within the migration framework. Though income expansion is important, NELM theorises migration as primarily concerned with the minimisation of household income risk (Stark and Levhari, 1982). As household members migrate to different labour markets, the collinearity of income is reduced, reducing collective exposure to income loss during shocks (Balli and Rana, 2015; Balli and Balli, 2011). During migration, market information (such as job opportunities) is communicated through social networks and reduces exposure to potential income losses incurred as a result of migration (for example Acciaioli, 2000). Migration is thus accumulative: the backflow of market information from migrants to the left-behind makes migration more accessible as labour outflows increase over time (Taylor, 1999). Nonetheless, these assumptions lack conceptual clarity on the two main sources of risk: income and migration risk. The former, explained above, is addressed through migrating to different labour markets. The latter, however, is more nebulous. Conceptually, under NELM, migration is inherently risky as it does not guarantee employment. However, by conceptualising migrants only as units of income, latent migratory risks, such as the costs of migration, are neglected (Williams and Baláž, 2012). This is exemplified by a growing literature that looks into debt-migration, precarity, and exploitation which I review in greater detail in Section 2.3.

Finally, remittances, are theorised as household income insurance. Returning to risk, remittances are conceptualised as income co-insurance between household members where social security or market insurance is unavailable (Lucas and Stark, 1985; Massey et al. 1993; Kapur, 2004). Also relevant is the temporality of the remittance-insurance function. Where migration might entail short-term debts and loss of income, the migrant is co-insured by other household members; over time, migrant incomes stabilise, and remittances allow households to invest in the medium-long term (Taylor, 1999). Problematically, this assumes relations of reciprocity and a household contract (Loschmann and Siegel, 2015), whilst providing few insights into how remittances fit into everyday household survival strategies. Though ‘NELM has striking – though as yet unobserved – conceptual parallels with the livelihood approaches’ (de Haas, 2007: 6), remittances are seen as coping mechanisms or investment capital rather than banal everyday
practice (cf. Page and Mercer, 2012). Since livelihood approaches are interested in poor households’ agency in improving their living conditions, remittances should be situated within the household political economy. Concurrently, there was a return to the national as theorists promoted ‘co-development’. Coined by Nair (1997), co-development describes migrant contributions to origin country development through both economic and non-economic means, especially knowledge networks. This sparked the first calls for the formalisation of remittance channels and knowledge networks, which were ‘not built upon the ‘return option’ but the ‘diaspora option’” (Faist, 2008: 26). This new wave of optimism was premised on the contributions that migrants can and should make to their home countries and households (Bakewell, 2008b).

NELM has been an enduring framework within nexus thinking, partly because it is an intuitive and workable theory: people migrate because they want to support their family by earning more. Indeed, this is a narrative that is corroborated within both this thesis’s findings and migration studies more generally (see 2.4.1). However, this thesis seeks to challenge three of NELM’s theoretical assumptions: of economic rationality, household solidarity, and risk. NELM and associated ideas of co-development were not just theories of development, but they also imported assumptions of moral codes and household social contracts. This is an important facet of nexus thinking I seek to dispel in Chapter Four and Five, where I scrutinise in detail the motivational drivers for migration and remittance-sending, which I argue inform the outcomes they will precipitate. Specifically, I reveal how the rhetoric to generate income forms just one portion of the drive to migrate, which is also liable to change over time. Narratives of what constitutes ‘development’ is thus dynamic and varies between workers. Moreover, households are not social vacuums but are structures of politicised distribution. Interests, practices, and culture thus mediate how remittances are brought into the fold of everyday strategies. The relationship between remittances and development is not clear cut because they do not flow into economic models, but social relationships. Finally, although migration may generate new income streams that reduce household economic risk, it may also expose the household to risks associated with precarious migration. For households more reliant on remittances, risks can be multiplied and inherited through the migration chain, as I explore in Chapters Five and Six.

2.2 Contemporary Migration-Development Nexus

The previous section detailed the theoretical trajectory of nexus literature. This section examines how it has been studied in practice. The growing interest in remittances has seen greater data collection efforts and attempts to ‘test’ the relationship between remittance flows and various development indicators. Nonetheless, results have been mixed and it is uncertain whether remittances are able to drive the kind of progress policymakers have been hoping for. This section argues that current methodologies provide insufficient explanatory detail on the impact of remittances because they exclude analyses of migrant behaviours and grassroots structural
perspectives. Though studies yield interesting findings at the national level, they provide little insight as to how they came to be that way.

2.1.3. Between policy and data

In preceding decades, uncertainty within nexus debates can be attributed to differing theoretical perspectives as well as limited data availability with which to test claims (de Haas, 2007). This changed rapidly at the turn of the century, when more standardised and sophisticated means of collecting data on international migration and remittance flows were developed. Concurrently, the framing, collection, and publishing of data as a resource for development policy, rather than just administration, prompted increasing interest in quantitative, macro-level, data-driven research. In Thailand, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) assisted in the implementation of the Labour Force Survey (n=79,560 households), which includes data on the country of origin of workers. Given the number of Burmese in Thailand, and the paucity of data on Burmese labour mobility, the survey represents one of the more effective monitors of Burmese workers (see Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit, 2009; IOM, 2019). Nonetheless, such surveys are not designed for monitoring migration and yield limited insight into migration drivers and contexts (Carletto et al., 2012).

Interest in the nexus has engendered an institutional demand for migration-specific, macro-level data, especially within intergovernmental organisations such as the UN, the World Bank, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the ILO (Clemens et al., 2014). In turn, this has led to coordinated efforts to install migration-specific modules into existing household surveys and censuses, and build institutional capacity to monitor bilateral flows (Tomas et al., 2009; Carletto et al., 2012; Clemens et al., 2014). This rush is further catalysed by a rhetorical shift towards data-driven policy (Tomas et al., 2009). In 2004, the World Bank established its Research Program on International Migration and Development, the outputs of which included a collation of census, micro-census, and register data from 192 territories, and migration-specific household surveys in select developing countries (Docquier and Marfouk, 2006). Concurrently, the International Working Group on Improving Remittance Data was established in 2005 following a meeting between the G7 Finance Ministers in 2004 (Clemens et al., 2014). The Working Group aimed to better understand aggregate and bilateral remittances flows and was supported by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (ibid.). This was followed by the United Nation’s 2006 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which laid the groundworks for the development of the UN Global Migration Database (UNGMD) (Özden et al., 2011).

To date, the UN Population Division (UNPD) and IOM’s Migration Data Portal, provide the most comprehensive statistics on international migrant stocks and flows currently available. Similarly, the World Bank provides the most widely-cited statistics on bilateral remittances and has
emerged as the primary authority on remittance research and policy lobbying, especially since the establishment of the KNOMAD consortium in 2011.\textsuperscript{14} That the World Bank (2018) self identifies as the ‘custodian’ for migration-related data also speaks to the organisation’s representational power (see 2.3; Asis et al., 2009). Most recently, the IOM has also established its Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) in Berlin in 2015, which is specifically tasked with data collection and analysis for migration governance and programme support.

Despite efforts to augment data on migration and remittance flows, limitations still remain. First, efforts to modernise and standardise monitoring tools are inhibited by institutional incapacity. According to Myanmar’s Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP) (2016a), for example, the 2014 census recorded only 79,659 Burmese residing in Singapore. However, unofficial estimates place the real figure closer 200,000 (Ma, 2017a). This uncertainty echoes sentiments shared by the Myanmar government who submit that census tallies of 2,021,910 Burmese overseas is likely an underestimate; a later revision estimated the true figure to be 4.25m (MOLIP, 2016b). Second, Burmese remittances are largely informal. According to the World Bank (2016b) estimates, Myanmar received US$3.5bn in remittances in 2016, or 5.4% of GDP. However, given strong reliance on informal remittance services, such as hundi (see 6.1), flows might be higher still (Kubo, 2015; Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit, 2009; Turnell et al., 2008).

Where Turnell et al.’s (2008) study of Burmese remittances from Thailand to Myanmar is perhaps the most widely cited, the authors use survey data from 2002-2003. Barriers to access and the uncertain veracity of black market exchange rates pre-2012 means that remittance data are still scarce (see Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit, 2009; Wagle, 2016; Akee and Kapur, 2017). Finally, Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2012) also warn of the inability for survey data to fully capture the variability of remittances over time, complicating our understanding of remittance flows. In the absence of definitive statistics, both further research and policy is hindered (Bilsborrow and Lomaia, 2011).

Despite limitations, data collection instruments are increasingly sophisticated, and have allowed us to scrutinise migration and remittance flows at greater resolution than previously possible. The figures are worth repeating. Globally, total migrant stock in 2017 exceeded 257.7m, nearly 50% more than in 2000 (UN, 2017). About 38% of this stock is accounted for by South-South migration (World Bank, 2016a). Together, international migrants remitted more than $625bn in 2017, $477bn of which were received by low- and middle-income countries (World Bank, 2018). Again, growth has been phenomenal: global remittance receipts in 2010 totalled only $469bn, representing a 25% increase in seven years (ibid.).\textsuperscript{15} The top three recipients of remittances in 2016 were India ($72bn) and China ($64bn), buoyed by their size of their overseas populations.

\textsuperscript{14} KNOMAD is the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development, a research consortium that looks at the development economics of migration, which grew out of the World Bank Research Group on International Migration and Development and the Global Remittances Working Group.

\textsuperscript{15} This growth is likely both due to absolute volume increases but also more effective monitoring of bilateral flows (Ratha and Shaw, 2007).
and the Philippines ($30bn), which pursues more aggressive remittance-led economic planning (World Bank, 2016a). Moreover, proponents laud the stability and scale of remittances compared to other capital flows such as overseas development aid (ODA) or foreign direct investment (FDI) (Ratha, 2007). On the former, global remittances have outstripped and continued to surpass global ODA since 1996. On the latter, remittance flows are more stable than FDI, which tends to follow private capital market trends. Save for the immediate aftermath of the 2007 Financial Crisis and 2015, remittances have not recorded any significant period of negative growth or slowdown since the 1970s (World Bank, 2018).

The lack of data on Burmese migration outside the Thai-Myanmar corridor is part of this thesis’s rationale for collecting survey data. By doing so, I will be better placed to understand inter-group differences and to situate qualitative interview findings. Despite the capabilities of multilateral organisations, margins of error in enumerating both migrants and remittances are attributable to informal flows and migrant distrust in state instruments. By partnering with local NGOs and community gatekeepers, this thesis addresses the lack of grounded, grassroots data on Burmese migration.

2.1.4. The Nexus in Contemporary Research: Euphoria or Cautious Optimism?

Remittances have been hailed as the ‘new development mantra’ (Kapur, 2004). This euphoric optimism is bolstered by large-scale, quantitative panel studies that propose a positive relationship between remittance receipts and various development goals. Studies, often published by researchers at the World Bank or the IMF, have examined the relationship between remittances and poverty (Imai et al., 2014; Adams, 2004; Adams and Page, 2005; Adams, 2011; Gupta et al., 2009; Acosta et al., 2008; Barajas et al., 2012; Adams and Cuecuecha, 2013). Adams and Page (2005), for example, uses panel data from 71 developing countries and find that a 10% increase in the receipt of international remittances lead to a 3.5% decline in the proportion of people living under $1 a day. The authors conclude that ‘international migration and remittances reduce the level, depth, and severity of poverty’ in developing countries (ibid.: 1646). Wagle (2016: 548) produces one of the few datasets on remittances in Myanmar but find that incidence of poverty is higher in remittance recipient households and that ‘the benefits of remittance may accrue to the relatively well-off, making poorer households unable to meaningfully participate in migration and remittance’ (cf. Akee and Kapur, 2017). Nonetheless, he warns of causality: it may be that the poorest households also have the highest number of migrants.

The direct economic effects of remittances are especially important in times of shock. Yang and Choi (2007) find an inverse relationship between rainfall shocks in the Philippines and household remittance receipts: in migrant households, remittances increase during rainfall shock, taken as a proxy for sudden downturns in agrarian household income, supporting the NELM remittance-
as-insurance hypothesis (see 2.1.2). The insurance and counter-cyclical function of remittances have been corroborated elsewhere (Generoso, 2015; Lim and Morshed, 2015). Similarly, remittances allow poor households to smooth consumption: where rural livelihoods might be constrained by a lack of accessible credit, remittances allow households to maintain essential expenditures during income shocks (Rapoport and Docquier, 2006; Balli and Rana, 2015; Brown and Jimenez-Soto, 2015). This speaks to the normative goal of achieving livelihood ‘resilience’, allowing migrant households to better cope with shock and downturn (Griffiths, 2018b; Mangshang and Griffiths, 2018). This is particularly important in Myanmar, given seasonal agrarian incomes and rural precarity (LIFT, 2016b). Other elements of ‘development’ – investments and savings, education and health, and economic growth – have also been ‘tested’ against remittances (de Haas, 2007).

Studies into remittance impacts on investments and savings have generally been positive. In rural Pakistan, Adams (1998), finds a positive relationship between remittance availability and the propensity to accumulate assets and invest. Brown (1994: 364) similarly finds that remittances in South Pacific economies ‘make a significant contribution to savings and investment’. These might include human and physical investments, such as education and property, allowing households to diversify away from everyday expenditures such as food (Adams and Cuecuecha, 2010). This shift away from ‘survival’ expenditures speak to attempts to better integrate migration and remittances into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).16 Thieme and Ghimire (2014: 410), for example, advocate ‘linking migration with the more fundamental demand for human rights’ within the MDGs, to better protect workers whilst abroad, integrate returning migrants, and to ensure greater transparency within migration processes (Sutherland, 2013; Testaverde et al., 2017). Elsewhere, authors have looked at the relationship between remittances and health. In Algeria, Akçay and Karasoy (2017) find a positive correlation between remittances and long-term calorie consumption. In Vietnam, Nguyen and Nguyen (2015) find that both international and internal remittances increase the number of outpatient healthcare visits. As I explore in Section 6.2.2, this relationship between remittances and healthcare consumption is particularly important in Myanmar, where social protections are severely lacking (van Rooijen et al., 2018; Grundy et al., 2014; World Bank, 2015).

Beyond this, the effects of remittances are ambivalent. Using panel data spanning 1980-2004 in 39 developing countries, Pradhan et al. (2008) find that remittance receipts have a positive impact on economic growth, but impacts are modest; a small increase in economic growth requires a disproportionately large growth in remittances to achieve. Using remittance data for 24 Asia-Pacific countries between 1980 and 2009, Imai et al. (2014) similarly find that, although remittances reduce poverty and boost economic growth, some countries may be unable to buffer against the influx of remittances and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), thereby harming

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16 SDG 17.3 makes reference to ‘mobilise additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources’. Specifically, this is measured using FDI indicators (17.3.1) as well as remittance receipts (17.3.2) (UN, n.d.)
growth (see also Barajas et al., 2012). Though some have conjectured leveraging remittances to facilitate access to the formal financial sector, Ambrosius and Cuecuecha’s (2016) study in Mexico found that remittance receipts facilitate borrowing, but mainly from informal sources. In turn, this increases both households’ likelihood of having debt and the amount of debt, which counters broader ambitions of economic ‘development’ (Bylander and Hamilton, 2015; Bylander, 2014). That households are afforded greater access to credit but via informal channels also raises ethical questions over the definitions of the ‘right’ kind of development (Kunz, 2011). In a similar vein, gender has been of interest to policymakers as women are considered ‘better’ remitters (King et al., 2006); it was only in the last decade that remittance data meaningfully incorporated gender monitoring (Kunz, 2011). Comparing Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia with secondary male remittance data, Rahman and Fee (2009) find that women remit a larger proportion of their income home than men, and are more likely to remit to other women in their household (also Parreñas, 2001a). Similarly, the authors find that female recipients are more likely to spend remittances on human capital, such as education, whereas male recipients are more likely to spend on physical capital, such as farmland and agricultural equipment (see Orozco et al., 2006). More qualitatively, remittances are also seen to rework household gender roles by enabling novel politics of resource distribution (King et al., 2006), which are in turn driven by different visions and gendered narratives of development (Dannecker, 2009; Petrozziello, 2011). Put simply, gender plays a role in determining how much remittances are sent, to whom, and to what ends (Semyonov and Gorodzeisky, 2005).

Finally, studies have long evidenced that remittances do not flow to the poorest households (Lipton, 1980; McDowell and de Haan, 1997; Kapur, 2004). International migration, with higher costs and barriers to entry than internal migration means that it is not accessible to the poorest of the poor (Bylander and Hamilton, 2015; van Hear et al., 2017). Instead, studies have highlighted the potential for remittances to induce or exacerbate income inequality at origin (Massey, 1993; Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002; de Haas, 2010). Given ambivalent remittance impacts on certain development objectives, euphoric discourses must be qualified against grounded examinations of the socioeconomic life of migrants and their dependants.

Nonetheless, migration and remittances have become a staple of development discourse. In 2002, the UN held the first International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey (Ghosh, 2006). Over fifty heads of state adopted the ‘Monterrey Consensus’, seeking to capture FDI and other ‘private flows’ for development, whilst modernising financial and trading systems (see also Caliari, 2017). In September 2015, migration was included in the UN Summit: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, signalling ‘the first international development framework to include and recognise migration as a dimension of development’ (Foresti et al., 2018: 2).

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17 Two further conferences were later held in 2008 and 2015 in Doha, Qatar, and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, respectively. With each iteration of the conference, remittances became an increasingly prominent part of the agenda, contributing to ambitions to reduce the global cost of sending remittances (see 2.3.2).
Though migration and refugee issues had been recognised by multilateral organisations and conventions since the 1950s (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019), it was only in the last two decades that migration began to crystallise as an economic development issue in mainstream discourse. That the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) became a ‘related organisation’ to the UN in July 2016 further indicates the ‘mainstreaming’ of migration into development.

Though the 2000s were typified by a renewed optimism that remittances might help achieve various development objectives, results thus far have been mixed (Barajas et al., 2009). Indeed, nexus goals are potentially incongruent; though there is an expectation that migration can engender development, development is also considered desirable because it removes some of the impetus to migrate (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005; see 2.1.1). This poses an uncomfortable question: are we advocating migration to pursue development, or advocating development to control migration (Bakewell, 2008b)? It is this lack of clarity both in the normative aims of policy and of development outcomes that this thesis seeks to address. Chapter Four will examine the structural contexts of pre-migration livelihoods. Workers do not simply move from one place to another and the social contexts of migration and remittances are important determinants of their effects. To an extent, studies have capitulated to this idea and emphasis is increasingly placed on creating conducive environments for savings and investment (for example Clemens and Ogden, 2014), though these typically discuss structures in abstract with no empirical grounding. Both Chapters Four and Five will examine how structural contexts inform both migration drivers and development outcomes. Moreover, Chapters Five and Six will explore migration and remittances from behavioural and experiential perspectives. This requires grounded analyses of individual narratives and practices to understand the motivations behind behaviours: how money is sent, saved, managed, and spent.

2.3 The Nexus as Discourse, Practice and Management

How can we maximise the ‘returns’ to migration? How do we ensure remittances are put to ‘productive’ use? How can we leverage migration to create lasting development? From the earliest days of the nexus, these have been the key questions that policymakers, states, and researchers have strived towards answering. The previous section detailed how the nexus is couched within an institutional optimism that migration and remittances might be ‘leveraged’ or ‘harnessed’ for development. This section will review how this optimism has translated into policies. First, however, I review some of the ideological underpinnings of ‘development’ more generally. Here, critical development theory is useful in explaining how development is a social construct undergirded by ideological and political perspectives that stem from Western hegemony (Ziai, 2007; 2013). The nexus cannot be read as neutral objective truth but reveals in itself an ideological power structure where institutional priorities are framed, articulated, and practiced through policy over time (Gamlen, 2014).
At the highest level, ‘development’ represents the umbrella ideology of ‘progress’ (Thorbecke, 2007; Escobar, 1995; Ziai, 2007). For Raghuram (2009: 109), these ideologies are manifest as the ‘stratification of power that reinforces certain versions of development’ that allows the dominant to define the boundaries of (il)legitimate concerns and pursuits (see also Bakewell, 2008b). In terms of remittances, this is vested in a host of Western institutions of political and economic power, principally the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, or what Easterly (2002: 226) calls the ‘cartel of good intentions’. This ensures that research, policy, and funding are couched within profoundly Western understandings of progress and development (Asis et al., 2009; Asis and Piper, 2008). This is best articulated through Escobar’s (1995) Encountering Development, a seminal ‘anthropology’ of development studies. For Escobar, a defining characteristic of development discourse is how it is framed as a set of objective truths which can only be delivered through ‘neutral’, ‘scientific’ research, and ‘expert’ planning which, as we have seen, takes on a distinctively econometric flavour. It is beneath this that we find our subsidiary of the development enterprise: labour migration (Maiava and King, 2007). Though the factors that drive and sustain migration are varied, the preponderance of the so-called ‘migration-development’ nexus requires that the complexities of migration be reduced to a managerial vocabulary as in ‘flows’ and ‘stocks’ to reflect the grammar of development (Escobar, 1995; Piper, 2010; Asis et al., 2009). In doing so, this renders migration knowable, tangible, and malleable to achieve development goals and objectives (Thieme and Ghimire, 2014). Beneath both ‘migration’ and ‘development’ are the assets that policymakers are interested in capturing, leveraging, and mobilising to finance and sustain development priorities: remittances.

This theoretical nesting is important because it demonstrates how migration and remittances are not separate policy endeavours but are a part an ideological conglomerate (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994; Ziai, 2004). More sophisticated monitoring migration and remittance monitoring instruments have enabled policymakers to target and manage those flows to further the development agenda (Hudson, 2008; Thieme and Ghimire, 2014; Ghosh, 2006; Sutherland, 2013). In this vein, remittances are not so much the ‘new development mantra’ (Kapur, 2004), but the expression of neoliberal orthodoxy through new arenas of socioeconomic relations (Abreu, 2012). Escobar (1995), for example, charts distinct periods of development preoccupations, from poverty reduction in the 1950s, nutrition in the 1960s, gender from the 1970s, environmentalism in the 1980s and 1990s (see also Thorbecke, 2007; Boserup, 1970). For Escobar (1995: 210), this successive ‘discovery’ and definition of new narratives did not amount to paradigmatic shifts, but:

‘[T]he repeated bifurcation of development… reflect the appearance of new problems, even if the new discourses exist in the same plane of the original concept [of development], and thus contribute to the discourse’s self-creation and autoreferentiality.’
The development discourse is recreated in every new ‘discovery’ as part of the ‘oscillating search for some “silver bullet” for development (Ranis, 2004: 13). This is reflected in nexus vocabulary as policymakers seek to capture remittances’ hitherto ‘untapped potential’ (USAID, 2012: 2). Given that migration and remittances have long preceded such policies, one must question for whom is this resource ‘untapped’ (Pieterse, 1998)? Thinking about the nexus as an extension of development rather than a paradigmatic shift helps us to understand the traits and limitations of this discourse. In particular, this discursive self-production has three implications.

First, the disconnect between phenomena, such as poverty, and broader development discourse depoliticises the causes of underdevelopment and intervention (LeBaron, 2014; Collinson, 2009; Wise, 2015). Moreover, depoliticisation obscures the historical-structural, path-dependent trajectories of migration and economic development (see Kashwan et al., 2018). Instead of thinking of poverty as a discrete condition, theorists have examined the production of poverty through unequal social relations (Mosse, 2007). For Vammen and Brønden (2012: 28), the migration-development nexus amount to mere ‘buzzwords [which] are often intentionally ambiguous and “fuzzy”, thereby obscuring complex issues by promoting optimistic universal recipes for development within a depoliticized framework, useful as a tool for mediating in the interest of political consensus’ (see also Ziai, 2013). Similarly, in Ferguson’s (1994) seminal study of development intervention in Lesotho, he writes how aid failure was attributable to the inability for policymakers to grasp traditional social and cultural structures that meant that attempts at livestock commercialisation, amongst other objectives, proved disastrous. Instead, Ferguson argued, ‘standard’ aid packages pushed by multilateral organisations essentialised aid recipients as the undeveloped ‘other’ (Naylor, 2011). Development organisations, principally the World Bank, were handed trusteeship over a society with the power for intervention, without the need for accountability; policy was less implemented than they were imposed (Cowen and Shenton, 1995; Moyo, 2009). This entrenches market principles and a hierarchy of state governance power (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002), and depoliticises both poverty and the state (Piper, 2008b).

In his study of poverty interventions in Afghanistan, Naylor, (2011: 193) describes how discourses perpetuate power inequalities between aid donors, recipients, financial institutions, international organisations and NGOs through a ‘politics of pity’ that ‘uses subjects as mere instruments by (re)presenting them to achieve some other objective, such as fund-raising or policy justification’. Discourse thus inscribes in beneficiaries an internalised subjugation, whilst paving over the historical trajectories that might have contributed to underdevelopment in the first place (see also Gamlen, 2014; Moyo, 2009). This depoliticization of intervention also permits a detachment between policy outcomes and policy viability (Ferguson, 1994). That remittances do not straightforwardly entail economic growth did not amount to failure in economic reasoning, but signifies market imperfections that needs correction (Clemens and Ogden, 2014). In turn, this generates demand for further intervention where the power of neoliberal, market-friendly policies can be reproduced and further entrenched. Development is thus both intervention and political discourse (Gamlen, 2014; Ziai, 2013; Maiava and King, 2007).
Second, while development discourse may be autoreferential, it is not auto-critical. In his novel analysis of 136 articles in 10 leading development studies journals across six decades Park (2017: 58), for example, finds that development research is often strong in terms of using ‘external histories as a source of data’ whereas papers tend to be much weaker when engaging with the internal histories of development studies. Development research, in other words, generally fail to significantly engage or build, on the theoretical histories within development (Gamlen, 2014). The analytical referent may change but the underlying logic of development policy remains hegemonic. This is similarly true for a cornerstone of migration theory: The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM). Here, Abreu (2012) argues that, far from being innovative, the NELM model remains inherently neoclassical, based on individualistic assumptions of economic rationality and optimisation according to market information, whilst ignoring structural-historical factors of migration.

Finally, nexus policies are not neutral, ahistorical science but instruments which inherit the ideologies of development orthodoxy through self-production (King, 2012). As above, discourse is actioned through management, which imports into policy a host of ‘authoritarian and technocratic implications’ (Ziai, 2007: 8), which might include data monitoring, border policing, and the categorisation of different migrant groups (Frowd, 2017; Ye, 2014; Kunz, 2011). Again, Escobar (1995: 52) describes how ‘development fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people—the development professionals—whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task’. To understand how nexus policy is practiced is to understand how development is managed. Here, ‘that group of people’ principally refers to the World Bank, the IOM, and the ILO, which provide humanitarian assistance, migration monitoring and best practices, border security expertise, programme funding, and policy reform (Frowd, 2017; Kunz, 2011; Barber and Bryan, 2018; Pape, 2016; ILO, 2017). This consolidation of power also underwrites the type of knowledge these organisations hold. As Asis et al. (2009) note, these organisations principally organise around quantitative, programme-based discourses and ‘investigative nodes’ that might harbour categorical biases (as in looking at particular migrant groups over another) (cf. Ferguson, 1994). English-dominated publications and limited political independence – the authors mention limited attention given to politically sensitive issues in Singapore, for example (also Asis and Piper, 2008; Asis et al., 2009) – means that ‘expertise’ is always contingent on the agendas of donors (Parfitt, 2002). In sum, knowledge does not simply ‘inform’ policy, but is also a symbolic means of lending authority to, and legitimising, political objectives (Boswell, 2009; Simmons 2008).

In turn, three nexus policy motifs can thus be identified: knowledge creation, regulation, and marketisation. The first, discussed above, involves efforts to visibilise and quantify irregular flows and transactions to render the subject – people, capital – knowable to the expert gaze of the planner (Escobar, 1995). The second involves subjecting these flows to the managerial logic of
various state, legal (migration governance and pathways) (Yeoh, 2006), and economic instruments (anti-money laundering measures) (Atia, 2016), by policing flows of people and money (Piper, 2010). Principally, these institutions comprise Myanmar’s Ministry of Labour, Immigration, and Population (MOLIP), as well as Singapore’s Ministry of Manpower (MOM), and the Monetary Authority (see 2.3.1 and Chapter Five). Through regulation, the returns to migration can be made ‘productive’ through formal instruments of development: savings and banking accounts, credit facilities, and investment products which, it is assumed, will deepen financial markets and facilitate growth (Hudson, 2008). It is through these motifs that the contours of development discourse reveal itself, normalising Western/Northern precepts of economic development, trajectories of modernisation, and the ‘right’ way to develop.

Critical development theories allow us to question ‘development’, economically-defined, as neutral and disinterested (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). This power to define what constitutes development and how it should be achieved is narrowly vested in a particular set of institutions each with its attendant agendas. Moreover, agendas are not consistent across all parties – governments, businesses, migrants, multilateral organisations, researchers – that are interested in ‘development’. This thesis builds on these themes by examining workers’ experiences across the migration chain (Barrientos et al., 2013). In doing so, I map the points where workers come into contact with various stakeholders to reveal how different interests impede the quest for development (see Testaverde et al., 2017). I challenge the broader normative assumptions of nexus thinking that migration is a neutral process. Instead, migrants do not simply move from one place to another; the processes and experiences they encounter mediate the returns they are able to realise. In Chapter Five, I reveal how different migrant groups secure employment in Singapore and how these structure predictable pathways that determine how risks and rewards are distributed. In particular, I focus on brokers and how these inform patterns of precarity that prevent the generation of remittances. Governance also plays a large role and I demonstrate how the different interests and capabilities of Myanmar and Singapore to regulate movement leads to rifts in worker protections that undermine ‘development’. In the next two sections, I review how this managerial culture is put into practice in nexus policy and how it impacts on the lives of its beneficiaries. I begin with an overview of migration regulation in Southeast Asia and how policies are targeted.

2.1.5. Nexus Interests in the Myanmar-Singapore Corridor

The previous section reviewed some of the theoretical contestations in development discourse and how these inform particular modes of interventionism. This section reviews how migration is regulated in the Myanmar-Singapore corridor in practice. The rhetoric behind regulation is simple: in order to maximise the returns to migration (conceived as remittances), policies should protect workers from exploitation and lower the transaction costs (travel, documentation, brokerage) associated with migration by regularising cross-border flows (Hugo, 2012; Piper,
The impulse to manage, applied to migration, is defined by the need to produce ‘orderly, legal’ migration schemes [that] can benefit sending countries’ developmental needs (typically measured by way of monetary remittances) and receiving countries’ labour market needs as well as individual migrants themselves’ (Piper, 2010: 400, emphasis added). The optimism of migration regulation lies in optimisation, such that a ‘triple win’— gains for the migrant, origin country and destination country— can be attained (Wickramasekara, 2011). Such rhetoric should be read with caution and critics have grown sceptical of sweeping ambitions, instead urging recognition of intra-group differences, which have important repercussions of our understanding of who is being managed and why.

First, there is the distinction between ‘orderly’ (and presumably ‘disorderly’) migration (see also Cowen and Shenton, 1995). Mobility studies offer important insights into how the migration of different peoples are framed as desirable or subversive to the global economic order (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013; De Genova, 2002; Bakewell, 2008b). On the one hand, authors have studied the mobilities of so-called ‘expatriates’— high-income, footloose nomads whose unhindered mobilities are celebrated as part of a cosmopolitan ‘lifestyle’ (Devadason, 2017; Kim, 2010). These workers are welcomed into labour markets as drivers of economic growth, but also courted by their countries of origin as entrepreneurial investors and virtuous human capital (Faist, 2008; Yeoh, 2006). On the other hand, there is a class of low-income, temporary workers— primarily in the domestic, construction, manufacturing, and agricultural industries— whose movements are dictated by the whims of global labour demand and increasingly restrictive policies of destination countries (Kaur, 2010; Piper, 2010; Hugo, 2012; Hickey et al., 2013; Rother, 2017).

Management policies are primarily interested in the latter (Kaur, 2010). Since the nexus is interested in development issues, policies tend to target the mobilities of low-income workers who are disproportionately irregular and therefore ‘in need’ of management (Friesen, 2017). Moreover, the spectre of disorderly, low-income mass immigration is increasingly frames as a security issue, driving the demand for management (Arifianto, 2009; Faist, 2005; Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005). This is catalysed by public discontent over ‘intolerable levels’ of unskilled migration, especially in European and North American destinations (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002: 5; Datta, 2009b). Since temporary workers represent a ‘group of economically-needed but politically ‘undesirable’ labour’, the logic of management thus straddles both development and political imperatives (Hickey et al., 2013 13). Finally, concerns around migrant protections and migration costs have coincided with discourses of modern slavery, human trafficking, and ‘vulnerability’ in research and policy (Waite et al., 2015; Joarder and Miller, 2013; Yea, 2015; Mahdavi, 2013b; Mahdavi and Sargent, 2011; Meyer et al., 2014). This spectre of vulnerability is highly gendered, as in women ‘trafficked’ into domestic or sex work (Sobieszczyk, 2000, Anderson and Davidson, 2003; ILO, 2015a), which is also predicated on selective criteria of who the state deems ‘worthy’ or ‘deserving’ of protection (Yea, 2015). This is relevant in Singapore, where domestic workers must be female (Annex 9). Together, the migration governance
disproportionately manifests as the management of the ‘poor’, ‘vulnerable’ woman (Islam and Cojocaru, 2015).

Second, migration management is increasingly couched in broader mobility regimes (Glick Shiller and Salazar, 2013; Kalir, 2013; LeBaron, 2014; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). Hickey et al. (2013), identify three distinct types of migration policy: national border regimes, migrant rights and protections policies, and migration and development policies. In practice, policies often have overlapping concerns and interests that precludes straightforward categorisation (Chi, 2008). Nexus policies do not escape the broader politics of migration. Here, we also see how nexus ambitions for ‘maximising migrant gains’ may also be at odds with current regulation as migrants face intersecting interests (Goh et al., 2017; Chi, 2008; Testaverde et al., 2017; Rigg and Oven, 2015; Piper, 2010). Nonetheless, in April 2017, migration governance was crystallised as an intergovernmental priority as the UN and IOM launched the ‘Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration’ (IOM, n.d.).

As migration policies are diverse and highly context-specific, this section will focus on Myanmar and Singapore migration policies (see Hickey (2013) for an overview of the internal and regional migration policy in Southeast Asia).

The bulk of international Burmese outmigrants is found in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore (Testaverde et al., 2017), though the types of migrants in those countries are very different. First, both as a result of politics and institutional capacity, Myanmar has historically been weak at migration governance (Grundy-Warr, 2013); outmigration was prohibited from the 1960s until the 1990s (Charney, 2009). For those unable to leave, this fostered massive internal displacement (Mahn et al., 2008; South and Jolliffe, 2015; Aung, 2014). Those who did manage to leave usually did so across the Thai-Myanmar border where ineffective policing of the peripheral 2,100km border meant that international movements were largely undocumented (Lamb, 2014; Meyer et al., 2014; Aung, 2014). In this corridor, earlier migrants were typically designated ‘refugees’ (see Waite et al., 2015), owing to the political instability that rocked Myanmar in the 1980s (see Dudley, 2011). Ethnic conflict, notably between the Tatmadaw and the Karen ethnic minority in Kayin State drove these flows and established semi-permanent refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. Though there have been successive efforts to repatriate refugees, 100,000 still reside in these camps (IOM, 2019). Moreover, there is a further two million Burmese working in Thailand (ibid.). However, their congregation in urban centres and manufacturing hubs such as Bangkok and Mae Sot means the distinction between ‘refugee’ and ‘labour migrant’, especially across generations, is increasingly unclear (Ma, 2017a; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014).

Second, according to NGO experts in Myanmar, there are 500,000 Burmese labour migrants in Malaysia, the majority of whom are ‘irregular’. In addition, there are another 142,370 refugees,

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18 Amongst migrant protections and measures to combat xenophobia, one of the key policy priorities for the Compact has been to develop an international governance framework for migration and migration formalisation (IOM, n.d.).
19 Thailand lacks a national framework on determining urban refugee status and official statistics record only around 6,000 Burmese urban refugees (IOM, 2019).
over half of whom are Rohingya (UNHCR, n.d.). The composition of Myanmar-Malaysia flows is thus more ‘humanitarian’ in nature compared to Thailand. Despite this, the religious-linguistic divide between the Buddhist-majority Burmese and the Muslim-majority population in Malaysia has also led to discrimination, violence, and everyday exclusion of the former (Franck, 2016). In turn, the Myanmar government had periodically banned labour migration to Malaysia (Htwe, 2018b). Finally, informal estimates place the Burmese population in Singapore to be 200,000 (Ma, 2017a). Given Singapore’s sophisticated migration governance regime and the absence of a refugee population, those 200,000 are mostly ‘labour’ migrants, although there are a growing number of students and dependants. Compared to other destinations, the typology of Singapore-bound migration is typified by formality and stronger affinity with so-called ‘economic’ labour migration. Although conflict and displacement are important vectors of Burmese migration within the region, this thesis is principally concerned with labour migration, and finds no explicit evidence of conflict and displacement amongst the respondent sample. Nonetheless, as Chapter Four details, labour migration itself might be compelled through environmental and economic stresses that complicate a straightforward classification of ‘voluntary’ versus ‘forced’ migration (Davidson, 2013).

Myanmar lacks a coherent set of migration policies (ILO, 2017). Upon assuming power in 2015, the NLD has attempted migration policy reform with the assistance of the ILO through revising extant policies and restructuring government departments (ILO, 2017). In Thailand and Malaysia, policy has focused on the regularisation of workers (IOM, 2019). ‘Nationality verification’ processes has been ongoing since 2009 and is the product of various memoranda of understanding that aim to extend better protections for migrant workers (IOM, 2019). In Malaysia, regularisation, as Kaur (2014) argues, has been used by the state to maintain a supply of cheap labour to fuel economic growth on an as-needed basis (also Yeoh, 2006). In both countries, regularisation has been hindered by poor implementation, corruption, and abuse (Chalamwong et al., 2012; IOM, 2019; Kaur, 2014). Nonetheless, Myanmar’s thawing international relations has spurred policy research in recent years. The World Bank, for example, recently published a report entitled Migrating to Opportunity: Overcoming Barriers to Labor Mobility in Southeast Asia (Testaverde et al., 2017). As Myanmar is the largest regional exporter of workers within ASEAN, the authors recommend policies to improve governance, international collaboration, data collection and monitoring, policy reform and, critically, ‘balance protections for migrant workers with the needs of economic development’ (ibid.: 25). Other projects have balanced these macro perspectives with grassroots insights to understand how migration is experienced and how strategies of migration fit into everyday livelihood strategies (de Haan et al., 2002; McDowell and de Haan, 1997; de Haan, 1999). The University of Sussex and the IOM have been active in looking at the role of migration for poverty alleviation and development, and the role of brokers

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20 Diplomatic relations between Myanmar and Malaysia have soured in recent years, partly over concerns of working conditions for Burmese migrants, but also due to Malaysia’s condemnation of Myanmar’s treatment of Muslim minorities, especially the Rohingyas.
in facilitating international mobility. Moreover, LIFT has funded a flagship US$6.5m project named ‘Twe Let’ (Burmese for ‘hand in hand’) to look at how to improve migration outcomes for rural communities.

In contrast, the absence of shared land borders coupled with sophisticated border policing means that the Singaporean ‘mobility regime’ is highly formalised (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013). Following decades of rapid economic growth since independence in 1965, economic growth has fuelled demand for foreign labour (Yeoh, 2006). Despite this, Singapore has developed strict immigration laws that extend different types of rights to migrant workers, usually depending on their skill and income level (Annex 9). Migrants are unequally incorporated into the Singaporean labour markets. On the one hand, skilled migrants are eligible for permanent residency or citizenship applications whereas unskilled workers are not (Wong, 1997), and there are limitations on the jobs accessible to workers in different visa categories. In the long-run, skilled workers are encouraged to remain in Singapore and apply for residency whereas unskilled workers are employed on temporary work permits subject to renewal (Hickey et al., 2013), and are imported very much on a ‘use and discard’ philosophy’ (Yeoh and Huang, 1999: 1163). It is because of this formality that Singapore offers an interesting case study of how nexus ambitions may undermine or conflict with ambitions of migration management more generally (Piper, 2008b).

Singapore also enacts migration management through marketisation. Post-development charges that development policy practices are monopolised by a cadre of ‘professionals’ or ‘experts’ no longer ring true (Ziai, 2007). Instead, evidence from Asia illustrates the opposite: there is an increasing diversification of actors engaged in the recruitment, placement, and management of transnational labour (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). There is a greater recognition of the diverse, private actors that occupy the ‘middle space’ between the state and migrants (Deshingkar, 2018; McKeown, 2012; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). Collinson (2009: 26) subverts the marketisation of migration by applying the logic of value chain analysis to reveal the bricolage of ‘labour recruiters, gang leaders, brokers, powerful actors within trans-national migration networks, smugglers and traffickers’ that comprise the migration process (see also Barrientos et al., 2013; Barrientos, 2013). It is within this complex system of ‘interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility’ that the mobility of millions are forged (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014: S124). Intense focus is trained on understanding the range of actors that market and facilitate migration, variously termed the ‘merchants of labour’ (Martin,

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21 Implemented by the IOM, Metta, and the University of Sussex, and funded by LIFT, the Capitalising Human Mobility for Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Development in Myanmar (CHIME) (2016-2018) project examined labour migration patterns and impacts in Myanmar. Similarly, implemented by the IOM and the University of Sussex, and funded by the British Academy, the Brokered Migratory for Domestic Work and Construction Work in Ghana and Myanmar: Examining the Relevance of the Slavery and Trafficking Discourse (CHAINs) (ongoing) project examines the impact of brokerage on labour mobility and migrant freedoms. I was involved in the latter project. Outputs for both projects are forthcoming.
the ‘migration industry’ (Jones, 2015), and ‘migration infrastructure’ (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014).

At the other end of the value chain are intermediaries that facilitate the flow of remittances. In the Myanmar-Singapore corridor, the majority of remittances flow through networks called *hundi* (Kubo, 2015; 2013; Turnell, 2014), an ‘informal but highly organized and founded on social infrastructures comprising webs of relationships based on kinship, friendship, and regional networks’ (Rahman and Yeoh, 2008: 6) (see 6.1). Despite attempts to formalise them, the resilience of *hundi* demonstrates the complex relationships between migrant, governmental, and corporate interests, and the enduring role of brokerage in various migration functions (Rahman and Yeoh, 2008; Rahman et al., 2014; Kubo, 2015; McKeown, 2012). If development policy is principally theorised through the lens of the nation-state and a small group of multilateral organisations, then the enduring role of the informal private sector is noteworthy and will constitute a large part of this thesis’s analysis. Here, Hart’s (2001) distinction between ‘Big D’ and ‘little d’ development is apt: where the former describes intentional interventions in post-War reconstruction, decolonisation and the formation of the new world order, the latter describes the immanent process of uneven capitalist development (see also Maiava and King, 2007). In practice, we see how the two are not mutually exclusive as states and policymakers selectively intervene to guide the market to effect and to ‘do’ neoliberal ‘development’ (see 2.4.1).

Though migration governance falls under the purview of Singapore’s Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the enforcement of temporary worker policies – from worker protections, compliance, and administration – is largely delegated to a private sector of employment agents (Goh et al., 2017). In turn, these intermediaries satisfy Singapore’s demand for flexible, low-wage labour whilst maintaining a hands-off, de-risked approach to management (Yeoh, 2006; Piper, 2010; Hickey et al., 2013; Kalir, 2013).22 This is both economically and politically expedient. First, migration brokerage represents a lucrative industry as the processing and placement of workers commands heavy fees. Delegating the recruitment and placement of workers thus shields the state from the cost of directly contracting workers (Williams and Baláž, 2012). Second, outsourcing management insulates the state from political risks as it ‘makes it easier for Singapore authorities to pay little attention to the demands of origin states, perhaps until their political standing and legitimacy are called into question’ (Goh et al., 2017: 24). This is of particular relevance to the domestic worker industry where the mistreatment of workers in Singapore have threatened diplomatic tensions with labour sending countries, notably Indonesia and Myanmar who had, at various points, banned the migration of domestic workers to Singapore (Tan, 2015; Wei, 2015). The role of the state, therefore, is to mediate crisis, rather than

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22 The size of the non-resident (non-citizen or non-permanent resident) population in Singapore has long been a sensitive political issue and there have been attempts to curb the state’s reliance on foreign labour, especially in skilled occupations. Following weakened growth in the construction and offshore marine sectors – some of Singapore’s largest migrant labour industries – Singapore’s non-resident population in 2017 fell for the first time in 14 years by 1.6% (Toh, 2017).
to regulate the day-to-day (Goh et al., 2017). This confluence of interests – between the state to minimise risks and the private sector to maximise profits – might explain why Singapore has abstained from international conventions on migrant worker protections. At the time of writing, the Philippines was the only country in ASEAN to have ratified the ILO’s Domestic Workers Convention C189 (Islam and Cojocaru, 2015). By rejecting the Convention, Singapore maximises returns for the state but perhaps, as we will see, at the expense of the migrant (cf. Pape, 2016).

That temporary workers are funnelled on an industrial scale into so-called ‘3D occupations’ – those jobs that are dirty, difficult, and dangerous (see 2.4.1) – signals a departure from nexus rhetoric of a ‘triple win’ and ‘formal’ migration (Baey and Yeoh, 2015; Standing, 2011; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). The imperative to produce ‘order’ takes on a darker tone. Where the business of employment agencies is to ‘import’ workers from origin countries based on the preferences of individual employers, workers are filtered by criteria of desirable or undesirable specifications, such as nationality, age, appearance, or docility (Huang and Yeoh, 1998; Anderson, 2000).

Domestic, as with most other temporary workers, are ‘maid to order’ (Constable, 1997), which reproduces essentialised classes of workers over time (Ye, 2014). The imperative to protect workers is subsumed beneath the interests of the labour marketplace where one ‘shops’ for workers, and the purported benefits of managed migration has largely failed to materialise (Anderson and Davidson, 2003).

Migration policy is not so much a nexus of migration and development, as a ‘migration industry and markets for migration control’ (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012: 67). Indeed, as Sobieszczyk’s (2000; 2002) studies of low-wage Northern Thai migrants show, irregular migration pathways are sometimes actively pursued by workers as it is cheaper and more flexible than their formal counterparts (see also Silvey, 2004b; Killias, 2010; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). The logic of flexibility is subverted as workers migrate irregularly precisely because it is seen as quicker and more profitable (see Aung, 2014; Killias, 2010). A misalignment of interests is evidenced where policy primarily assists the state – which itself may lack policy coherence or political unity (ILO, 2017) – in maintaining a pool of accessible labour, but where market actors harbour perverse incentives against migrant protections in order to maximise profits (Schierup et al., 2014). This incoherence in migration policy thus manifests across three axes: first, the nominal aim of protecting workers to maximise the uncertain returns to migration, second to satisfy the flexibilised labour needs of labour receiving-states, and third the private interests of the migration industry.

In sum, there is significant discrepancy between how migration is managed in Myanmar and Singapore. Where the former is generally lacking in capacity and policy coherence, the latter is highly sophisticated and restrictive. In the spaces created between the migrant and the state, private interests percolate. Discourses of migration management – bound by ideas of order and protection – sit uneasily against business interests to generate revenue from worker placements. The implications of this is policy and discursive incoherence. On the one hand, there is a desire
to manage population flows. On the other hand, the way it is being managed has undermined migrants’ faith in regulatory instruments, thereby pushing the purported beneficiaries of policy further from uptake. Put simply, the nexus is not a bounded ideology forged from common goals but a tenuous conglomerate of divergent concerns that is often detrimental to migrant interests. In Chapter Five, I demonstrate how these interests structure the pathways and experiences of migration, which in turn determine the likely returns migrants are able to realise. The overall argument of this literature review bears repeating: people do not simply move from one place to another, but migration structures, to a large extent, mediate whether she is able to capitalise on her mobility.

2.1.6. Money and the Nexus: Cashing in

Though migration management policies differ by national contexts (Kaur, 2010; 2014; Piper, 2010; Hugo, 2012), remittance management policies are characterised by remarkable consensus amongst policymakers and remittance-receiving states. The rhetoric is simple and inherits similar ambitions from migration management: in order to leverage remittances to orchestrate desired development impacts, remittances should be managed ‘properly’ by both migrants and the state (Sutherland, 2013). In Myanmar, migration was both a pressure valve to relieve popular dissent associated with economic mismanagement from failed experiments with socialism in the 1960s to 1980s (Charney, 2009; Aung-Thwin and Myint-U, 1992), and a means for businesses to generate foreign exchange through remittances (Kubo, 2015). Since migration is often pursued as a strategy of income expansion, policies have sought to maximise the economic returns through remittance-led development (Clemens and Ogden, 2014). Transfers must be regulated and redirected towards more ‘productive’ market usage.

The discursive legitimacy of regulation and marketisation rests on the distinction between formal and informal remittances on two key axes: productivity and security. The first axis distinguishes between the ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ use of remittances, which is rooted in early nexus studies in the 1980s (see 2.1.1). Migrant remittances, it was argued, is often ‘squandered’ on conspicuous, non-productive consumption such as household goods and non-agricultural land and property, and status-oriented imported goods that are not income-generating (Yang, 2011; Hudson, 2008; Datta, 2009b). In some cases, remittances might displace waged labour in the household, creating a moral hazard where those who can work don’t, and instead rely on remittances (Chami et al., 2003). For ‘development’ to occur, remittances must be used ‘properly’ (Bakewell, 2008b), which is often defined in terms of income generation and investment (Rapoport and Docquier, 2005; Adams, 2011; de Haas, 2005; Clemens and Ogden, 2014; Basok, 2000). In turn, these objectives require the formalisation of capital flows since ‘countries with improved financial markets... have more opportunities to attract remittances through formal channels and are thereby more likely to channel it into more productive uses’ (Ahmed and Martínez-Zarzoso, 2016: 24). The ‘productivity’ argument has received considerable criticism as
though these ‘external trustees know what is best and are the best people to determine development outcomes [whilst assuming] that local people do not’ (Maiava and King, 2007: 84; Cowen and Shenton, 1995; Parfitt, 2002). Nonetheless, the paternalistic conceptualisation of how remittances ought to be spent remains a mainstay of modern remittance policy today (see for example Clemens and Ogden, 2014). As Bakewell (2008b: 1354) notes, implicit within nexus discourse is the ‘expectation that migrants should want to maintain their links with the country of origin and, moreover, want to contribute to its development’ (emphasis added; see also Yeoh et al., 2000; Gibson et al., 2001; Skeldon, 2008). Nexus remittance discourse is therefore as much about productivity as it is about shaping the moral code of one’s obligations (Harper and Zubida, 2018).

More recently, the second axis of remittance regularisation has appealed to ideas around security and securitisation. Discursively, this bifurcates remittances into legitimate or subversive flows, the latter portrayed as conduits of the global shadow banking system, enabling terror-financing and money laundering that governments have increasingly sought to eradicate/control (Brown and Jimenez-Soto, 2015; Atia, 2016; Wang, 2011). On the policing of international transfers, de Goede (2003) notes how anti-terror and anti-money laundering measures in the US post-9/11 have hindered global hawala transfers, an informal method of remittance used in the Middle East and North Africa.23 Not only did this lead to the financial exclusion of Muslim migrants who rely on hawala to send money home, but it also frames informal remittances as illegitimate and risky whilst normalising and legitimising Western banking and financial systems (see also Datta, 2009a; 2009b). For Kunz (2013), the distinction between formal (good) and informal (bad) remittances functions as a tool of governance and discipline, enabling what Atia (2016: 468), terms the ideological ‘war on terrorist finance’, thereby granting states ‘power over financial mobility’. At best, this spurs efforts to visibilise, track, and co-opt into policy the ‘missing billions’ transferred through undocumented channels (Kunz, 2013; Simmons, 2008). At worst, selective legitimacy has enabled authorities to target remittance corridors it deems dangerous, severing migrant financial corridors through corporate and governmental ‘de-risking’ (World Bank, 2016b). The securitisation of remittances can have major impacts on the viability of bilateral flows and the livelihoods of migrants’ financial dependents (Hudson, 2008).

Remittance management represents an attempt to discipline unruly flows of ‘remittances’ – hitherto unproductive and dangerous – into an orderly, productive stock of development capital, whilst legitimising intervention (Ziai, 2007). In practice, the objectives of remittance management – regularisation and marketisation – go hand in hand. If the core ambition of remittance management is to create productive capital leverage, then proponents argue that it is only by integrating informal flows into formal products and services – money transfer operators (MTOs), banking and savings products, investment vehicles and instruments – that this will be achieved.

23 In terms of its structural organisation and its functioning as a trust-based means of cash transfer, hawala in the Middle East and North Africa is analogous to hundi in South and Southeast Asia (Rahman and Yeoh, 2008; Rahman et al., 2014).
(Ahmed and Martínez-Zarzoso, 2016; Zapata, 2013; Aggarwal et al., 2011; Ambrosius and Cuecuecha, 2016; Rapoport and Docquier, 2006). This rests on the assumption that the formalisation of remittances would increase demand and access to financial services, which would induce financial and economic development (Zapata, 2013; Aggarwal et al., 2011; Gupta et al., 2009; Ambrosius and Cuecuecha, 2016). Nonetheless, one enduring barrier to formalisation is due to low uptake of formal services, usually attributed to the high cost or inaccessibility of services (Freund and Spatafora, 2008).

A key policy objective to emerge in the last decade has been to reduce the transaction costs of formal MTOs to better compete with informal remittance methods (Rahman and Yeoh, 2008; Rahman et al., 2014; Kubo, 2015; Kosse and Vermeulen, 2014). Of particular priority are attempts at fostering competition amongst money transfer operators and removing exchange rate restrictions (Simmons, 2008; Ratha, 2004). To date, perhaps the largest coordinated effort to tackle remittance costs has been the ‘5x5 Objective’, which was proposed by the World Bank’s Global Remittance Working Group (GRWG) and endorsed first by the G8 at the L’Aquila Summit in 2009 and then the G20 at the Cannes Summit in 2011. The purpose of the 5x5 objective was to reduce the cost of remittances from a global average of 10% of amount sent to 5% within five years of endorsement, which represents a global annual saving of US$16bn in transaction fees (Nicoi, 2012). In doing so, this increases the overall amount received by recipients (Ratha, 2007; 2004), and encourages workers to send more money home (Ahmed and Martínez-Zarzoso, 2016; Kakhkharov et al., 2017; Kosse and Vermeulen, 2014). Research on remittances in Myanmar is both necessitated and hindered by the lack of extant data. At the time of writing, international remittances have not been of significant visibility in Myanmar. Though the private sector has made inroads into the domestic remittance market, few have made meaningful entry into the Myanmar-Singapore corridor, despite reforms to the banking industry in 2012 (Turmel, 2014; Kubo, 2013).

Zapata (2013) details the case of Colombia where overseas remittances are increasingly courted by state and private actors via the ‘Mi Casa con Remesas’ programme, which aims to channel remittances into the housing market. Initially comprised of low-cost mortgage products, Zapata details how the programme has since diversified to an ‘ever-expanding range of products… extending participation in the programme to a wide range of financial institutions’, through international property and housing fairs (ibid.: 99) (see also McGregor, 2014; Faist, 2008). Two key observations can be gleaned from Zapata’s study. First, as Datta (2009b) notes, there is an institutional hypocrisy that the state should encourage purchase of housing when extant rhetoric had derided these very expenditures as unproductive and frivolous (see also Kunz, 2011). Instead, property under conventional remittance rhetoric ‘are not considered ‘productive’ because they are not explicitly linked to the financial sector and so are not conducive to the kind

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24 Another World Bank initiative – ‘Remittance Prices Worldwide’ – also publishes annual remittance cost data across 365 country corridor pairs (World Bank, n.d.(b)). The drive to reduce remittance costs is also reflected in SDG 10.C (UN, n.d.).
of local economic and social development that migrants are expected to provide’ (Zapata, 2013: 100). In other words, investing in property is permissible if done ‘properly’ through the financial sector. Just as ‘investment’ defines productivity, so is growth the goal of formalisation. The argument is multi-scalar. On the micro-level, formalisation expand service access to financially excluded individuals, which enables accumulative economic development capital accumulation and is leveraged for investment and enterprise (Rapoport and Docquier, 2006; Ambrosius and Cuecuecha, 2016; Aggarwal et al., 2011). Even unproductive ‘expenditures’ can be recast as productive ‘investments’ if couched in the logic of formal markets; in post-development terms, this demonstrates the discursive power to define what constitutes development and what practices are legitimate.

Second, the co-optation of remittances into markets represents a broader trend towards the ‘financialisation’ of development (Mawdsley, 2017; Young, 2010; Hudson, 2008), which describes the ‘increasing importance of the financial markets, often the capital markets in particular, in structuring economic agents’ strategies and broader patterns of growth in the economy’, thus reifying the ‘primacy of the financial sphere over the economy, production, and the organisation of everyday life’ (Hudson, 2008: 318). Here, the securitisation of remittances takes on a new meaning as capital flows are increasingly used to collateralise against both micro- and macro-level financial instruments. At the micro-level, this might include mortgages, credit, and investments (Ambrosius and Cuecuecha, 2016). At the macro-level, states such as India and Israel have also leveraged remittances to issue bonds to raise capital through diaspora networks (for example Ketkar and Ratha, 2011; Faist, 2008). For Leyshon and Thrift (2007), capitalisation (cf. ‘financialisation’, see Young, 2010), entails the transformation of everyday objects, such as remittances, into ‘assets’ which can then be speculated, traded and securitised against in capital markets (see also Hudson, 2008). Policymakers do not shy away from this reasoning and have made clear that the project of ‘transforming remittance flows into developmental capital would require changing the very nature of remittances, from compensatory transfers to investments’ (Chami et al., 2003: 21, emphasis added), as defined by the logic, vocabulary, and instruments of Western capital markets (Kunz, 2011).

The ‘discovery’ of remittances has led to concerted efforts to co-opt them into both development and profit-driven corporate agendas (Ratha, 2007). The Inter-American Development Bank’s (IADB) rhetoric that ‘remittances are financial flows in search of financial products’ (cited in Hudson, 2008: 328), is revealing and emblematic of the remittance-development management strategies we see today. In practice, this has materialised in efforts to ‘bank the poor’ and to liberalise the financial sector (Gupta et al., 2009; Weber, 2004; Kunz, 2011). On the one hand, development agencies appeal to economic rationality and productivity to legitimise their intervention and ‘expertise’ (Simmons, 2008). On the other hand, this further augments the power of the state as the facilitator and narrator of ‘development’ (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). Intervention is unilateral and migrants, the supposed beneficiaries, are excluded from the framing and formulation of policy (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012; Williams, 2004; Pieterse, 1998).
Where policy calls for the severing of informal remittance corridors, the ostensible legitimacy of market formality calls for the construction of linkages between migrants and the market to enforce ‘productive’ investment (Kunz, 2011). As Phillips and Mieres (2014: 246) note, poverty, according to the ‘dominant policy orthodoxy’ results from ‘insufficient’ integration into global economic activity’ (emphasis added). A growing priority has been to bolster migrant financial ‘literacy’ and ‘capabilities’, which policymakers hope will foster both ‘competition and new product adoption’ (Gibson et al., 2012: 131; Doi et al., 2014; Karunarathne and Gibson, 2014; Adams, 2009; Datta, 2009a). For Kunz (2011), such interventions illustrate the disciplinary nature of remittance policy as states increasingly narrow down their definitions of ‘correct’ behaviour.

In the context of Kunz’s Mexican case study, this translates into discourses around the unproductivity of women, who ‘just’ receive remittances from their husbands – and whose productivity in domestic labour is not recognised – thus excluding them from policymaking processes.

It is within this ostensibly neutral behaviour-managerial framework that market interests may be imported into the heart of multilateral development strategy (Weber, 2004). At its core, remittance management aims to bring remittances into the fold of nexus governance, whilst consolidating the power of capital and finance, ostensibly for the wider, legitimate cause of ‘development’. In doing so, it produces an ideological schematic of development behaviours that conflates formality with productivity, productivity with growth, and growth with development. Here, Mawdsley’s (2017: 265) charge that we might be ‘witnessing a distinctive acceleration and deepening of the financialization-development nexus’ may foreshadow the future trajectory of migration and remittance management, especially in the case of Myanmar’s rapidly developing financial markets. The unprecedented capacity for states to monitor and regulate migrant and remittance flows, and increasing economic integration within the ASEAN will likely accelerate managerial interventions (Testaverde et al., 2017; ILO, 2017; Ito and Griffiths, 2016).

Together with 2.3.1, this section has demonstrated how diverse interests percolate through nexus discourse at numerous scales. This section reveals how remittances are increasingly co-opted into narratives of international financial order and security, as well as national economic development. This is actioned through the financialisation of private capital flows where discursive parameters are erected around the ‘right’ way of spending, saving, and investing. In turn, this frames the options available for the migrant and her dependants, whilst importing and legitimising the interests of markets above self-defined ideas of productivity (Kunz, 2011). These theoretical directions are useful in uncovering the interests and assumptions inherent within nexus thinking – productivity, moral and regulatory legitimacy, market profiteering – that frames discourses around what ‘development’ means in practice and how it can be achieved. The spectre of paternalism echoed by critical development theorists still reverberate in the background as the assumptions and goals of policymakers seem far removed from the interests of their purported beneficiaries. This speaks to this thesis’s overall argument that nexus thinking does not only fail to conceptualise the diversity of migrant practices, but actively works to shape
and limit practices in a way that might be detrimental to development. This is not to romanticise ‘traditional’ or ‘native’ ways of living (Pieterse, 1998), but it does cast doubt on the legitimacy and veracity of nexus assumptions hitherto presented. I demonstrate this in Chapter Six where I will discuss how remittances are sent and managed on an everyday basis, how financialisation is experienced in the Myanmar context, and how ‘development’ is narrated by migrants.

2.4 Humanising Development: Troubling the Nexus in the Wider Social Sciences

Where the previous sections reviewed the key trends and critiques of nexus theory, the following sections seek to balance this literature with perspectives from the broader social sciences to better understand the drivers and experiences of migration. As nexus research describes phenomena at the macro-level, they are limited in understanding mobility as experience. In comparison, qualitative methodologies appeal less to the nomenclature of the ‘nexus’, but instead focus on uncovering the experiences, motivations, spaces, structures, and times of migration (Kalir, 2013). The next section harnesses the rich body of work generated through the broader ‘cultural turn’ in the social sciences that began in the 1990s to enrich the debate on migration outcomes (King, 2012). This section is not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, the works presented here are selected to clarify this thesis’s findings and its relationship to the broader field of migration and development. This section begins with a selective overview of the literature on transnational migrant-household relations. Of particular interest are works on care and altruism. This is useful for troubling the notion that migrant practices are only informed by economic rationality. Moreover, emergent works challenge the household as the key unit of analysis in migration research. In Myanmar, for example, novel work on remittance-funded community organisations demonstrate how migration impacts diffuse far beyond the household.

This is followed by a discussion on precarity. Of particular importance are works on processes and experiences of brokerage, which unfold as immanent mechanics of everyday economic and social practice (Hart, 2001). If the goal of migration is to achieve ‘development’, then I argue that certain systems of migration, such as brokerage, can expose groups of migrants to heightened risk and precarity. Work on construction and domestic work, for example, have demonstrated how already vulnerable workers might be subject to exploitative practices. The seemingly endemic prevalence of precarity within migration cast doubt on nexus rhetoric as migration may leave individuals worse off in financial, physical, and emotional terms. The relationship between migration and development is more uncertain than hitherto theorised. The section argues for an expansion of the analytical frame beyond the conventional parameters of nexus thought. Migration does not just happen, and remittances do not just materialise in the hands of recipients. Instead, there are a multitude of motivational and structural factors that contribute towards particular development outcomes. Put simply, why people do things matter just as much as what they do.
2.1.7. Doing Development: The Household and Beyond

An analysis of remittances – how they are generated, sent, spent, managed – necessitates a transnational view of migration to recognise how transactions are spatialised across the migration chain (Barrientos et al., 2013; Faist, 2012; Kalir, 2013; Collinson, 2009). This spatiality is also useful for visualising where different interest, both inside and outside of the household lie, and how these impinge on migrant practices and narratives. This marks a departure from nexus orthodoxy by challenging the centrality of the household as the key scale of analysis, and the degree to which the household is a coherent social unit.

This thesis argues that remittance impacts are the product of the behaviours and structures that migrants encounter across their journeys. A transnational study of the nexus is instructive since the developmental potential of migration and remittances rests on their circularity (Datta, 2009a: 112). For Faist (2012: 55), transnationalism is also a rejection of methodological nationalism, and takes the state-centred analyses as only ‘one of several possible social frameworks in which to situate empirical studies’ (see also Kalir, 2013; Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013; Asis et al., 2009). This analytical flexibility is useful given the differing role of governance actors and migration brokers in both labour sending- and receiving-states (see Chapter Five). Moreover, this complements the ‘cultural turn’ in the social sciences that prioritises individualised, social phenomena over ‘grand theories’ of migration (Bastia, 2014; Castles, 2010; Portes, 1999). This also invites an interrogation of how transnationalism is practiced. As Page and Mercer (2012: 4) argue, ‘development outcomes are better understood as part of everyday life rather than as the intentional outcomes of choices about ‘doing development’’. In sum, the transnationalism approach simultaneously entails a concept and a methodology that is multi-sited and multi-scalar, enabling a richer understanding of migration and its contexts. Migration reconfigures social relationships, creates new identities and experiences, and informs relationships with place that are practiced, dynamic, and transactional. At least three overlapping strands of research are relevant.

First, transnational perspectives have highlighted the non-economic dimensions of household support. Migration is not just about sending money. Where early research tended to foreground poverty-driven migration (Skeldon, 2008), authors have also examined the complex familial, emotional, and cultural negotiations that inform decisions to migrate (Parreñas, 2005; 2001a; 2001b; McKay, 2012 Constable; 2007; Petrozziello, 2011). Work has also looked at how traditional care roles are renegotiated in response to migration (Hoang et al., 2015). Parreñas (2001), for example, explores Filipino domestic workers’ experiences of transnational mothering whilst working in Rome and Los Angeles, noting how gender norms are challenged by international migration, whilst creating emotional stresses through frictions with familial traditions (see also Parreñas, 2005). Later research has illustrated how migration stretches conventional
household relationships across space, which are increasingly bridged by technology (Madianou, 2012). Put simply, ‘development’ is about supporting the family both financially and emotionally (Campasano, 2012; McKay, 2012; Parreñas, 2005). Such works are noticeably gendered and focus on the relationship between migrant women and ‘left-behind’ family members, especially children (see Nguyen et al. (2006) for an overview). Though this thesis recognises the diverse meanings of ‘care’, analyses will focus primarily on monetary remittances, even if they cannot be reduced to their economic value alone (see Chapter Five).

On the one hand, children as seen as vulnerable stakeholders in the migration project owing to unstable household environments (see Khoo and Yeoh, 2017; Graham et al., 2012). On the other hand, there has also been an increasing interest in the role of men and masculinity in transnational households (Lam and Yeoh, 2018; Parreñas, 2008; Hoang and Yeoh, 2011; Graham et al., 2012). The absence of men in earlier studies of transnational care has prompted authors to critically engage with the changing role of men in migrant households as male identities shift from being ‘breadwinners’ to ‘househusbands’ (Lam and Yeoh, 2018). Changing dynamics are also attributable to ‘social remittances’ (Levitt, 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2010; Lacroix et al., 2016). Widely attributed to Levitt’s (1998) paper, social remittances refer to the circulation of non-economic capital through transnational communication (cf. Bourdieu, 1984). For Levitt, social remittances include normative structures (social norms and values), systems of practice (habits and dispositions), and social capital (community and social membership). Conceptually, social remittances allow us to visualise the flows of information that inform accumulative and intergenerational migration (Khoo and Yeoh, 2017), ideas around gender norms (Kusakabe and Pearson, 2010; 2015; 2016), as well as cultural practices of remitting (Rahman and Yeoh, 2008; Page and Mercer, 2012). Where the preceding sections have argued for greater scrutiny of social structures in informing the migration, these works invite us to examine how migration might also transform the social fabric of migrant households and communities.

Second, work has looked at the motivational aspects of remittance-sending, often premised on material need (Poirine, 1997; Paerregaard, 2015; Carling and Hoelscher, 2013; Harper and Zubida, 2018; Page and Mercer, 2012; Douglass, 2012). Gender is seen to play a strong role as women are assumed to be more altruistic and ‘naturally’ empathetic to the needs of the household than men, even if female-headed households are often more vulnerable (Buvinić and Gupta, 1997). This may be contrasted against nexus models that assume an implicit household contract of mutual support (see 2.1.1). In their study of intergenerational migration amongst young Indonesian women, Khoo and Yeoh (2017: 285) find a strong narrative of migration based on becoming the ‘dutiful daughter’ and ‘self-responsibilisation’ for the needs of the household. Moreover, the authors reveal how ‘decisions’ are shaped by the gendered options available to prospective migrants and the multiple, competing interests that women navigate within the household (see also Ye, 2014; Petrozziello, 2011). Migration is the product of complex interactions between potential pathways and competing agencies (Sobieszczyk, 2000; Yeoh et
al., 2017; Friesen, 2017). Over time, well-trodden paths crystallise into a normative ‘culture of migration’ as seeking opportunities overseas becomes the habitual thing to do (Massey et al., 1993). Importantly, Brickell and Chant (2010) challenge the notion that women are innately more altruistic, instead suggesting that female practices are moulded by tacit social coercion towards ‘correct’ female behaviour (see also Hoang, 2015; Kunz, 2011). Nonetheless, the authors also describe the possibility for subversion as women may ‘perform’ altruism as a means of legitimising female identity for their own ends, since migration is rarely compelled by singular motives (see Silvay, 2006). In her vignettes of Filipino domestic workers in Southeast Asia, Asis (2002) found migratory decisions to be tempered by a combination of personal and family ‘agendas’. Beyond the impetus to alleviate household poverty, workers appealed to their ‘natural’ instinct to help when family members objected to their migration (see Huppatz, 2009).

To interrogate the drivers of migration requires at least a partial abandonment of the household the key referent of analysis. Migrants may not only be interested in supporting the family but may also harbour self-defined ideas of the ‘good life’ (Abreu, 2012). Kashwan et al. (2018), for example, analyse the life narratives of ‘privileged’ migrants working in the UN and how migration choices are shaped by employer policies but intersects with changing priorities of career development and family formation. We are thus invited to consider the notion of ‘disinterested’ or, perhaps more accurately, differently interested migration. Kim (2010), for example, explores the role of desire in the migration decisions of women from Korea to the UK. She found her middle-class respondents were driven by the desire to escape gender norms in Korea and experience Westernised lifestyles. In both studies, motivations to migrate were borne of class privilege that permits the migrant to pursue experience over material need (see 2.5). That is not to say that pursuits of experiences are the preserve of the wealthy ‘as migrant channels have become wider and more transient, distinctions among migration types have eroded. Conventional classifications such as economic migration… no longer apply to all migrants’ (Kim, 2010: 436). Where this thesis examines the Burmese migrant population in Singapore as a whole, the data reveals important typologies of migrants, not just between migrants to different destination countries (see Introduction), but also inter-group differences (see 4.1). Put simply, not all migrants are solely interested in economic returns, some are more driven by social mobility, and some are interested in pursuing experiences (Waters and Brooks, 2010). Given the diverse constituents of migrant populations, this challenges us to consider the extent to which ‘migrants’ and their practices of development can be theorised in aggregate.

In terms of remittance drivers, a similar complexity percolates through the literature. Perhaps the strongest distinction can be found between remittances sent to support absolute needs versus relative wants. On the one hand, the majority of remittances sent to developing countries are assumed to be spent on ‘survival goods’, indicating a material imperative to send money (Wagle, 2016). On the other hand, scholars have instead become increasingly interested in areas of remittance as social obligation (Hoang and Yeoh, 2015). As one of McKay (2007: 186)
respondents, a remitting Filipino worker in Hong Kong summarises: 'sending dollars shows feeling!'. For McKay, her respondents demonstrated how, despite the financially burdensome task of family support, remittances sustain a network of reciprocal social obligations where ‘parents care for children, who later provide practical care for parents, and similar exchanges and reversals happen between siblings’ (ibid.: 189). Remittances are performative, and are non-negotiable practices that come with group membership (Page and Mercer, 2012). In order to sustain these relationships, migrants send remittances since they are, as Singh et al. (2010: 246) put it, a ‘currency of care’.

Remittance obligations can also be a financial and emotional drain. As Kusakabe and Pearson (2015) demonstrate in their study of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, the pressure to remit is more burdensome for women, who are also more reliant on their families for reciprocal services like childcare (cf. Semyonov and Gorodzeisky, 2005). For Kusakabe and Pearson (2015: 73), these ‘networks of obligations’ require the women to acutely ‘assess their situation and the resources available to them and adjust their reciprocity transactions in order to manage their meagre resources’, whereas men are less burdened. Missing from these conversations are ideas around economic productivity, which signal the need for a greater recognition of the socially productive role of remittances. Indeed, as Sobieszczyk (2000) demonstrates through her study of Northern Thai migrants in Asia, the economic value of remittances is often outweighed by their social and religious significance. Where some of Sobieszczyk’s respondents worked in the sex industry, remittances allowed the sender to accrue symbolic merit through family support and religious donations to mitigate social stigma (see also Yeoh, 1999; Meyer et al., 2014; Mahdavi and Sargent, 2011). This diversity of motivation and meaning challenges the assumptions of nexus orthodoxy to dispel assumptions around singular, static, and altruistic motivations.

Finally, recent research has looked at the effect of migration and remittances beyond the household, usually at meso-level development projects. Here, the state is often proactive in crafting and reshaping transnational migrant-state ties (for example Silvey, 2004b; Gibson et al., 2001; Ketkar and Ratha, 2011). As Faist (2008) notes, there has been a shifting emphasis towards bottom-up brain gain policies of labour-sending states to harness overseas diaspora to fund development through hometown associations (Mercer et al., 2009). Faist, for instance, extensively reviews public programmes in Mexico where the state pledges to co-fund hometown projects, as well as measures by China and India to court investment from overseas nationals (see also McGregor, 2014). In the context of Myanmar, there is a small but growing body of work on hometown and civil society organisations and their role in mediating development (Prasse-Freeman, 2012). Griffiths and Soe (2017), for example, details the role of ‘parahita’ organisations – social organisations motivated by Buddhist tenets of altruism and community service – in Myanmar as a provider of social protection against rising levels of household precarity. As the authors explain, parahita occupy an organisational space between formal administration, religion, and social reciprocity, which traditionally provided funeral and festival services, but increasingly eldercare, healthcare, and education (see also Griffiths, 2018a).
Though some parahita are undermined by growing out-migration of the young men who typically staff these services, parahita are also strengthened by remittances. A study by Ito and Griffiths (2016) found that villages in Myanmar with higher out-migration are more likely to have community social welfare organisations. On social remittances, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2010) elucidates how remittances can be ‘scaled out’ beyond the household to support social and political activities, such as activism, but also ‘scaled up’ to higher levels of organisation such as regional or national organisation at home. This is relevant in Myanmar where social organisations often replace the protective functions of the state (Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012; Kusakabe and Pearson, 2010; Dudley, 2011; Prasse-Freeman, 2012). In the absence of public social protections and a lack of civic trust in authorities (Griffiths and Soe, 2017; Griffiths, 2018a; Turnell, 2014; Cammert and MacLean, 2011), McCarthy (2017) finds that village-level organisations have taken development – for example local road building in rural areas – into their own hands, buoyed Buddhist moral obligations and faith-based group membership. This sort of moral-spiritual citizenship, McCarthy argues, fuses religion with care and solidarity that, in the context of state failure, has forged a culture of self-reliance and organisation. Given Myanmar’s history of internal conflict and displacement, both citizens and migrants have organised to subvert state power along the Thai-Myanmar border, but increasingly internally as well (Aung, 2014; Prasse-Freeman, 2012; Dudley, 2011; South, 2012). Counter to nexus rhetoric, relations with the state, for many, is something to be avoided and minimising ‘formality’ can actually improve one’s returns to migration (Killias, 2010; Sobieszczyk, 2000; 2002). This is especially true given Myanmar’s population of non-citizens and stateless peoples, such as the Rohingya, for whom encounters with the state have been characterised by gross human rights violations and violence (MacLean, 2018).

Transnational perspectives and social studies of migration are of critical importance to this thesis. First, they expand the analytical frame of migrant behaviours to beyond the economic. Migrants are not just income generators, but also providers of care and non-monetary support. Second, they also expand the theorisation of migrant motivations, allowing us to conceptualise more broadly the different ambitions that workers pursue, and how these might lead to particular practices and outcomes. Third, they highlight the ways in which migration impacts diffuse beyond the household and how spillover effects might scale to the communal level. Just as studies have examined the impact of remittances beyond the household, so have authors highlighted other mechanisms of value transfer. In the case of Myanmar, charitable and religious donations are particularly relevant (Houtman, 1999). By delving deeper into the nuances of behavioural drivers, we are better placed to explain practices and outcomes. In Chapters Four and Six, I explore how narratives of family support translates into action. Importantly, I argue that drivers are not the same as motivations (van Hear et al., 2017), and illustrate through interview data how migration is actually compelled by a historicised understanding of responsibility, the role of the state, and ideological appeals to filial piety.
2.1.8. Encountering Precarity in the Nexus

To what extent does migration lead to ‘development’? What can migrants’ experiences of migration tell us about the normative assumptions and aims of nexus thinking? Are migration and development congruent aims? Historically, literature and policy on migration and development has paid little attention to the lived experiences of workers. At best, this abstraction falls back into the paternalistic essentialisms of ‘big D Development’ (Hart, 2001; Cowen and Shenton; Ferguson, 1994). At worst, policy may privilege particular types of migration that is at odds with the interests of the migrant on one hand, and the overarching ambitions of ‘development’ on the other (Raghuram, 2009). The purpose of this section is to uncover the hidden costs associated with migration that mainstream nexus thought has failed to consider and to reflect critically on what this means for ‘development’. In particular, I am interested in how precarious migration counters nexus narratives that purport an equitable relationship between the migrant and labour-sending and receiving states.

A theoretical innovation popularised in the migration vernacular in the last decade has to do with ideas around ‘precarity’, ‘precariousness’, and the ‘precariat’. Siegmann and Schiphorst (2016) offers a history of the term, tracing it back to earlier works such as Harris and Todaro’s (1970) dual economy model (see 2.1.1), which separates the modern urban economy from unproductive rural sectors. This distinction between economic classes sets the theoretical basis, as the authors note, for later research on insecure work in the informal sector, to which ideas around precarity owes a theoretical debt. In more contemporary usage, the notion of precarity, widely popularised by (Standing, 2011), similarly describe that class of workers – the ‘precariat’ – in structures of uncertainty which is typified by inadequate economic opportunities, ‘flexible’ labour policies that engenders job insecurity, and inadequate labour rights protections, or what Lewis et al. (2015: 584) call a ‘status of exceptional or unacceptable insecurity and suffering’ (see also Schierup et al., 2014).

Precarity is important for the understanding of development impacts for three reasons. First, there is increasing policy and scholarly interest in issues of human rights, labour protections, and unfree labour, especially in temporary, low-wage migration (Piper, 2008a; Anderson, 2015; Strauss, 2012; Waite, 2009; Castles, 2011). Second, owing to the risky legal and employment statuses of temporary migrants, this can translate into severe economic uncertainties for the migrant as well as his or her dependants (Buckley, 2012; Baey and Yeoh, 2015; Platt et al., 2016). An analysis of remittance impacts must therefore be cognisant of the risks and vicissitudes of precarious migration (Wee et al., 2018). Finally, given the growing trend towards stricter migration management, and the monopolistic power the migration industry holds in facilitating migration, precarity is an inherent part of the migration process, rather than an exceptional state of uncertainty (Woolfson and Likic-Brboric, 2008; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Neilson and Rossiter, 2008).
Not all migrants are precarious. Some migrants, as Chapters Four and Five will show, are what one might loosely term ‘privileged migrants’, where the circumstances and goals of migration are very different (cf. Waters and Brooks, 2010; Devadason, 2017; Faist, 2008). Nonetheless, the preponderance of temporary labour in Singapore, especially in the construction and domestic work industries (Hickey et al., 2013), means that precarity is systemic. If orthodox nexus thought is interested in appropriating migration and remittances for development, then theories of precarity aim to uncover the structural conditions that produce uncertainty in socioeconomic life. This contradiction is an important one as it seemingly sets ‘development’ and migration on irreconcilable paths; there is absent due diligence on the mechanics of migration from analyses of development, despite the optimistic theorisation of the pair. Ideas around precarity have been applied across time and space to examine the various points at which workers are more or less vulnerable (Davidson, 2013; Yeoh et al., 2017; Platt et al., 2016; Deshingkar, 2018). Where Section 2.2 examined the role of development management in regulating and marketising migrants and remittances, precarity allows us to examine how risk is produced through those same tools of management across the migration chain.

Precarity can denote both migration that is compelled by livelihood precarity, as well as migration that is precarious. In Myanmar, livelihoods are marked by a combination of poverty, ecological shock, and civil unrest that have prompted millions to migrate internally and internationally (LIFT, 2016a; 2016b; Rammohan and Pritchard, 2014; Jacob, 2014). By now, narratives of migration compelled by poverty, poor economic opportunities at origin, and the need to support one’s family have become commonplace and too lengthy to review here (see Hoang, 2015). In this frame, migrants do encounter new structures of precarity but are compelled to move precisely because of insecurity at origin (LeBaron, 2014). Here, precarity shares similar theoretical foundations to another useful, but less familiar concept: ‘householding’. Coined by Douglass (2010: 64), householding is premised on the need to interrogate the ‘linkages between the household and larger structural issues, such as demographic transitions and shifts in the global economy’. For Douglass, the focus is less on the extremes of precarity but on the restructuring of household strategies of formation, maintenance, and social reproduction that might involve migration (Brickell and Yeoh, 2014). Focusing on East and Southeast Asia, Douglass (2012) cites a neoliberal turn in economic and political policy – erosion of agricultural livelihoods and landholding and retrenchment of social protections – that has forced households to renegotiate their livelihood strategies towards migration (see also Wise, 2015; LIFT, 2016a; 2016b; ILO, 2015b). Precarity must therefore be understood historically as the product of institutional and structural change (Kashwan et al., 2018). Such mediating factors of migration are consistent with the broader assumptions of nexus thinking (van Hear et al., 2017). However, the focus of this section is not the precarity faced by households pre-migration, but the systems of risk and exploitative that workers migrate into.
During migration, authors have pointed to the role of two familiar stakeholders – the state and migration intermediaries – in producing precarity (Anderson, 2010; 2015; Castles, 2015; Desingkar, 2018; McKeown, 2012). Where the previous sections detailed how the state and intermediaries work to regulate migration, they also create spaces of uncertainty and exploitation. The role of the state in producing precarity relates to the design and implementation of intentionally restrictive and temporary migration regimes (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Paret and Gleeson, 2016). I have already reviewed how low-skilled workers are flexibly incorporated into Singapore’s national economic and immigration policy (see 2.3.1). More technically, Singapore imports temporary workers on what can be understood as the ‘kafala’ system (Au, 2014). Typically associated with labour markets in the Middle East, kafala describes a system where workers are legally bonded to their employers (Mahdavi, 2013a; 2013b). This prevents workers from changing employers without their permission as doing so would void their immigration status and subject to deportation (see De Genova, 2002).

There is a strong element of gender at play; as with intermediaries, the function of migration management has been further delegated as employers of domestic workers are required to post a S$5,000 security bond to ensure their worker complies with Work Permit regulations (Goh et al., 2017). Though all foreign workers are bonded to their employers, the nature of Singapore’s structural demand for domestic workers, who must be female (see Annex 9), means that women are disproportionately disadvantaged. Being foreign, gender or ethno-essentialised into care work, and female means domestic workers face multiple intersecting precarities (Bastia, 2014). Amongst more notorious policies are regulations to deport domestic workers who get pregnant, marry a Singaporean citizen or permanent resident without government permission, or ‘run away’ from their employers, all of which can also cause the employer to forfeit their bond (Platt et al., 2016; Goh et al., 2017; Kaur, 2010). From this perspective, we see how the state’s ‘immigration controls function both as a tap regulating the flow of labour, but also … as a mould shaping certain forms of labour’ (Anderson, 2010: 301), whilst rendering certain migrant groups more precarious than others (Yea, 2015). Simultaneously, beyond their role in recruiting, transporting, job-matching, and placing workers, the migration industry also allows the state to ‘outsource the risks and responsibilities for moving migrants onto employment agents’ (Goh et al., 2017: 18).

This devolution of power and incentivization of control means that some employers have taken extreme steps to police their workers (Platt et al., 2016), for example installing hidden cameras in the home (Ueno, 2009), or withholding mobile phones (Wessels, 2015). Moreover, the non-interventional approach to migration governance (see 2.3.1), also means that Singaporean has typically been reactive to the labour rights of migrants during crises rather than actively securing them through legislation (Goh et al., 2017). As a result, especially from the early 2000s, migrant labour rights in Singapore have been heavily scrutinised by activists and scholars who have documented incidences of employer verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Yeoh et al., 2004), as well as economic exploitation and fraud (HOME and TWC2, 2017). As Section 2.2 reviewed, the legitimacy of nexus debates and development ideologies more
generally rests on the normative assumption that workers should be one of the key beneficiaries to migration. However, as this analysis shows, the feted ‘triple win’ seems misguided at best (Bakewell, 2008a; Wickramasekara, 2011). Precarity is not accidental, but is produced through layers of state, commercial, and employer practices that stacks their collective interests against that of the migrant.

That migration might be inherently precarious reveals an uneasy tension between harnessing migration for development and the need to protect workers (Sutherland, 2013). For Crosswell (2010: 22), mobility can be conceptualised as a resource, which can be leveraged for social mobility, and it is ‘the differential distribution of this resource that produces some of the starkest [socioeconomic] differences today’. The interest amongst governments and workers to migrate thus cannot be discounted. Conversely, a lack of migration policy coordination between labour sending and receiving countries, and institutional, jurisdictional and regulatory gaps have created exploitative spaces to the detriment of workers’ rights (Deshingkar, 2018). In Singapore, the majority of foreign workers are accounted for by the ‘Work Permit’ category (972,600 workers in December 2018), the two largest groups comprising construction workers (280,500) and domestic workers (253,800), respectively (MOM, n.d.(a)). Unlike their higher income, skilled counterparts, low-wage Work Permit migration is heavily reliant on brokers.25

Some authors have argued that brokered temporary migration is inherently precarious because it is realised through ‘obligations or debts which are... used as disciplining mechanisms by employers’ in order to control and regulate workers (Lewis et al., 2015: 387; Piper and Lee, 2016; LeBaron, 2014). Some debt-financed migration pathways, such as construction and domestic work, are also gendered (Platt et al., 2016; Davidson, 2013; Ye, 2014). The former is dominated by men who often have to pay for the cost of migration upfront (Baey and Yeoh, 2015). A study by TWC2 (2011), a migrant NGO in Singapore, finds that average migration debts incurred by Bangladeshi construction workers can reach S$7,256, usually funded by borrowing money from friends, family, or even high-interest money-lenders at origin (for example Buckley, 2012; Yea, 2017). In comparison, the latter are entirely female, and typically debt-finance migration through employment agencies; the worker migrates with minimal upfront cost and instead repays her debts via monthly salary deductions (Platt et al., 2013) (see 5.1.1 and 5.2.1). Under this model, migration debts average S$2,443 (TWC2, 2016). Platt et al. (2016) term the former ‘resonant debt’ in that the debt is readily quantifiable and visible, whereas the latter is debt that is ‘silent’ as it lacks transparency. For construction workers, debt means that the worker is burdened with economic risk as he is rendered disposable during periods of reduced construction demand during economic downturns (Buckley, 2012; Yea, 2017; Woolfson and Likic-Brbovic, 2008). Since men’s fees are paid upfront, employers incur minimal economic risk in the hiring and firing process, especially during complaints or grievances (Yea, 2017). Instead, risks are shouldered

25 Whilst the number of ‘Other’ Work Permit holders have steadily decreased by 12% between December 2013-2018, domestic workers have increased by 18% in the same period (MOM, n.d.(a))
by workers in the flexibilised neoliberal labour market (Williams and Baláž, 2012). This allows employers to fire or deport workers with minimal repercussions, which also disciplines workers against complaints against exploitation (Yea, 2017; Lewis et al., 2015; Joarder and Miller, 2013).

Precarity is layered: debt fuels insecurity which, in turn, is ‘produced by the immigration policies pursued by states, and the systems of labour import and export they foster’ (Davidson, 2013: 13). For domestic workers, debt also incentivises the employer to control the worker (Platt et al., 2016). In Goh et al.’s (2016) examination of debt-financed domestic labour migration from Indonesia to Singapore, the authors reveal how placement fees are paid from an employer to an agent in Singapore, who in turn pays a portion of the revenue back to the primary agent in Indonesia. It is from this combination of the worker’s fees and the employer’s fees that the agent in Singapore is able to make a profit. In essence, the employer is responsible for two outgoings: first, the security bond as mentioned above, and second, the ‘investment’ into a specific worker. The employer is doubly incentivised to maximise control on their domestic workers, thus compounding precarity, pushing workers to what Lewis et al. (2015) call a state of ‘hyper-precarity’. For one of Goh et al.’s (2016: 22) respondents, the employer has ‘Absolute responsibility. [But also] Absolute liability!’, which she likens to ‘holding a bomb’. Importantly, studies have rejected reductive narratives of precarity, instead emphasising expressions of agency that brings about changes in employment conditions either as coping strategies or as lasting dispositions towards ‘resistance’ (Rother, 2017; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Waite, 2009; Ueno, 2009; Ma, 2017b). Though Burmese migrants workers are amongst the most ‘vulnerable’ in the region (Wessels, 2015), research has also documented strategies of resistance and subversion of power by Burmese irregular migrants, including refugees, along the Thai-Myanmar border, for instance (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Eberle and Holliday, 2011; Egreteau, 2012; Aung, 2014; Meyer et al., 2014).

Studies of migration can be enriched by paying greater attention to how migrant experiences develop over time (Griffiths et al., 2013). Although workers might be more constrained at the outset, the hope is that they are able to realise lucrative returns over time (Platt et al., 2016; Wee et al., 2018; Kalir, 2013). In effect, the migrant is ‘mortgaging the present to an anticipated future’ (Deshingkar, 2018: 10; Bastia and McGrath, 2011; Mavroudi et al., 2017). That migrations begins with debts means they enter the labour market at the ‘lowest point’, rendering them particularly susceptible to exploitation (Lewis et al., 2015). However, Davidson (2013: 14) reminds us that ‘migrants do sometimes consent to enter into relations of debt that will entail very heavy restrictions on their freedoms’, compelled both by desperate circumstances but also aspirations of income growth and social mobility (see Hoang and Yeoh, 2015). Present difficulties are tolerated in anticipation of a future homecoming and the realisation of one’s aspirations (Boccaigni, 2017; Yeoh et al., 2017). The migrant is not statically precarious but her experiences and tolerations of precarity are referential to a broader lifecourse of the past drivers, present experiences, and aspirations of the yet-to-be (Ma, 2017b; Lewis et al., 2015; Kalir, 2013). Migration must therefore be understood as agential interactions between migrant, market, and
state that project across space and time as ‘migrants are exposed to multi-layered forms of precarity in and beyond labour markets throughout the entire migration cycle’ (Piper and Lee, 2016: 474).

In sum, migration is inseparable from precarity, which is both a driver and state of migration, even if one does not always entail the other. Debt, in particular, emerges as a major driver of migrant precarity (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Williams and Baláž, 2012; Woolfson and Likic-Brboric, 2008). Since debt is integral to brokered migration, precarity is not an exceptional state but, as Neilson and Rossiter (2008) suggests, an essential structure of neoliberalism and capitalist development (cf. Hart, 2001). This has implications on how we theorise the relationship between migration and development. First, the rhetoric behind nexus thought is naively optimistic. Migration is not straightforward and might further precarise the vulnerable before she is able to realise any returns (Davidson, 2013). The caveat that things are likely to get worse before they get better is conspicuously missing from nexus debates. What results are cavalier analyses and recommendations that may not resonate with migrant narratives. At best, this may undermine the legitimacy of the intervening party. At worst, this may undermine the livelihood of the intended beneficiary.

Second, methodological distinctions between development economics and migration studies yield different insights into how migration is experienced. Nexus analyses are valuable, but risk fetishising labour, remittances, and development (Christophers, 2011). Instead, nexus thinking will benefit from analyses of human processes of migration to better understand hitherto abstracted visions of ‘progress’. Finally, that precarity might render certain groups of workers more susceptible to exploitation calls for both a disaggregation of migrant effects, and greater clarity over whether migration is able to bring about ‘development’ writ large. On the one hand, perspectives ‘on the ground’ have repeatedly highlighted the exploitation that some workers face, which policymakers cannot legitimately ignore. On the other hand, there is a conspicuous lack of engagement with the migration policies of labour sending- and receiving- states within nexus research. This risk depoliticising the structures and regimes that are entrusted with the protection of workers and the supposed facilitators of ‘migration-led development’. These debates are vital to this thesis. In Chapter Four, I reveal how pre-migration livelihoods in Myanmar work to shape a migration-oriented habitus. In Chapter Five, I specifically focus on the migration process to analyse how precarity is experienced and how it hinders migrants from realising returns to their migration. Finally, I return to Myanmar in Chapter Six to analyse how remittances are used to mitigate aspects of livelihood precarity that motivated migration in the first place. I argue that migration is able to alleviate the symptoms of precarity but are generally unable to achieve sustained livelihood change. Moreover, the migration process is integrated; dependence on remittances, especially amongst low-income households, means that the fate of the migrant is intimately tied to those of her dependants.
2.5 Understanding Migration and Development: Bourdieu and Practice Theory

The ambition of this thesis is to critically examine migration and remittance behaviour to understand why people do what they do, and why migration outcomes are the way they are. I draw on Bourdieu’s theory of practice to examine how behaviours are socially and structurally mediated, embedded in context-specific histories, and temporally dynamic. I apply a Bourdieusian theoretical framework to analyse three key spaces along the migration-remittance chain: pre-migration livelihoods, migration processes, and remittance impacts. In turn, this draws on three core concepts within Bourdieu’s practice theory: fields, capitals, and habitus.

Bourdieu’s practice theory was first elaborated in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). Developed through an ethnography of the Kabyle Berbers in Algeria, where he was stationed during the Algerian War (1954-1962), Bourdieu was fascinated with domination, colonisation, and organisation of agrarian life during a period of rapid social change. His ethnography of everyday Kabyle practices, from religious rituals to agriculture calendars and timekeeping, demonstrated how action is ‘habitual, primarily non-discursive and un-reflexive, routinized behaviours, scripts not scripted, regular but not rule-bound’ (Friedland, 2009: 888). Such analyses were novel because they overcame the dichotomous impasse between structure and agency. In doing so, ‘Bourdieu proposes a theory of practice that integrates culture, power, and social structure within his key concepts, such as habitus and field, and calls for their reflexive application in every substantive empirical investigation’ (Swartz and Zolberg, 2005: 4). These factors combine to form the practice ‘equation’, which Bourdieu sets out in *Distinction* (1984: 101):

\[ ([\text{Habitus}) (\text{Capital})] + \text{Field} = \text{Practices} \]

For Bourdieu, practices are the product of our internalised dispositions (habitus), and the resources we have at our disposal (capitals), which are then played out across social spaces (fields). This equation allows us to analyse both agency and structure in mutually constituted terms. Moreover, a Bourdieusian framework is also actionable as it guides the researcher into uncovering the specific drivers of practice. Following Bourdieu, it is insufficient to look at factors in isolation but studies, as Swartz (1997) notes, require a mapping out of intra-subject relations, subject-field relations, and the habitus. The integrated nature of a Bourdieusian theory of practice requires a simultaneous cross-referencing of fields, capitals, and the habitus, where all aspects of social being correspond to more or less durable practices. A Bourdieusian analytical framework is useful because it speaks directly to this thesis’s ambition to understand migration drivers and impacts as both a result of overarching socioeconomic structures and people’s individualised, strategic responses to them. The rest of this section provides an overview of the key concepts within Bourdieu’s theory of practice: field, habitus and capital.
A key critique of Bourdieu’s theory of practice is its alleged structural determinism and inability to recognise change, which Bourdieu explicitly rejects (see Wacquant, 1989; Friedland, 2009; Yang, 2014). This is generally attributed to his theory of ‘fields’, which describes the social space where practices are mediated, and where capitals are differently distributed to structure relations of domination and subordination:

‘I define a field as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). Each field presupposes, and generates by its very functioning, the belief in the value of the stakes it offers.’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97)

Fields may denote different arenas of social relations, for example a labour market or a migration regime (see Erel, 2010, Nowicka, 2013; Huppatz, 2009). Moreover, fields may be abstract and encompass the ‘intellectual, religious, educational, cultural’ spheres of social interaction (Navarro, 2006). Fields simultaneously structure resource distribution, and determines how objective relations of power are experienced, which in turn drives the development of the habitus. It is also because of the blurriness of fields that the boundaries of particular spaces may, as Bourdieu warns, only be grasped through empirical investigation (Friedland, 2009, Wacquant, 1989; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In the context of this thesis, fields are important because it highlights the historical trajectory of structures and how these inform migration. In Chapter Four, I use fields to analyse pre-migration livelihoods in Myanmar and how narratives of struggle constitute the ‘predisposing drivers [that] contribute to the creation of a context in which migration is more likely’ (van Hear et al., 2017: 931). In Bourdieusian terms, I am interested in the structures of ‘objective relations’ between households and how class (explored further below) structures particular migration pathways with lasting dispositions and trajectories.

### Habitus

The conceptual space between the structuring function of the field and group actions and behaviours is the habitus. Behaviours are simultaneously regulated and bound by the objective possibilities set out in the social field, whilst being informed by the habitus which, according to Bourdieu (1977: 82-83), describes the:
‘System of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems.’

The habitus is a set of orientating frameworks developed through socialisation, and which informs and circumscribes appropriate or possible behaviours through an unspoken grammar at any given time. The habitus is both the guiding principle of behaviour and the internalisation of norms. As Brubaker (2005: 45) explains, the habitus is ‘a concept made to do an extraordinary amount of theoretical work’ as it describes ‘three distinct sets of relations: to the conditions under which it was formed, to the immediate situation of action, and to the practices it produces’.

The habitus is temporally dynamic as it is acquired through primary and secondary socialisation. The former describes stable dispositions acquired from childhood, which becomes ‘internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history’, whereas the latter is acquired from education and subsequent life experiences (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). Accordingly, the habitus can also describe the ‘collective practice of the same modus operandi’ (Bourdieu, cited in Brubaker 2005: 27). The habitus is largely unconscious and allows everyday practices to become habit, conducted with little forethought, whereas ‘explicit principles—codes, rules, genealogies—rush in only where dispositions fail to produce the practices required by structure’ (Friedland, 2009: 889). Finally, the habitus is self-referential and reproductive, even if it ‘is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period’ (Navarro, 2006: 16). This represents a type of power that is produced through the interplay of agency and structure, as ‘society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them’ (Wacquant, cited in Navarro 2006: 16).

Habitus is a useful concept because it understands behaviours not as the product of either dominating structures or unfettered agency. Rather, practices are the ‘locus of internalised dispositions’ that are negotiated between opportunities objectively available and the individual’s propensity or capacity to grasp those opportunities (see Devadason, 2017). In Chapter Four, I foreground the chapter with an analysis of pre-migration livelihood contexts to demonstrate how the migrant habitus was produced from internalised dispositions towards self-responsibilisation (see Khoo and Yeoh, 2017) as a result of decades of economic decline, stagnation, and mismanagement. As Bourdieu (1977) notes, since different groups command different amounts of capital, this likely creates an enduring class hierarchy that is resistant to change. I demonstrate this across later chapters as the combination of field and habitus engenders path dependencies that, over time, not only renders migration the ‘right’ thing to do, but also creates enduring pathways with predictable outcomes (Grundy et al., 2014; Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010; Kashwan et al., 2018).
Capitals and Class

Capitals are social resources of power; they cannot be understood in isolation of the field since 'capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101, emphasis in original). Capitals, therefore, could be thought of as applied, situated, and relational resources that nets its holder 'profits of distinction' (Bourdieu, 1986: 245). A key theoretical innovation under Bourdieu are capitals beyond the economic (as in money or assets): social, cultural, and perhaps more obscure, symbolic capital. First, social capital accrues from relationship networks, which derives its value from the 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network' (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). Second, cultural capital exists in three states: embodied (internalised, intangible dispositions such as one’s way of thinking or behaving), objectified (meaning that is given physical form as a book, artwork, or instruments), or institutionalised state (educational qualifications or recognitions). Cultural capital may be leveraged to gain access to particular professions where particular skills or attributes are required (see Huppatz, 2009). Finally, symbolic capital generally refers to the legitimacy conferred to capitals by other actors within the field; qualifications are valuable insofar as relevant institutions verify or valuate them to be so (Bauder, 2003; Erel, 2010; Raghuram, 2008; Huppatz, 2009). Put simply, symbolic capital describes the value realised through a recognition of legitimacy.

Bourdieu maintains that capitals can be converted or exchanged, as qualifications into wages or social networks into job opportunities (Joy et al., 2018). This seems to indicate a market for capitals, with attendant exchange rates (Huppatz, 2009; Nowicka, 2013). Erel (2010), for instance, describes how Turkish migrants in the UK and Germany create intra-group distinctions by adopting particular speech patterns to demonstrate high culture, which opens up new economic opportunities. Conversely, Huppatz (2009) demonstrates how women in Australia use their gender as a sort of embodied cultural capital to access care professions, though this risks essentialising gender norms (see also Bauder, 2003). Capitals may be transferred and converted, but their value is not constant across social fields; in migration studies, the power of such exchange rates are most powerfully illustrated in occupational 'deskilling' (Datta, 2009b; Bauder, 2003; Nowicka, 2013; Burawoy, 2012; Piper, 2008a). In many ways, it is the conversion from material to symbolic capitals that obscures the root causes of inequality. As Bourdieu elaborates in Distinction (1984), it is primarily through symbolic capital that class hierarchy is signified, which in turn drives a habitus that informs our sense of belonging and selfhood.

This aptly segues into a final element of Bourdieu’s sociology which is important to this thesis’s theoretical framework: class. An academically loaded term with a rich history of sociological, economic, and philosophical implications, I am not interested in class as a historical-structural construct, as in Marxist understandings of capitalist-worker relations (Abreu, 2012; Castles, 2015; Strauss, 2012). Instead, I am interested in two strands of a Bourdieusian formulation of class: taste and domination (van Hear, 2014). On the former, class is simply determined by the sum of
one’s portfolio of capitals. The dominant class, for example, would be richer in economic, cultural, and social terms than the dominated. In turn, this also informs disposition towards particular tastes and lifestyles, driven by the individual’s relative burden or freedom from material necessity. In Waters and Brooks’ (2010: 224) study of education migration, for example, they find that, as opposed to foreign students in British universities who take a more instrumental view of education, British students were more likely to seek ‘experience for experience’s sake’. For the authors, these ‘accidental achievers’ pursued education disinterestedly, reproducing privileged, classed dispositions that are made possible by an absence of material necessity. Similarly, in Atkinson’s (2013) study of post-financial crisis employment security in the UK, he finds class to be an important determinant of whether respondents felt optimistic or that they had control over the future. Class is an important part of this thesis’s theoretical framework as it allows us to interrogate both current practice and imagined futures. The capitals one has at their disposal largely determines the ‘routes would-be migrants can take, the channels they can follow, the destinations they can reach, and their life chances afterward’ (van Hear, 2014: S102). Across the empirical chapters, I demonstrate how individuals and households’ relationship with hardship informs, to a large extent, their likely behaviours and narratives.

On the latter, class is inescapable, and defines an individual or group’s ‘rank occupied in all possible fields’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Class dominance is achieved not only through accumulation of capital, but the conversion of said capital to symbolic power through legitimisation – what Bourdieu terms the ‘misrecognition’ of power relations – such that the dominated are unaware of their subordination or the unequal distribution of capital (for example Rother, 2017). The ‘legitimate principle of domination’, therefore, lies in the perception of disinterest amongst the dominant (Bourdieu, 1984: 254). This has clear resonance with post-development theory where poverty and intervention are both depoliticised in apparently ‘neutral’ policy and discourse (see 2.3). As Section 2.4.1 explored, precarity and brokerage are of increasing concern with migration studies. In this vein, I am principally interested in analysing individuals’ relational experiences with the so-called ‘migration industry’ and how these mediate particular development outcomes. Ideas around misrecognition, in particular, will be important in understanding the social contexts of brokerage and how precarity is produced across space.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter began with an exploration of the early roots of nexus literature, which was typified by historical and structural accounts of development economics. This was succeeded by ideas around household-based migration strategies, popularised by the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM). Gaining traction in the 1980s, nexus thought saw increasing popularity by the 2000s; aided by the exponential increase in international migration and data availability, migration enjoyed a renaissance in development policy. Various development goals were tested against migration data, in a new wave of optimism that saw migration increasingly
‘mainstreamed’ into policy parlance. Nonetheless, though the nexus has been marked by differing sentiments over the decades, research has remained methodologically consistent, primarily relying on national-level panel data. Helpfully, perspectives from migration studies, especially at the turn of the century, also drew our attention to systemic issues within migration, such as precarious working conditions, exploitation, and the role of brokers in facilitating movement. Similarly, more qualitative insights into household care dynamics and migration motivations also afford greater clarity on the diversity of narratives, allowing us to challenge deeply held assumptions of migrant rationality. In the context of Myanmar, novel work on donations and hometown associations also highlight development impacts beyond the household.

The main shortcoming of orthodox nexus theory this thesis challenges is the myopic focus on remittances as the sole factor of development. This thesis argues that development outcomes must be understood as the product of migrant practices and prevailing governance structures, such as sending- and receiving-country policy. There are theoretical and ethical implications of this. First, why and how people do things matter just as much as what they do. Since remittances are generated by migrants, it follows that individuals’ motivations to migrate, their means of movement, and their experiences of overseas employment all implicate on the degree she is able to generate remittances and more importantly, how she uses those remittances. Without paying due attention to the narratives around migration, nexus analyses are unable to account for the impact remittances have in context-specific case studies.

Second, abstracting remittances from the migration processes dehumanises migrants. On the one hand, this shifts the responsibility for national development onto the shoulders of the poor whilst depoliticising the historical-structural drivers of migration (Skeldon, 2008; Maiava and King, 2007). Burmese migration and remittances are steeped in history: of structural inequality, military dictatorship, ethnic conflict, demonetisation, failed experiments with socialism, segmented livelihoods, agrarian decline, natural disasters, and so on. Where the nexus does lend credence to structural analyses, this is further couched in market-speak, as in to create a conducive ‘investment climate with well-developed financial systems’ (Ratha and Shaw, 2007: 7). This conceptual selectivity means that the nexus is not a neutral frame of analytical enquiry, but a political and ideological construct. On the other hand, analyses and policy prescriptions are made without a firm grasp of the lived realities of the beneficiaries they purport to assist. People generate remittances, they do not appear from nowhere. Failure to recognise that means remittances are just another resource to be leveraged in sterile ‘policy’ discussions, which dehumanises workers and their money in an already abstract vocabulary of migration management. As a result, both the legitimacy and accountability of the state is undermined, as is the likely effectiveness of interventions that do not take into account local structural contexts. As post-development critiques of the 1980s and 1990s have shown, a one-size fits all approach is unlikely to yield favourable outcomes. Though migration studies have gradually shied away from ‘grand theories’ of migration (Castles, 2010), the simple idea that migration can be made
to ‘work’ for development is a curiously stubborn staple in the literature (Wickramasekara, 2011). The quantitative leanings of the nexus orthodoxy and its lack of engagement with the rest of the social sciences limits the extent to which we can truly understand the developmental impacts of migration. Similarly, though I argue that qualitative studies into household care, migration motivations, and precarity can shed light on workers’ behaviours and experiences, these do not explicitly link with how they lead to particular development outcomes. Impactful research will thus need to combine both parts of the methodological spectrum.

Finally, by this thesis’s definition, the mode of migration undertaken by many low-wage workers is at odds with ‘development’ as workers migrate from one precarious situation to another (Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016). If development is about obtaining freedoms, then migration seems to constrain and enable in equal measure; the worker may generate remittances to support her family, but at great cost to her own physical and mental wellbeing (Wessels, 2015). Without falling prey to a ‘free’ versus ‘unfree’ binary (Davidson, 2013), the risk and uncertainty that migrants face is not adequately theorised in extant nexus discourse. This is all the more pressing given the uncertainty that remittances are able to meaningfully lift households out of poverty in the first place (Wagle, 2016). If migration fails to provide the worker and her dependants with a net-positive outcome, then the legitimacy of nexus orthodoxy must be called into question. Similarly, to advocate greater migration without conducting due diligence on the migration channels and regulations that workers encounter may further undermine ‘progress’.

This thesis addresses these issues by re-embedding remittances into the social contexts of their production to explain why remittances have the impacts they do. This is both a theoretical and methodological departure from nexus orthodoxy and draws on innovations in tangential disciplines, notably sociology and migration studies, to situate remittances in migrant and household practices. Theoretically, I reconcile the agency-structure binary to analyse how migrant behaviours interact with prevailing structures such as pre-migration livelihoods, migration brokerage systems and regulatory regimes. Moreover, I pay attention to how these interactions are temporally dynamic as workers’ priorities and narratives of ‘development’ change over time. The aim is to bring together elements of nexus thoughts with broader contemporary debates such that our understanding of the migration-development relationship can be greater than the sum of their parts. Methodologically, I trace remittances across the migration chain such that contexts, meanings, and impacts may be understood in their historised and spatialised settings. Moreover, I seek inputs from both migrants, remittance recipients, and third parties such as brokers to map out the interests and stakeholders that together mediate ‘development’. The key innovation of this thesis is premised on its diversity: of spaces, times, and peoples. In order to fully grasp the ‘impact’ of migration, one must cast an expansive theoretical net. This literature review presented just a slice of the vast amount of work done on one of the most hotly debated issues in contemporary development studies and it is upon this literature that this thesis will build. Taking inspiration from both qualitative and
quantitative studies, this thesis hopes to bridge the perspectives that often divide our discipline to explain the impact of remittances and, perhaps more importantly, how they came to be.
3. Methods

Methodology, as distinct from ‘methods’ or the ‘tools’ of data collection, is the ‘underlying logic of research’ (Castles, 2012: 7) and reflects the author’s view of social reality and how they choose to investigate this reality. This chapter evaluates the methodology, methods, and research design used to acquire the data used to answer the core research question: what is the relationship between migration and development?

This thesis combines quantitative surveys (n=459) and qualitative interviews (n=71) to examine why people migrate, remit, and the impacts these practices have. The former lends itself to positivist understandings of reality as an objective truth that can be ‘tested’ or grasped (Iosifides, 2012). The latter is associated with a constructivist, interpretative nature of enquiry that understands knowledge as subjective, contingent and partial, and increasingly finds purchase in migration studies, which has hitherto leaned towards more quantitative methods (King, 2012; McDowell, 2008). A mixed methodology may seem incongruent. However, at the heart of this research is the need to reconcile collective experiences and patterns with individual behaviours and practices to demonstrate how the two are mutually constituted. Mixed methods allow the researcher to ‘develop greater understanding of social issues and of their relevance to individual and group life’ (Castles, 2012: 13), and recognise how social reality comprises both independent truths and constructed realities. This maps neatly onto this study’s implicit concern with scales and temporality, as Castles (2012: 8) insists:

‘[I]t is indeed important to carry out micro-level studies of specific migratory experiences, but they should always be embedded in an understanding of the macro-level structural factors that shape human mobility in a specific historical situation.’

This thesis sidesteps the positivist-constructivist impasse by adopting a pragmatist position of knowledge production, which recognises the possibility for multiple realities perceived through both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2003). Just as nexus research is typified by a fractious divide between macro-quantitative and micro-qualitative studies, this also produces theoretical binaries: between agency versus structure, mobility versus stasis, voluntary versus forced mobility (Davidson, 2013). A mixed methodology strengthens findings by accommodating multiple perspectives without falling prey to determinism (Wacquant, 1989). Findings may therefore be scaled without losing sight of minute observations. This study’s pragmatic approach is actioned through the principles of grounded theory and a ‘follow-the-thing’ methodology.

First, grounded theory works by setting out the parameters of the study, followed by deliberately expansive data acquisition and identification of emergent themes as the study progresses. These themes are used to inform data collection until ‘theoretical saturation’ has been reached, when
the researcher is confident they cannot gain any more insights from further research (Charmaz, 2014). Knowledge and theory are induced from ground-level observations rather than ‘tested’ from predetermined hypotheses. Grounded theory informs not only the logic of data collection, but also the processes of its collation, analysis, and ultimately the formulation of theory (see 3.6.3). Second, the methodological logic of this study is informed by principles of ‘follow-the-thing’ geographies of material culture (Cook and Harrison, 2016; Cook, 2004; Gregson et al., 2010; Christophers, 2011; Marcus, 1995. Coined by Appadurai (1986), the approach uncovers how ‘things’ are intertwined with everyday social life by adopting a ‘methodological fetishism’ that is object or ‘thing’-centred. This thesis’s ambition to trace remittances is premised on the idea that ‘it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context’ (Appadurai, 1986: 5). Remittances cannot be understood in isolation of their social, cultural and political contexts but are themselves a product of the practices within these overlapping realms. To explain remittance impacts thus require us to re-embed abstracted capital flows across the migration chain to examine their relationship with multiple actors across space. This allows us to transcend ‘methodological nationalism’ to better understand the relationship of migrants and remittances beyond the vector of the nation-state (Faist, 2012; Kalir, 2013).

It is by uncovering the machinations of social reality by examining how remittances are integrated into everyday livelihoods that their social relations, value, and meaning – the ‘social life of things’ (Appadurai, 1986) – are brought to light. On the one hand, this thesis charts the migration value chain in its entirety to describe the spaces where value is created, transferred, and consumed. This requires an evaluation of the relationship between immobile infrastructures that enable the mobility of both people and things (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Marcus, 1995; Barrientos, 2013). This addresses Christophers’ (2011: 1075) call for an expansive sociology of money:

‘We should be seeking, in other words, to assess where money has come from and travelled to; to examine the various stages of its passage; to identify the networks of social relations underpinning its ongoing movement and metamorphosis; and to ascertain the relative quanta involved as money grows, contracts, and is parcelled off to different economic agents in different places on its journeys.’

On the other hand, a sociology of remittances is motivated by the need to ‘get behind the veil’ of money (Harvey, 1990: 423). As development drives the financialisation of everyday life (Hudson, 2008; Young, 2010; Cross, 2015), tracing remittances across actors and networks humanises migration by uncovering the realities of their production, and rescues social nuances otherwise lost in orthodox migration-development calculations (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). The tracing of money must also therefore entail the tracing of humans. In following the ‘thing’, ‘people’, and other ‘metaphors’, such as ‘development’, we are able to ‘[suture] locations of cultural production that had not been obviously connected and, consequently, for creating empirically argued new envisionings of social landscapes’ (Marcus, 1995: 108-109).
In sum, this thesis seeks to understand the relationship between migration and development by tracing the behaviours, experiences, and remittances of migrants across space and time. In practice, this was achieved through multi-sited surveys and interviews; surveys examine migrant remittance behaviours and characteristics, whereas interviews elucidate individual practices and experiences (Hitchings, 2011). The former prioritises breadth by elucidating macro-level structures and group categories, whereas the latter prioritises depth by furthering interrogating those experiences in more interpretive and explorative ways. The portability and thematically explorative nature of interviews also resonates with this thesis’s broader methodological frames. Together, they tell the story of money from the perspectives of a range of actors: how it came to be, what it means, where it goes, and how and why it affects those it touches. Though this thesis recognises that remittances represent more than just capital transfers (Singh et al., 2010), the dominant forms of remittances I found were monetary, and this thesis will prioritise analyses of these flows (see Chapter Five introduction).

Data collection took place between two sites: Singapore (August 2016-March 2017) and Yangon, Myanmar (June 2017-February 2018). Surveys (n=459) were conducted with migrants in Singapore, whereas interviews (n=71) were conducted with migrant workers in Singapore, remittance recipients in Yangon, and relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, intergovernmental organisations, employment agents, and community leaders. The rest of this chapter will be structured as follows. The first and second sections explain the design of the survey and interview aide memoirs. This is followed with an overview of my strategy for participant sampling and recruitment. Section Four goes on to give an overview of the specific sites of data collection and evaluate how they contribute towards data collection and the overall ambition of this thesis. Section Five reflects on the methodological challenges I encountered in Singapore and Myanmar, how these impact upon data collection, and the steps I took to minimise them. I then detail how research was executed in practice and the role of temporality in shaping the research experience. Finally, I close on a reflection on some of the ethical dimensions of research, writing, and representation.

3.1 Found in Translation: Designing a Burmese Worker Survey

A survey was used as it speaks directly to this thesis’s research ambitions: to establish a baseline understanding of Burmese migrant demographics in Singapore and to understand group migration and remittance behaviours. On the one hand, this allowed me to better understand the social structures that inform the processes and outcomes of migration at the macro-level (Castles, 2012). On the other hand, surveys also produced data that aided in the thematic development of subsequent interviews (Ivankova et al., 2006).
The survey spanned 57 questions across four sections: migrant demographics, migration pathways, household characteristics, and remittance behaviours (Annex 1). Migrant demographics covered variables such as age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, education level, State or Region of origin, and religion. Migration pathways examined migration motivations, durations, and the means workers used to access Singapore, including issues of migration debt and pre- and post-migration incomes. Household characteristics look at workers’ number of household members, dependants, incomes, and debts. Finally, remittance behaviours examined the means of remittance transfer, amounts, regularity, cost, recipients, and expenditures. Questions to do with membership in social and hometown associations as well as donation practices were also included.

Both the design and translation of the survey had a large bearing on the type of data that is collected. First, the development of the survey followed a rigorous process of thematic mapping to relate specific questions back to my overall research questions. As Carletto et al. (2012: 220) advise, survey design should ‘include information on as many potential determinants of migration as possible, as an omitted determinant of migration might bias the analyses of outcomes of interest.’ A literature review was conducted to examine the prevailing issues that affected migration and remittance outcomes, focussing on Myanmar-specific issues where possible. These included gender differences in migration and remittance behaviour, migration pathways and industry-specific experiences, rural livelihood challenges and poverty, and remittance methods (ibid.). Data collection in Singapore was done in collaboration with the Humanitarian Organisation for Migrant Economics (HOME), a migrant NGO. At HOME’s suggestion, a subsection was included which focussed on experiences of using employment agents, brokerage fraud, misinformation and contracting in the hiring process. Questions were developed on strong theoretical assumptions of their relevance to migration and development (Iarossi, 2006).

This thematic selectivity is also a limitation. Marsh (1979: 295), for instance, questions the positivism of surveys and suggests that data ‘cannot be seen just as passive reflections of unproblematic reality, but they must be logically distinguished from the manipulation that the experimenter engages in’. Surveys thus represent a top-down imposition of the parameters of knowledge inclusion and exclusion based on the value-judgements of the author. In practice, this may be reflected in the content of the survey, the choice of wording, and the form the questions take (Iarossi, 2006). In order to reduce participation time, for example, the survey comprised only closed questions, leaving little space for dissenting responses. This design

26 19 of 57 questions were conditional. Question A7, for example, asks if the respondent accrued debt as a result of migrating to Singapore. If yes, A7a asks for the amount owed, and A7b asks for the repayment duration.
27 Generally speaking, Regions are distinguished as areas with a Bamar ethnic majority versus States, which are primarily populated by other non-Bamar majorities (see the Administrative Map of Myanmar).
28 HOME is primarily engaged in researching migrant worker issues, lobbying for migrant worker rights, and also provides legal and practical assistance to migrants.
29 Where relevant, questions included an ‘other’ option.
entailed advantages and limitations: on the one hand it simplified participation, on the other hand it reduced the richness of the narrative that could be conveyed. Given the intended purpose of the survey – to gain broad contextual data on an expansive population – and the supplementary power of sequenced interviews (Ivankova et al., 2006), I accepted these limitations.

Second, in order to maximise responses, all surveys were offered in Burmese (Annex 2). I was cognisant of the methodological issues this raises: the varying translatability of terms challenged the degree to which meaning can be preserved when asking and answering a question (Ward et al., 2018). There may not be a conceptual equivalent to ideas expressed and one must settle for ‘operational equivalence’ (Hunt et al., 1964: 67). This is further problematized where there might be a lack of culturally applicable terms (see Ward et al., 2018; McGorry, 2000). To an extent, these limitations were overcome by involving participants in survey design from the earliest stages (Ward et al., 2018). A two-week pilot study was conducted with HOME in April 2016 to trial the survey. The pilot entailed two focus groups with domestic and construction workers to test the survey for translation accuracy and appropriateness, depth, and length. Historical issues of engagement with the Burmese community in Singapore also meant it was important to evaluate the feasibility of the survey before going ‘full-scale’. Focus group discussions led me to reflect on the conceptual assumptions of ‘class’ or ‘income’. This necessitated adjustments to both what was asked and how they were asked (Shih, 2012), and focus groups provided a participatory space to allow respondents a direct role in research design (Ganga and Scott, 2006). Proxies of household financial wellbeing used in Myanmar’s census (MOLIP, 2014) – such as the main source of cooking fuel in the home – were initially included, but respondents pointed to differences in how financial wellbeing was defined in local contexts. Instead, household debt was used as an indicator of financial health. Similarly, Likert scale questions, which rank responses by agreeableness, were culturally unfamiliar to low-income migrants and were later removed.

HOME provided invaluable technical and practical assistance on survey design from the outset. This required me to reflect on the positionality of contributors: as educated, middle-class professionals, their familiarity with surveys and Western research concepts obscured how questions will be received by other migrants (Ganga and Scott, 2006). During one trial, one volunteer lamented how long it took a domestic worker to complete her survey. When I asked whether it was an issue of literacy, he exclaimed: ‘They’re all schooled in Burmese, it’s the national language!’ However, it later transpired that the respondent was from Mon State, where residents have distinct spoken dialects and written script. Though there are numerous reasons for variances in survey completion time, it did betray some of the convictions my gatekeepers held and how these must be mitigated against to prevent the research tools from inheriting their biases. The pilot also allowed me to iron out minor formatting flaws. ‘MMK’, the designation for

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30 Focus groups were held with five domestic workers from HOME’s shelter and five construction workers recruited through migrant networks.
the Myanmar Kyat, for example, was rarely used by workers. Instead, ‘Ks’ was used. More complex questions were prefaced with explanatory annotations to ensure consistent interpretation across respondents. In order to ensure the completeness and accuracy of responses, questions were branched: instead of asking ‘how much money do you send home?’, questions would instead read: ‘do you send money home? If yes go to C2, if no go to C7’. Visually, indentation, emboldening and italicising fonts, and highlighting questions ensured a pleasant participant experience (Iarossi, 2006). A translated information sheet and consent form prefaced surveys (Annex 3 and 4), ensuring respondents understood the terms of their participation. Written consent was not sought, and respondents could remove the information sheet after completing the survey.

**Figure 3.1: Online Survey [Unicode]**

Initially, surveys were only distributed in paper format. However, after I received a number of requests from workers and gatekeepers to ‘send’ them the survey, I adapted the survey onto Google Forms. This brought numerous advantages. First, with the support of social media gatekeepers, a large number of responses was solicited in a short space of time. Second, Google Forms ensured that respondents cannot progress or submit a survey without completing mandatory questions, reducing item non-response and the need for validation. Third, I had more control over the experiential aspects of participation. Contingent questions could be hidden or skipped to reduce the visual length of the survey, and digital responses made data entry and validation less time consuming. Overall, two-thirds of all survey responses were submitted online. In order to boost responses, a financial incentive was included in the online survey: participants could opt into a prize draw for one of four S$50 cash prizes. Surprisingly, incentives had a

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31 Burmese is written in two fonts: Zawgyi and Unicode. The former is most widely used but often encounters display issues on mobile devices. The online survey was offered in both Zawgyi and Unicode to maximise accessibility.
negligible effect on response rates. When I randomly drew four winners after the online survey was taken offline in November 2017, none responded. S$200 was donated to HOME instead.

### 3.1.1 Survey Data Analysis

Survey responses were analysed in SPSS; prior to analysis, data were ‘cleaned’ to remove duplicates and outliers to ensure veracity or removed. Similarly, Van den Broeck et al. (2005: 967) recommend the removal of cases from the dataset depending on what is missing: ‘some errors deserve priority, but which ones are most important is highly study-specific.’ I excluded all cases with missing data on both income and remittances. Screening was important for data validation and comparability. Pre-migration income questions were answered in kyats. Given the volatility and opacity of MMK exchange rates prior to liberalisation in 2012, it was difficult to meaningfully compare pre- and post-migration income differentials. To ensure consistency in remittance data, responses expressed in kyats were converted to Singapore dollar using exchange rate on the day of survey completion. Surveys were labelled so specific cases can be followed up if necessary. Since the survey was comprised mostly closed, categorical questions, the majority of data generated were either numeric, categorical or ordinal data. Categorical data were entered as numeric values, each 'coded' with a value label. The primary role of survey data was to produce descriptive statistics on the Burmese worker population. To this end, univariate and multivariate statistical procedures were used to identify characteristics by key dependant variables such as visa categories. Cross tabulations were used to visualise the statistical representations, and these are presented in the following empirical chapters.

### 3.2 In-Depth Interviews: Designing an Aide Memoir

Mixed-methods can overcome the limitations posed by individual methods that, taken alone, eroded the depth or generalisability of findings (Ivankova et al., 2006). Establishing a macro-level snapshot of the Burmese community in Singapore was invaluable but lacked resolution on the experiential and motivational nuances that drive migrant behaviours. Specifically, it fails to account for how group characteristics and structures might resonate with individuals (Castles, 2012). In contrast, interviews provided the bulk of the conceptual thrust of this thesis. Driven by social-constructivist perspectives, interviews lend themselves to interpretive frames of knowledge acquisition, where social reality is not singular but is relative, multiple, and interpreted (Creswell, 2003). Rather than quantifying phenomena, interviews are interested in uncovering the subjective aspects of social life (Kvale, 1996; Hitchings, 2011). It is within interviews that workers and households reflected on the reasoning and motivations behind behaviours: why did you migrate? Why do you send money? Why do you donate money? Emphasis thus shifts from

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32 It was only from 2nd July 2012 that the Myanmar Central Bank began publishing daily exchange rates. A lack of historical data means pre-2012 incomes were difficult to compute accurately. This is further complicated by devaluation of the kyat. Where possible, historical kyat responses pre-2012 were standardised by data from Kubo (2013).
generating descriptive statistics towards understanding why and how phenomena come about (Kvale, 1996).

This study follows a sequential research design; interview aide memoirs were developed from survey findings (Ivankova et al., 2006). This was important given the lack of existing data on the Burmese population. During survey collection, preliminary analyses generated unexpected insights into the prevalence of single migrants, household debt obligations, and the prevalence of donations. These findings provided the thematic springboard for my interviews. Two sets of aide memoirs were developed for the Singapore case study: one set was used with both ‘Domestic’ and ‘Other’ Work Permit holders (Annex 5), whilst the other set was used with S Pass (SP) and Employment Pass (EP) holders (Annex 6). The two memoirs differ primarily on their focus on brokerage as the former group is generally more reliant on debt-financed migration (Platt et al., 2016). Interviews focused on understanding the socioeconomic contexts of migration, remittance behaviours, remittance impacts, and the temporality of migration. In Yangon, interviews focussed on the socioeconomic trajectories of households, livelihood challenges, how remittances are managed, and the effect on remittances on household finances. Again, memoir development was retrospective, their thematic directions informed by findings from Singapore (Ivankova et al., 2006). Unlike in Singapore, only one aide memoir was developed for Yangon interviews (Annex 7). Since interviews were specific to Myanmar-based issues, the distinctions between workers were no longer thought to be theoretical unique to warrant separate interview questions. Instead, the aide memoir was worded to be broad enough to apply to all households. Interviews also differed from surveys in that the focus of conversations varied considerably as findings became more or less saturated over time, reflecting changes in the thematic priorities of the study.

Finally, translation was an important facet of interviewing. In Singapore, 20 of 34 migrant interviews were translated from Burmese to English. In Myanmar, 17 of 24 household were translated from Burmese to English. In Singapore, interviews were translated by May, a female, second-year undergraduate student at the National University of Singapore, who conducted interviews in Burmese and later transcribed these into English. In Yangon, a similar process was conducted by Min and Kyaw (see 3.2.1), both male undergraduates at the University of East Yangon. As with surveys, a translated information sheet and consent form (Annex 3 and 4) was provided to respondents to set out the terms of their participation. Again, written consent was not sought. Section 3.5.3 will further detail how translated interviews worked in practice and the impacts it had on overall data collection.
3.2.1 Interview Data Analysis

Where conducted in English, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Burmese interviews were transcribed by the same interviewer to ensure consistency and to preserve nuance (Schrauf, 2016). I worked with May, Min, and Kyaw to ensure they understood how transcripts would be used by introducing them to NVivo. Direct Burmese to English transcription was achievable in Singapore as May had strong English fluency and accuracy. Later, we relied on a second transcriber-translator – May’s friend, Hseng – as May’s schedule was inhibited by university. Interview recordings from Yangon, on the other hand, were transcribed using a two-step process as Min and Kyaw found difficulty translating responses into their conceptual equivalent (Schrauf, 2016); we agreed that Min and Kyaw would transcribe recordings into Burmese and Hseng would translate the Burmese into English. What resulted was significantly clearer narratives with richer vocabulary, meaning and depth. Beyond interviews and transcripts, May, Min and Kyaw provided valuable insights into everyday life in Singapore and Yangon to enrich and contextualise findings. This also allowed me to juxtapose the testimonies of respondents with the thoughts and opinions of the researchers, who themselves became part of the meaning-making process. Though I was cognisant of how their subjective positionalities might affect analyses, May, Min, Kyaw and I, over time, became friends, rather than just ‘researchers’, and provided insights beyond mere ‘data collection’.

Interview analysis involved breaking transcripts down to component parts by their meaning and concepts. I began with ‘open coding’, which assigns passages a descriptive annotation of their contents, allowing for quotes to be classified by topics that could be interrogated further (Böhm, 2004). Later, ‘axial coding’ produced categories of phenomena to decipher its relationship with contextual factors, creating interpretive frames of ‘temporal and spatial relationships, in relationships of cause and effect, in means–ends relationships and in terms of argumentative and motivational connections’ (Böhm, 2004: 272). This process allowed me to induce explanatory theories of remittance outcomes by isolating passages and individually interrogate their relationship with other codes. Reading through transcripts, it was clear that elements of grounded theory were overlooked. If research should be bracketed by ‘theoretical saturation’, then the lead time between interview and transcription limited the agility to which interviews could be attentive to emergent themes. Analyses were simplified by using NVivo, which assisted in the organisation, codification, and visualisation of data. In particular, word trees and word clouds also helped to visualise how phenomena are linked across intersecting narratives.

Although grounded theory recommends the reduction of complex ideas followed by the reconstruction of complexity, this interpretive space also allowed one to insert their own biases.

The gulf of difference between my interviewees and I – social, cultural, economic, experiential – made it difficult to walk the line between critical analysis and judgement, especially in areas that
I might lack knowledge. On the one hand, this required me to confront and critically deconstruct both my, and my respondents identities, to examine how they sit ‘within a complex relational nexus’ (McDowell, 1993: 306). Where the flow of interviews precluded these reflections and analyses in real time, memos and annotations were an important means of flagging relationships and phenomena of interest. On the other hand, May, Min, and Kyaw checked and balanced my analyses to clarify responses. The tonality and body language of respondents, for example, were non-verbal cues that the interviewers were able to restore to transcripts in the form of notes and comments, which helped rescue meaning from otherwise sterile ‘analysis’. As we discussed surprising or unusual findings in our group messenger chats or team meetings, they provided interpretive frames that vastly improved my understanding of responses. This was not to cast doubt on respondents’ narratives, but to contextualise and triangulate responses to better understand their situated knowledge. By stepping back from the data and reflecting critically – on what I found curious, suspect, unusual – these thoughts grew to be important thematic areas in my empirical chapters (Böhm, 2004).

3.3 Sampling Method and Strategy

This thesis’s first research question examines the diversity of behaviours and practices of the Burmese population in Singapore to understand inter-group differences to explain migration-remittance outcomes. The lack of existing data on the population meant sampling and representation was difficult. In the absence of existing data, I defined my ‘sample universe’ based on recruitment criteria derived from literature reviews and consultations with local NGOs (Robinson, 2014). Above age, gender, ethnicity, and other factors, visa categories were used as a means of ‘sorting’ migrant workers. This was premised on strong theoretical grounds that workers experienced and exhibited particular migration and remittance traits based on visa requirements (Marsh, 1979). In Singapore different visa tiers entail specific eligibility requirements such as minimum levels of education and qualification, income, age, and gender (see Annex 9). Similarly, different visas also grant workers different rights and responsibilities, including dependant passes and access to permanent residence (Yeoh, 2006). This thesis focuses on four migrant groups: Work Permit holders (which is disaggregated into domestic workers and ‘other’ Work Permit’ holders), S Pass, and Employment Pass holders (see 4.1). Across categories, workers are likely to have experienced similar migration trajectories owing to standardised pathways into Singapore. In practice, visa categories function as a sort of indices of multiple variables, and it is because of their universal applicability that they were used as a proxy of the different typologies of migration and remittance behaviours individuals experience (Ma, 2017b). This sampling framework allows experiences to be grounded into context-specific group structures and is also consistent with ambitions of explaining different migration and remittance practices and outcomes. An outline of the demographic and economic traits of migrant groups is first given in Section 4.1, but visa categories remain the primary sorting variable of analyses throughout this thesis’s analytical chapters.
Through consultations with community leaders, NGOs, and the Association of Employment Agencies in Singapore (AEAS), I calculated the approximate proportion of Burmese workers by visa category and used these to purposively quota sample survey responses (see Table 3.1). Though final responses did not coincide with these estimates, they nonetheless provided an actionable baseline of demographic data. For all interviews, in order to seek theoretical contributions from all groups, sample sizes were determined by theoretical saturation. This framework was actioned through snowball recruitment. In Singapore, the momentum of recruitment depended on networks snowballed over weeks of interactions with migrants on Sundays (see 3.6.1). One-third of survey responses were conducted in-person, which relied on volunteer networks from HOME. Online, I distributed surveys via specific Facebook pages to solicit broad responses. For both surveys and interviews, recruitment was purposive to avoid overrepresentation of particular ages, genders, migration durations, or jobs. In Yangon, recruitment was more opportunistic than purposive. Reverse sampling contacts from Singapore was met with limited success. Instead, reliance on referrals meant narratives were often replicated through respondents with similar life experiences. Nonetheless, recruitment was steered to prevent households of certain ethnicities or income levels, for example, from dominating the sample (see 3.4.2). Finally, the underrepresentation of Work Permit households in Singapore was replicated in Yangon. Owing to a lack of contacts, visibility, and organisation, only two Work Permit interviews were conducted there.

Beyond migrants and their households, interviews were also conducted with stakeholders and intermediaries, notably employment and remittance agents. Though agents were reluctant to engage with researchers, interviews still provided a wealth of information. Table 3.1 summarises the total data collected during the course of this thesis; a full schedule of all interviews conducted can be found in Annex 8 and Table 4.1 in Chapter Four outlines the population characteristics of survey respondents.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target</strong></td>
<td>Total responses: 459 (target)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3% Domestic worker: 180 (153)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25% Other Work Permit: 68 (115)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3% S Pass: 168 (153)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.3% Employment Pass: 18 (38)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A Permanent Residents: 25</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.2: Summary of interview data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Age(^{33})</th>
<th>Migration Duration(^{34})</th>
<th>Female %(^{35})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singapore</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Work Permit</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP/EP/PR</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders(^{36})</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yangon</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Work Permit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP/EP/PR</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>108.5</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Fieldwork Spaces

Data collection took place between two sites: Singapore (August 2016-April 2017) and Yangon, Myanmar (June 2017-February 2018). Research was split into two phases to reflect the spatiality of remittances: from its generation in Singapore, through intermediaries, and eventually to its recipients in Yangon. Sequencing – both temporally and spatially – was an important component of mixed-methods, multi-sited research that sought to uncover the processual aspects of remittances (Williams and Gemperle, 2016; Marcus, 1995). This section introduces the two fieldwork sites to explain where and how data were collected.

3.4.1 Singapore: geographies of access

Fieldwork in Singapore took place between August 2016 and March 2017. As above, data collection was sequenced: surveys were conducted from September to December 2016, and interviews took place between January to March 2017. There are predictable spatial patterns to migrant worker practices in Singapore (Yeoh and Huang, 1999). The mapping out of socially and culturally significant spaces played an important role in my fieldwork. Where Burmese social organisation often lack public visibility, it by mapping and negotiating access to these spaces that the success of this study rested (see McAreavey and Das, 2013). By far the most popular site of congregation for Burmese workers is Peninsula Plaza in the City Hall area (Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4). An ageing five-storey mall located in an otherwise swanky part of town, Peninsula Plaza houses myriad shops that cater to Burmese workers, ranging from travel, employment, and remittance agents to those selling electronics and Burmese food and clothing. The place pulses with life on Sunday, when the majority of workers have their day off, but remains eerily

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\(^{33}\) Average age of migrant(s). Migrant ages were not asked in household interviews.

\(^{34}\) Average time spent in Singapore in months.

\(^{35}\) Number of interviewees who were female. Interviews in Yangon were conducted with the primary remittance recipient.

\(^{36}\) Stakeholders included employment and remittance agents, migrant NGO staff, and multilateral organisations.
quiet throughout the rest of the week. Unlike their Filipino and Indonesian counterparts, Burmese are still a relatively new migrant community that has yet to command significant public presence in Singapore. Peninsula Plaza is one of the few spaces in Singapore where one could see Burmese signage, media, and services, which accounts for its popularity in such an unlikely location. Peninsula Plaza is also the site of one of HOME’s drop-in centres and is staffed from volunteers from its shelter for domestic workers. These volunteers have also, on numerous occasions, helped with the dissemination of printed surveys within their friendship networks. A small room behind the office – usually reserved for weekly classes – was also used as an interview space when unoccupied. Together, these comprise the physical sites where the majority of data were collected.

Outside of Peninsula Plaza, few places command a comparative concentration of Burmese workers. Around the Plaza are the grounds of St Andrew’s Cathedral and Fort Canning Park where workers congregate on Sundays. In Toa Payoh, a residential neighbourhood in central-northern Singapore, is the Burmese Buddhist Temple (Figure 3.5) – the largest and oldest of its kind in Singapore – that is frequented by workers on Sundays. Religiosity is an integral part of Burmese cultural life and these spaces also provide a space to socialise, rest, cook, learn, and seek spiritual guidance. During celebrations and crises, places of worship are a powerful site of congregation, action, and charity. For ethnic minorities, Christian churches also draw a significant number of Kayin, Kachin, and Chin workers. Owing to their accessibility and popularity, most fieldwork took place within Buddhist spaces, which limited this study’s ability to represent minority voices.

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37 The drop-in centre provides advice and assistance to migrant workers, especially domestic workers, in need. On Sundays, vocational classes are also run at the centre.
38 Residents at the shelter may be unemployed for various reasons. The most common reason is due to employment disputes that have led to contract terminations, whereas others may have been the victim of abuse. The HOME shelter provides invaluable support during this precarious interim period as, during legal arbitration, migrants are not permitted to work or leave Singapore.
39 These ethnic groups are often framed in humanitarian terms as refugees and forced migrants. However, this thesis found no evidence of such narratives and ethnicity was not a prominent feature of the analysis. Nonetheless, ethnic minorities (non-Bamar) did appear to be more present within low-value domestic and Work Permit professions (see Table 4.1).
Figure 3.2: Singapore Key Data Collection Sites

Figure 3.3: Peninsula Plaza (exterior, southwest entrance)

40 1) Fort Canning Park (entrance area), 2) Peninsula Plaza shopping mall, 3) St Andrew's Cathedral grounds. Source: Google Maps (overlay added by author)
Figure 3.4: Peninsula Plaza (interior)

Figure 3.5: Burmese Buddhist Temple, Toa Payoh (exterior)
3.4.2 Yangon

Formerly Rangoon, Yangon was the administrative capital of Myanmar before the military regime moved it to Naypyidaw (also Nay Pyi Taw), a new-build city some 320km north, in 2008. Nonetheless, Yangon remains the economic and cultural capital of Myanmar, and was chosen as the second research site due to its accessibility and the availability of contacts snowballed from Singapore. Other Regions, in comparison, require official clearance, and access is hindered by poor infrastructure, language barriers, and an absence of contacts. In contrast, Yangon is freely accessible to foreign researchers and research permission is generally not required. As the most developed urban area in Myanmar with comparatively advanced infrastructure, transport, accommodation and health services, Yangon made practical sense. Locating research in Yangon also made methodological sense. First, this study’s strong emphasis on intermediaries in the migration and remittance process resonates with Yangon’s role as the primary brokerage hub in Myanmar. Locating fieldwork there allowed me to keep a pulse on the economic and social developments of the migration industry and its stakeholders. Second, Yangon hosts a growing ecosystem of academic and policy research at both the local and national level. Meetings with the IOM, ILO, World Bank, and the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust (LIFT) have been particularly helpful in shaping the theoretical direction of my research and have afforded me a network through which to share and exchange ideas.

Nonetheless, Yangon also brings methodological limitations. First, conducting interviews in Yangon would yield a comparatively poor representation of everyday livelihoods in Myanmar. Yangon residents enjoy greater economic opportunities, better infrastructure, and better public services than the rest of the country (Kumagai et al., 2012). This is reflected in survey findings: skilled workers (S Pass and Employment Pass holders) originate disproportionately from the urban areas of Yangon and Mandalay, whereas WP holders were far more geographically diverse, with a skew towards the rural north. It would thus be fair to assume that migrant households in Yangon are generally far better off than those in rural states and regions, who might face a completely different set of livelihood challenges. From a representational perspective, data gathered from the households of WP holders in Yangon may not resonate with the broader population as data gathered from S Pass or Employment Pass households would (LIFT, 2016a; 2016b). For these reasons, findings must be qualified against a critical reading of the socioeconomic context into which they flow and requires an appraisal of the structural and social factors of remittance impacts. This also meant purposively seeking spatially diverse responses to gain a range of perspectives. Although some interviews clustered in certain neighbourhoods, care was taken to ensure a range of socioeconomic classes would be represented, i.e. some

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41 Access to areas of high labour out-migration outside of key metropolitan areas such as Yangon and Mandalay fall under the purview of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, and Population (MOLIP) and clearance, in the absence of a sanctioned collaboration with an NGO or intergovernmental organisation, is unlikely to be granted. Sensitivities around internal displacement and forced migration flows, especially in border States, further preclude access. Such considerations also partially explain why ‘forced’ and ‘economic’ migration studies have prioritised perspectives from the Thai-Myanmar border (Meyer et al., 2014; Aung, 2014; Dudley, 2011; Kusakabe and Pearson, 2016; Lamb, 2014).
respondents lived in wealthier parts of Yangon than others. These measures helped to partially mitigate the skew in household perspectives. Finally, this spatial-representational ‘limitation’ may also be advantageous as it offers novel perspectives from groups hitherto under-researched. Where Myanmar is often associated with case studies of forced migration and displacement (Mahn et al., 2008; South, 2012; South and Jolliffe, 2015; Weber and Stanford, 2017; Alam, 2017), especially along the Thai-Myanmar border (Meyer et al., 2014; Dudley, 2011; Kusakabe and Pearson, 2016; Lamb, 2014), this thesis contributes by exploring the perspectives of the urbanised majority beyond the frame of humanitarianism.

3.5 Doing Research

Despite rigorous planning, fieldwork was never straightforward. This section details some of the key issues, solutions, experiences, and lessons encountered along my 14 months of fieldwork overseas.

3.5.1 Challenges and Limitations of Surveys in Practice

This study’s deployment of surveys was hindered by both practical and methodological limitations. Beginning with a quantitative method meant that sampling had a heightened impact on the veracity of survey outputs. Though a univariate sampling strategy meant that the vast majority of the Burmese population can be targeted, this also welcomed self-selection sampling biases, since participation was unsupervised. As two-thirds of responses came from online sources, differences in internet and device access may skew data towards certain respondents. Since surveys were shared via Facebook, responses would be sampled from specific social groups, rather than the entire population. Without demographic data on each Facebook group, bias is unclear and findings may fail to represent more vulnerable workers without access to electronic devices (Wessels, 2015).

Time and space also proved an important constraint. First, as above, newly arrived migrants, especially domestic workers, may be less connected to local social groups and less mobile during initial salary deduction periods (see 5.1.1 and 5.2.1). Survey results may skew towards those who have worked in Singapore for longer. Moreover, responses may suffer from recall errors. Questions on pre-migration income and employment agency fees, for example, may yield less accurate responses from more established migrants (Carletto et al., 2012). Second, within Peninsula Plaza, there were micro-spaces of social interaction, each with their attendant politics (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Corridors on the upper floors were typically occupied by male workers socialising over beers and snacks, which made it difficult for May and other female

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42 May, volunteers, and I would distribute surveys, explain the study, and be on hand to answer any questions. However, once workers were handed a survey, participation was rarely supervised. Instead, respondents would simply return the completed form.
assistants to disseminate surveys (Elwood and Martin, 2000; Düvell et al., 2010). Conversely, female workers tended to prefer the open grassy spaces by St Andrew’s Cathedral, directly opposite the Plaza, or at foot of Fort Canning Park where large groups would congregate. Punctuated by the smell of home-cooked food and amateur singalongs, these spaces were far more conducive for survey work with women because of the safe, chatty, and informal environment it engendered.

The gendered politics of space forced me to think more about the dynamics of access and its impact on data collection. On the one hand, there is the imperative to safeguard both assistants and respondents (Düvell et al., 2010). Where community leaders afforded me access into the Burmese community, I was cognisant of their positionalities as an insider (Ganga and Scott, 2006). To broker access not only required reflections on the ethics of delegated data collection (see 3.7.1), but also the positionalities of the delegates themselves and how this might impact the data collected. On the other hand, space played a large role in ensuring that workers were comfortable with participating in the study. During surveys, my insistence on ‘privacy’ was often challenged by respondents who relished group participation as they joked and jibed over their collective experiences. Concerns around inhibited responses in group settings were unfounded, and I was struck by the frankness with which workers discussed issues. Some workers exclaimed at differences in their salary deductions, while some joked about marriage and children. This joviality enriched an otherwise ‘flat’ data collection method and provided unexpected insights into migrant lives.

3.5.2 Putting Interviews into Practice: Recruitment and Space

The majority of migrant interviewees in Singapore (n=34) were recruited by snowballing through social networks, especially amongst domestic workers where stigmas around migration prevented direct recruitment (Heckathorn, 2002). Later, May and I increasingly found ourselves randomly recruiting strangers in Peninsula Plaza as our male Work Permit contacts became exhausted. S Pass and Employment Pass workers were snowballed through existing networks; the relative visibility and prominence of these workers made it relatively straightforward. Interviews on migratory experiences often solicited emotional responses, and place played a large role in determining the type of interview one could have. Access to HOME’s office in Peninsula Plaza was invaluable, partly due to its advantageous location, but also due to its steady presence in the community over the years; the majority of interviews with domestic workers and Work Permit holders took place there.

The office was on the top floor of Peninsula Plaza, occupying a unit roughly three metres wide by eight metres long. This space was partitioned halfway: the front had two desks, a sink in the

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43 Burmese interviews were conducted by May. Surveys were distributed by volunteers from HOME and other contacts, the majority of whom were female.
44 These 34 interviews do not include stakeholder interviews.
corner, and a hotline staffed by a volunteer. The back was a makeshift classroom with foldaway chairs, shelves and a whiteboard. When not in use, the classroom was where the majority of interviews were held. Amidst the chaos of Peninsula Plaza, the HOME office provided a small, safe social hub where workers came to eat and socialise. This informality made respondents more at ease when talking in private. It was there that, in hushed tones, interviewees revealed the emotional aspects of migration that could not be expressed in more public settings (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Nonetheless, the presence of volunteers and HOME’s activist leanings meant that the office could not be said to be ‘neutral’. Though I was initially concerned about the impact this could place on responses, considerations of convenience, safety, and visibility ultimately took precedence. Conversely, for higher income workers, respondents tended to be more public. This is also an expression of class, signalled through proposals to meet at Starbucks and eateries downtown; they seemed more confident about the narrative they told. To thank interviewees for their time, respondents in Singapore were offered S$10, however I was surprised at how many refused to accept the money. Many workers either told me to donate the cash to HOME or to ‘keep it for your studies’. For those that accepted, responses did not seem to vary in any perceptible manner; I put this down to the skill of May to pick up nuances in conversation to critically examine responses.

Unlike in Singapore, interviews in Yangon were spatially sparse, although, on occasions, there did appear to be evidence of accumulative migration at the local level. One example was Kawhmu, a rural village about two hours from downtown Yangon (see Figure 4.2). To get there, one must take a short ferry across the Yangon River to Dala, and from there take a taxi southwest for an hour and a half. Once there, it was serendipitous that we managed to interview four households in one afternoon as word of our research spread. Recruitment relied overwhelmingly on referrals. Owing to the lack of any characteristics or social organisations that would render migrant households ‘visible’, direct recruitment was not possible. Similarly, fieldwork in Myanmar was hindered by the accessibility of particular groups: skilled worker households were numerous and domestic worker households could be contacted through the wealth of contacts accumulated in Singapore. In contrast, male Work Permit households were elusive, owing both to a lack of contacts and their general scarcity (see 4.1).

Since household interviews comprised the bulk of data collection in Yangon, all but three household interviews (n=26) were conducted in family homes; others were conducted in neighbourhood cafes and restaurants. Since the objective was to interview the main remittance recipient – the survey showed that the majority of remittances are received by parents (Table 6.3) – planning had to account for the needs of the elderly and less mobile. Indeed, interviews often

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45 A void deck is an open space at the ground level of public housing in Singapore. These spaces are usually used for communal social activities.
had to be brokered via the worker in Singapore and many refused to participate as their parents were ‘too old’. Where interviews in Singapore took place at the HOME office, the air of formality this engagement produced allowed respondents to be reimbursed in cash. Attempts to do the same in Yangon, however, were unsuccessful. Monetary gifts from strangers in a domestic environment, especially from juniors to elders, was culturally inappropriate. Instead, interviewees were given a gift bag comprising of coffee mix, biscuits, and sweets. This reimbursement resembled more a ‘gift’ than a ‘payment’ and was always graciously received.

3.5.3 Interview Translation: Brokered Meanings

The most significant challenge when conducting interviews had to do with language barriers. In Singapore, with the exception of one interview, all interviews with domestic and Work Permit holders were conducted in Burmese by May, whereas all but two interviews with S Pass and Employment Pass holders were conducted in English (Annex 8). Though many domestic and Work Permit workers had a basic grasp of spoken English, interviews in English would come at the expense of detailed nuances of respondents’ feelings and emotions. For S Pass and Employment Pass workers, English proficiency was less of an issue and respondents conversed confidently and openly about their experiences. Where this was not possible, interviews were translated by May, a second-year undergraduate student at NUS. Originally from Shan State in Myanmar, May was schooled in Singapore from a young age and was fluent in both Burmese and in English. In Yangon, I found myself more reliant on translators; households were largely interviewed in Burmese; only seven interviews – all with S Pass and Employment Pass households – were conducted in English. There, I worked with two male translators: Min and Kyaw, both of whom were undergraduate students at the University of East Yangon. In all cases, interviewers were recruited for their linguistic competence as well as their ability to navigate the cultural aspects of interviewing (Schrauf, 2016).

Originally, I had hoped that interviews could be translated ‘live’: I had planned that I would ask a question and responses would be translated to direct the interview. The inefficacy of such an approach was highlighted during pilot focus groups where such interactions proved stifling. Similarly, I had anticipated following a semi-structured approach: to gently guide the conversation towards salient themes without suffocating nuance (Creswell, 2003). However, owing to May, Min and Kyaw’s initial inexperience with conducting interviews, the aide memoir was more structured to guide conversations through explicit thematic issues with specific prompts. I was worried about how this might stifle responses, so I provided training to the team to allow them to conduct the interview themselves whilst I observed and interjected where appropriate. Since the translator is ‘the prism through whom all data are ultimately made available for analysis’ (Schrauf, 2016: 91), I ensured May, Min and Kyaw understood the theoretical underpinnings of questions to establish conceptual equivalence in their translation. Emphasis was placed on the semantic and normative equivalence of questions – the former
describes whether constructs mean the same in both languages, whereas the latter assesses the degree to which questions are culturally appropriate or relevant (Behling and Law, 2000).

In practice, interviews were often improvised. Western understandings of ‘quality of life’, for example, were confounded, instead we focussed on what respondents were worried about (ibid.). Interviews were thus both about what was ‘in and on someone’s mind’ (Patton, 2015: 426). Interview design was participatory in that May, Min and Kyaw’s role as co-developers provided insights into how questions could be approached from different cultural angles (cf. Schrauf, 2016). Training was also given to develop their interview skills, focussing on building rapport, pacing, probing, and body language. Mutual feedback was given after each interview to ensure technical improvement and to identify thematic areas where responses are either saturated or lacking. Over time, as the team became more familiar with the project and its theoretical directions, interview structures became more flexible; as May, Min and Kyaw became more experienced, the line between a ‘structured’ and ‘unstructured’ interview slowly blurred. Concurrent feedback helped to identify areas of ‘theoretical saturation’, allowing us to focus more or less certain themes. However, this also meant that feedback was delayed since changes couldn’t be made during an interview, though this became less problematic with practice. Though not without teething issues, both Singapore and Myanmar were steep but productive learning curves as we navigated the cross-cultural and multilingual aspects of qualitative data collection.

3.5.4 The Art of Asking Stupid Questions: Displaced Positionalities and Observation

During interviews, there were windows of opportunity for observation and self-reflection. These were particularly useful during translated interviews, which afforded me opportunities to remove myself from interactions and observe the people and things around me. As I sat with my aide memoir, looking at conversations flourish between May, Min, and Kyaw and various respondents, I found myself left out of the conversation. I decided to spend this time observing the interviewee’s micro-expressions and body language to find meaning beyond what I can linguistically grasp, recovering at least some of the meanings lost in translation. This dramatically improved how I read and interpreted transcripts.

*I watched as Min and Kyaw traced their fingertips across the aide memoir. I’ve come to recognise particular phrases, which gave me a vague idea of where the interview had progressed to. I’ve come to know which questions elicit what kind of emotion, which contextualised responses and gave depth to even the most taciturn response. The smirk when asked about relationships with siblings, the sigh when talking about debts, the twiddling of the thumbs when asked about...*
remittance methods all served to give insight to conversations to which
I was an outsider.

Memo, January 2018.

Non-humans can also be a respondent and it was in Yangon, where Min, Kyaw, and I were invited into respondents’ homes, that we gained rich observational insights that supplemented interview data. Though ideas around ‘class’ found little purchase in Burmese, one can look for culturally-defined signifiers of difference (Bourdieu, 1977). For younger households, this might be ownership of electronics and vehicles. For older households, this might be the building materials of the home itself, or opulent religious paraphernalia, such as a Buddhist shrine. As interviews progressed, I found myself increasingly drawn to the material cultures of home (Wise, 2000), using items in the domestic space as a visual proxy of remittances (see 3.7.1). These often served as prompts: ‘oh is that a new TV?’ Graduation photos, more common in middle-class households, provided useful segues into interrogating life narratives (Rose, 2003), and enriched familial narratives by humanising the anonymous, faceless ‘migrant’. By leveraging materiality and spaces to ground conversation, I was able to subtly understand the household practices that go into managing the dividends of migration.

This freedom to detach oneself from the immediacy of interviewing challenged me to think more about positionality and how it affected my relationship with interviewees. Though I was often able to offer comments during earlier interviews in Singapore and Yangon, made possible by interruptions – someone coming into the room, a phone call – this became less necessary over time as May, Min and Kyaw became more confident and skilled at tackling the interviews themselves. At times, my presence felt redundant and perhaps even counterproductive, as if I was supervising or moderating the conversation.

In Singapore, respondents sometimes mistook me as a member of HOME’s staff, changing the dynamics of interviews (Ali, 2014). As such, I renegotiated my relationship with interviews by emphasising my student identity and my lack of expertise or authority; I was there to learn from them (Kvale, 1996). Positionality is thrown into sharp relief at the beginning of every conversation with domestic workers: ‘hello sir’, would be followed by a bow of the head as they walked into the room. When hierarchy and subservience is drilled into the lexicon of an entire population of workers (Ueno, 2009), it strains an already contrived relationship. As I am ethnically Chinese, which is also Singapore’s ethnic, cultural and political majority, this placed me in a position of power that likely further eroded my relationship with vulnerable workers. This required skilful rapport-building by May to bridge an uneasy relationship, and interviewees were noticeably more relaxed as interviews progressed. English interviews were not absolved of issues of positionality. I was often surprised by a perceived lack of difference between me and younger interviewees – we visited the same places, ate the same food, saw the same films, and several were educated
overseas – but subtle, unexpected vectors of distinction remained. On his family’s income, one interviewee, Htway, explained:

Htway: My mother, still teaching... They are very old already, not much spend money.
Alex: How old are they?
Htway: My father is 65.
Alex: [chuckle] that’s still young.
Htway: Not the same as London! 65 in London is young because your country’s life expectancy is 80 years, my country is 65 years. 80-90% will die at 65.

(SG14, Htway, SP, male, 27, 60 months)46

Banter with Htway, a young male engineer, took a morbid turn, which he thankfully took in good humour and segued into reflections on filial piety, which I explore further in 6.3.1. Reading through transcripts, I was reminded how positionality demands vigilance: beyond reflections on gender, class, and ethnicity that researchers recommend, I also found myself battling with cultural positionality when participants explained concepts such as morbidity and karma. Although my Chinese heritage allowed me to navigate some of these topics, culturally distant themes required greater interpretive empathy and rigour, especially during analysis.

Difference can sometimes be leveraged productively. In Yangon, I was keen to learn more about the culture of donation. Min and Kyaw thus asked: ‘why do you donate money?’ In early interviews, responses would be curt, accompanied by a bewildered smile. In the sociological tradition of interviewing, asking obvious questions is often motivated by hearing insights ‘from the horse’s mouth’. Whilst it was beneficial for May, Min and, Kyaw to be cultural ‘insiders’ (Ganga and Scott, 2006), it represented issues when, designed by from a Western perspective, aide memoirs seemed to ask painfully obvious questions (Faist, 2012). My solution was simple: blame Alex. Respondents often found the foreigner’s silly questions endearing and allowed them to take an expert role to explain with greater nuance than if explained to a local. This interplay between being in- and outsiders worked well as difference could be exploited to solicit responses from a range of topics. Nonetheless, it was important to acculturate to basic behavioural observances: taking off shoes as you enter the home, a slight bow of the head when greeting elders. Learning basic phrases also enabled closer relationships; the mispronunciation of twe-ya-da-wan-da-bar-dey (nice to meet you) was often met with laughter, but attempts were welcome, and helped build relationships conducive for conversation. After decades of political isolation, locals are curious as to why foreigners are curious; the willingness to adapt helped bridge otherwise radically different class and cultural positions.

46 All worker quotes reference the interview ID number (SG14), the worker’s alias (Htway), their visa category (S Pass), gender (male), age (27), and the duration of their time in Singapore (60 months).
Surprisingly, other differences played smaller roles than anticipated: owing to constraints of finding appropriate translator-interviewers in Yangon, two male translators were hired. In practice, gender was not as significant as age (see 6.3.2). In Burmese culture, seniors command respect from juniors, but our ages also meant that more senior respondents felt at ease with sharing knowledge, especially for academic purposes. Against the context of democratisation in Myanmar, older respondents were particularly insightful about changes in livelihoods over time and were startling frank on their opinions on the government. Being critically attentive to my, and my team’s, positionality and how these might be mitigated or leveraged enabled more reflexive and nuanced interactions.

3.6 Fieldwork Times

The previous sections detailed the practicalities of fieldwork and the challenges and solutions involved. This section describes the time I spent in Singapore and Myanmar and how fieldwork played out. Just as ‘research methods will always be a means of carving up space and time’ (de Freitas, 2017: 34), so too does this project have its own spatio-temporal story to tell.

3.6.1 Going with the Flow: Synchronising Migrant Time

Following a pilot in April 2016, fieldwork began in August the same year, and data collection was sequenced to begin in Singapore followed by Yangon. In Singapore, I joined as a visiting researcher with the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore (NUS) from August 2016 to February 2017. Of the seven months I spent in Singapore, the first half was spent on conducting surveys with migrant workers. Over time, important temporal patterns emerged that affected the practicalities of research. On the one hand, the Burmese community is relatively closed to outsiders. Researching sensitive issues to do with migration and money further complicates this relationship and data collection was contingent on temporalities of trust. Beyond simply ‘doing’ research, ‘showing up’ at Peninsula Plaza on a long-term basis – to ensure I was both ‘knowing and being known’ (Eide and Allen, 2016: 45) – was vital to recruiting participants. Over time, contacts, trust, and visibility snowballed. On the other hand, workers also abide by structures of migrant temporality (Cwerner, 2001; Ma, 2017b). For the majority of workers, Sunday would be their only ‘off day’. Accordingly, the majority of data collection only took place on Sundays.

Cyclic pulses of activity and inactivity coincided with the processual data collection and analyses that grounded theory recommends (Charmaz, 2014). ‘Downtime’ was used to analyse interim findings and identify research directions though, depending on the availability of respondents, this was not always possible. Surveys, though time consuming, offered a ‘slow deliberative time of human consciousness’ where nuances can be grasped through reflexive interpretation (de
Freitas, 2017: 31). These cycles forced me to ‘go with the flow’ by attuning oneself to the
temporal rhythms of migrant life (Ma, 2017b). Even on Sundays there is a temporal predictability:
mornings typically entail temple or church, afternoons would see Peninsula Plaza thronged with
workers sending remittances, having lunch, shopping, and socialising. By evening, the crowds
subside as workers return to dormitories and employers’ homes. Outside of this regimentation,
there were moments of temporal opportunism – weekday interviews between shifts, for example –
but the bulk of data collected were enabled by a kind of studied intervention during near-
universal migrant times (Cwerner, 2001; Ma, 2017b). In practice, these constraints ensured an
extremely narrow window during which contact is possible.

By January 2017, survey work was largely complete as I focused on conducting interviews.
Survey results helped to contextualise interviews, but also focused questions to develop specific
themes. Alongside consultations with stakeholders and gatekeepers, issues around social
protection, donations and altruism, and financial precarity were explored further via interviews.
Purposively sampling workers of different migration durations highlighted issues and practices
that migrants encounter at various points of the migration process. Recently-arrived workers
spoke with clarity on the migration process, whereas veteran workers gave temporal
reconstructions of migration-remittance impacts. Towards the end of my time in Singapore,
cultural time became an important aspect of my research: the Burmese calendar is thronged
with celebrations and there are more months with a significant religious or social holiday than
those without. Most events would be held at temples or makeshift spaces – a school assembly
hall, for instance – and offered fleeting moments to immerse oneself in the community. In
Singapore, activists and academics I had spoken with often lamented the lack of visible Burmese
organisation, which limits outreach. In contrast, I witnessed events of extraordinary scale – inter-
Region/state football tournaments, ethnic-specific New Year’s celebrations – that brought
together thousands of co-ethnics and co-believers only to dissolve by the day’s end; the
excitement and productivity of research rested on these serendipitous discoveries.

3.6.2 Burmese Days: Working Fast and Slow

Building on the momentum of fieldwork in Singapore, a short trip to Yangon was made in March
2017 to attend the Myanmar Update Conference at the University of Yangon. In the absence of
existing contacts, the conference provided an opportunity to snowball contacts with researchers
and organisations. Strikingly, the conference highlighted the key policy priorities that the new
government was pursuing, but I was intrigued by the absence of migration in these conversations,
both in terms of labour- and forced-migration. By critically examining the administration’s
priorities, the conference revealed the broader issues – such as economic development, social
protection and security – that I must couch my study in. This also provoked me to examine more
carefully the historical-structural context for Burmese migration (Griffiths et al., 2013). In
Singapore, it was easy to conceive of migrants as actors detached from their socio-historical
contexts. However, brief encounters with presenters at the conference – including government officials and former political prisoners – provoked a renewed belief in the explanatory power of time.

Fieldwork in Yangon began in June 2017. Concurrently, from June to August 2017, I undertook a beginner Burmese class at the French Institute. The culture of immediacy in Myanmar meant that months of attempted preparation yielded little in comparison to one morning of phone calls. Life is simply not planned that far ahead, and work was often catalysed by strokes of luck, or simply by being at the right place at the right time. The most productive day, for instance, entailed a three-hour journey to the rural outskirts of Yangon, brought about by a serendipitous conversation just two days before. Once there, we conducted four of our most informative and engaging interviews. Unlike urban encounters, which were comparatively rushed, rural interviews lent itself more to the deep qualitative interactions from which this study draws its insights; there was a noticeable range in the pace of life and conversation depending on the part of Yangon one finds oneself in. As in Singapore, progress was tumultuous, and it was in the throes of Yangon’s traffic jams that much networking over the phone, conversing with Min and Kyaw, and analysing responses was done. As Sheller and Urry (2006: 213) claimed: ‘time spent traveling is not dead time that people always seek to minimise’. Instead, traffic jams proved to be useful intervals during which to reflect. As we raced around town, rarely on time, those spare minutes between interviews were invaluable for giving mutual feedback: what went well, what could be improved, how can we achieve a better result next time? Fieldwork was often reflexive and involved a constant process of revision, trial, and error (Shih, 2012); Min and Kyaw were invaluable in guiding both the research direction, and my life in Yangon more generally.

Initial interviews relied on reverse-networking contacts from Singapore. Many who were once a ‘participant’, over time, had become friends, and it was through these friends that an entire sample of interviewees eventually blossomed. Although respondents in Singapore said they would ask their household to participate in interviews, the vast majority did not follow through. Of all migrant and household interviews, only two were ‘end-to-end’ studies (MM1 and MM3, see Annex 8). As for stakeholder interviews, a ban on domestic workers migration and a general ban on migration to Malaysia (see 5.2.2), meant that employment agents were often leisurely as I walked into offices seemingly devoid of activity. This worked in my favour as whole afternoons can be spent listening to the rants of disgruntled agents, as ‘interviews’ evolved into a sort of accidental participant observation (see 3.7.1 and 3.7.2), the outputs of which were often startlingly frank.

Finally, the data collection was caught in the cycles of 28- and 70-day visa limitations. In practice, I never maximised the visa durations as, unexpectedly, Myanmar’s seasonality also took a heavy toll on my health. The progress of fieldwork was tumultuous, as the six-month-long rainy season from May to October coincided with a bout of seasonal flu that necessitated me flying back to London twice. Looking back, fieldwork was characterised by serendipity and I owe it to all those
chance encounters with generous souls that have helped me physically, mentally, and intelectually along the way. I returned to London in April 2018.

3.7 Ethics

3.7.1 ‘Doing’ Ethics: Space and Access in Singapore

During fieldwork, ‘ethics’ – what it meant, what it entailed and how it could and should be implemented in practice – was an unexpected source of uncertainty. Beyond the obligation to ‘do no harm’ – seeking informed consent, and ensuring voluntary participation, and data protection – I often found myself unable to anticipate the entanglements and impacts my work could have beyond what was anticipated. Ethical guidelines could scarcely account for the constellations of social interactions that comprise fieldwork. In Singapore, ethics was more institutionalised: my status as a visiting researcher at NUS was conditional on my securing ethical approval from UCL. With assistance from HOME, information sheets and consent forms were developed for participant reference (Annex 3 and 4). Ethics was formalised and of tripartite interest.

Despite these safeguards, ethical risks remained. At the most basic level, there is the spectre of vulnerability and the researcher’s responsibility to protect those ‘at risk’ (van Liempt and Bilger, 2012). In Singapore, Burmese workers have often been portrayed as one of the most vulnerable migrant groups. Wessels (2015), for example, finds that Burmese domestic workers in Singapore are disproportionately likely to be mistreated by employers and suffer from mental illness. Burmese domestic worker suicides have also sent shockwaves through social media (Htwe, 2018). This vulnerability was thrown into sharp relief during a survey focus group when a domestic worker asked: ‘sir, do I put my passport age or real age?’ In 2016, HOME and Al Jazeera broadcasted a documentary on the smuggling of underage Burmese domestic workers into Singapore which drew international attention. The eligibility criteria for a Work Permit is 23; the young woman in the focus group was 19. Nonetheless, I caution against reductive categorisations of vulnerability. Women from HOME’s shelter, for instance, assisted in the distribution of surveys to their friends. Although I was initially apprehensive about enlisting the help of ‘vulnerable’ migrants, they were energetic and enthusiastic about the study, and helped whenever they had free time. Vulnerability is not static but a spatio-temporally dynamic process that requires critical judgement to be exercised (McAreavey and Das, 2013; Davidson, 2013); assistance, as well as participation, was always voluntary. Moreover, defining groups as ‘vulnerable’ might be counterproductive as it excludes potential beneficiaries from the research process (Mollet, 2011; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Krause, 2017).

47 Ethical clearance was granted by UCL to conduct surveys and interviews with the proviso participants are clearly briefed on the project, what it entails, how their data will be used and stored, and voluntary participation.
I was also challenged by the spatiality of ethics (Krause, 2017); reflexivity was critical in the ‘doing’ of ethical research, especially where networking was so central to this study. Often, direct access to migrants, whether due to cultural, linguistic, or ethnic differences cannot be achieved (Eide and Allen, 2016). I thus found myself reliant on access brokered via gatekeepers in order to build ‘trust in a context of mistrust’ (van Liempt and Bilger, 2012: 458). However, this raised ethical dilemmas, especially when conducting surveys. On the one hand, gatekeepers had privileged access to particular Burmese networks and spaces. This was best illustrated by access to Work Permit holders, who tended to be male and live and work in construction, manufacturing, and shipyard sites, which are off-limit to visitors. In these contexts, community leaders were indispensable in facilitating contact; physical access does not equal social or cultural access (Eide and Allen, 2016). On the other hand, reliance on gatekeepers may undermine voluntariness and anonymity. In Burmese culture, monks and community elders command significant social respect and power. Workers might feel compelled to participate as reliance on community leaders disguise hidden power structures within the community (Ganga and Scott, 2006). Though care was taken to ensure gatekeepers were informed about consent and voluntary participation when delegating surveys, proper implementation may be limited: how likely is it that every participant was fully briefed on how their data will be used and stored? In a crowded, informal situation where participation tends to build its own social momentum, this is unlikely. Similarly, anonymity, where gatekeepers knows the respondent personally, may also be undermined.

It was only after I left Singapore that I found room for worried introspection: what are the power dynamics of participation? When a gatekeeper asked me for 50 surveys to distribute at a football game but only 10 were returned, what happened to the other 40? If they were completed but went missing, what are the risks? If someone offered their help in earnest, on what ethical grounds could I have refused? Could I have afforded to refuse the help and still collect the data I wanted to? These felt like elementary issues that were obscured by the naive optimism and excitement of data collection. Ethical procedures are not always practically implementable and challenged me to interrogate my own beliefs and commitments to protocol when conducting research with a population characterised by informality, transience, and mistrust (van Liempt and Bilger, 2012). As an early-career researcher, navigating ‘the [ethical] space between conduct and compliance’ (Israel and Hay, 2006: 131) was thought-provoking but challenging and required a great deal of critical judgement and situational awareness (McAreevey and Das, 2013). If the purpose of research ethics is to safeguard the wellbeing of participants and ensure that participation ‘does no harm’ (Krause, 2017), then the realities of social research reveals the complexities of social interactions that cannot always be reduced to ‘guidelines’ or ‘protocol’. 
3.7.2 ‘Doing’ Ethics: Interest and Observation in Yangon

Where ethical considerations proved uncertain even in the context of Singapore’s robust frameworks, they proved even more challenging in Myanmar where research was typified by informality. In Singapore, my gatekeeper networks were often developed through HOME, thus their motivations for assistance were more transparent. In Myanmar, I found myself again reliant on the goodwill of networks but with murkier interests. Through Joyce, a volunteer at HOME, I was referred to the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF), a private body that represents formal employment agencies in Myanmar. Comprised of private employment agency owners, I met with one of the board members, Thinn, at their office downtown:

Ostensibly interested in the protection of his, and the Federation’s, interests, I was struck by how candidly Thinn spoke about his misgivings with the government, his thoughts on the domestic worker ban, and his passion for worker protections. He seemed thoughtful and earnest and was an invaluable source of information. During the conversation, I mentioned how frustrating it was to acquire a business visa for Myanmar and he offered to sponsor an application if I wanted. A few months later, I took him up on his offer. In the meeting, I also offered to send him a report on the interim findings from my worker survey for him to comment on. He also shared with me data on migrant deployment numbers via the Federation’s members.

Memo, January 2018.

The meeting at MOEAF provided me with a wealth of information critical to understanding the migration industry. Nonetheless, I found myself reflecting not only on how his favour might impact the relationship between us as I interviewed him a second time, but also how objectivity might be compromised by taking a particular interpretive bias on what he tells me (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). Moreover, I was unsure of the murky ethics of sharing findings with a third party: despite his seemingly earnest intention to help, was sharing findings I collected on migrant workers with the Federation unethical given their role in representing employment agent interests? How much did I tell him that he didn’t already know as a leader in the migration industry? Is my cynicism towards employment agents, some of whom were passionate about worker protections and rights, itself unethical?

These concerns highlighted for me the ethical complexities of fieldwork in Myanmar where I was reliant on contacts not only to access interviewees, but also to solicit feedback and support. Although authors have considered the practical elements of research ethics in developing contexts, these tend to focus on participant wellbeing (Mollet, 2011). In practice, my dilemmas stemmed from my uncertain relationship with those who have helped me along the way: how
close is 'too close' when it comes to networking and reliance? Where access to Burmese politics is hindered both by language and a lack of networks, contacts, such as MOEAF, were vital to fieldwork. However, I was also cognizant of how I should not allow these relationships to distort my perspective or analysis of individuals and organisations. This highlighted how the sociality of research might undermine ethical obligations to serve the interests of migrant workers. I needed to clarify what my participants’ expectations of this research was and how I best protect and satisfy those expectations (van Liempt and Bilger, 2012). At the basic level, respondents often expressed interest to simply ‘help’ with my studies. Often, respondents hope that, by participating, my research would help ‘improve’ Myanmar by giving voice to migrants to visibilise the issues they face. This is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the study also aspires towards impact. On the other hand, I often found myself unsure of whether participants would approve of how that impact might be achieved. Even if the anonymity of respondents was robust, who would participants consider to be positive, negative, or neutral third parties to be sharing findings with? Finding oneself in an unfamiliar environment often meant that few spaces of introspection were afforded as research built its own social momentum. Leaving Myanmar, I found myself a little wiser, if cynical, and more aware to the multiple interests that research must juggle.

Finally, one aspect of ethics I had not considered whilst in the field related to participant observation. In Singapore, this played a limited role: interviews with May largely took place at HOME whereas English interviews took place in public areas (see 3.4.1 and 3.5.2). This meant that settings either contributed little towards interviewee narratives, or I was too busy to make observations during interviews. Where observations did play a role was in public spaces such as Peninsula Plaza where workers would socialise and send remittances, or at temples and celebrations where workers donate money. Given my untargeted observations in a public setting, this was not considered an ethical concern. Observations in Myanmar were richer both because interviews were in private spaces and because I had more time to observe as Min and Kyaw interviewed. Though all interviewees were explicitly prompted on the terms of their participation, I had not planned to use participation observations to collect data. Indeed, notes were taken as a supplementary aside, rather than an active attempt to ‘observe’. Since provided information sheets already outlined the terms of their participation in the study, and observations were largely incidental, additional consent was not sought. Nonetheless, confidentiality and the anonymity of households remain robust and observations are only used to triangulate against transcripts, or to preface empirical chapters with a contextualising note, rather than to serve as a primary source of data in and of itself. Consequently, observations were not deemed an ethical ‘risk’.
3.7.3 The Ethics of Writing: Representation and Power

'I would like all my friends who are foreigners here to read this. Always keep in mind, that if anything goes wrong, you get to pack your bags and leave. This is our country; we don’t get to leave. We suffer. Remind yourself of that the next time you feel like we’re not speaking out or doing enough about this and that. This is our country after all. No one else cares more than we do.'

Facebook post 09/02/18

Discussing my research outside of Myanmar yields predictable questions: ‘you’re working on migration in Myanmar? Tell me about the ‘Rohingya crisis’!’ With my cursory knowledge of the Rakhine, I am able to offer basic analysis of issues, albeit in hushed tones. On Burmese social media, there is frustration and resentment on how international media covers domestic affairs, as the Facebook post above testifies. As sentiments over foreign ‘expert’ opinion courts increasing controversy, I was reminded of the heightened significance my reporting on Burmese migration issues would have and the ethics of representation. As above, there is a need to account for multiple, overlapping positionalities during data collection, but positionality also impacts on how data are interpreted and re-presented through the analytical frame of the researcher (McDowell, 1992; van Liempt and Bilger, 2012; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). In Myanmar, resistance against foreign opinion is defended on the grounds of sovereignty and resentment towards Western ‘expertise’ in the subject (Boswell, 2009); criticisms of the incumbent government are usually frowned upon.

Where this research aspires to understand the migration-development nexus to recommend policy and theoretical ways forward, the power of representation is particularly salient. On the one hand, representation is inherently partial, reductive, and selective. On the other hand, the researcher must be reflexive and transparent in how data are selected to weave the narrative that they choose (Hoskins, 2015). Writing through data, I was faced with various interpretive frames I could adopt: were inconsistencies in the respondent’s story purposeful or a mistake? Whose testimony is likely more reliable and why? I often found myself adjudicating issues on which I have no expertise; it was difficult to juggle my responsibility between being true to my informants’ stories, whilst adopting a more critical voice. Although some authors have taken a participatory technique to interpreting and presenting findings (Ali, 2014), transient relationships with respondents precluded such possibilities. Instead, May, Min, and Kyaw acted as participatory third-parties to verify and explore unusual responses. Although they were not responsible for write-up, there were always at hand to explain turn of phrases to give depth to my analysis. Writing thus proved to be a project of mediating difference: of perspective, of understanding. I was careful in how I represented issues, marking and isolating direct quotations from my interpretations thereof. Translated transcripts from May or Hseng were checked and ‘cleaned’ to ensure correct grammar and punctuation; English interviews are quoted verbatim.
In this role, I am the conduit between the informant, interview-translator, and reader, offering suggestions on how findings might be understood through an ‘agentic reading’ of research outputs (Hoskins, 2015: 396). Where interactions with informants are transient, my relationship with May, Min, and Kyaw was durable and allowed us to discuss and revisit findings. Their nuances and thoughts are interwoven throughout translated interviews. In the following empirical chapters, I present stories and statistics that are true to the population of Burmese in Singapore to humanise migration and development. There are stories of struggle and success, unfinished stories and stories yet to be told. I make no pretence of my expertise but offer my view on how we can learn from those narratives to challenge conventional wisdom in the hopes that migration can be made to work for those who sacrifice the most.
4. Why People Move

This chapter addresses this thesis's first two research questions by foregrounding survey findings to establish an overview of the Burmese migrant population in Singapore and identify the structural-agential drivers of migration. Across collected data, a recurrent theme has to do with path dependencies: where people come from has a large impact on the where they go and the things they do. Put simply, history – of the migrant household and livelihood structures – matters. This will be illustrated throughout this thesis's analytical chapters as survey and interview data are interweaved to produce the story of money from pre-migration, during migration, and remittance recipient perspectives. This thesis's ambition to follow money and people begins in Myanmar. For most workers, the decision to migrate is rooted in economic narratives of family 'support'. But beyond the desire to earn more, what exactly drives over 120,000 people to leave their homes and those families to work in Singapore? What are the contextual drivers that inform those decisions? Finally, how do those contexts figure later on in the migration-development project? By understanding household backgrounds, we are able to examine migration not as a temporarily discrete phenomenon but the processual output of agential-structural negotiations (Bourdieu, 1977).

It is this chapter’s contention that migration is rooted in decades of livelihood challenges that stem from economic decline and mismanagement that produces a migration-oriented habitus, or a 'culture of migration' (Massey et al., 1993). This approach to understanding practice drivers rests on three pillars of Bourdieusian social analyses which, as Swartz (1997) notes, comprise an examination of intra-subject relations, subject-field relations, and the habitus. This chapter adapts this framework by establishing a migrant group typology to understand inter-group differences, examining the relationship between migrants and the pre-migration social field, and how they inform migration. By defining the conceptual parameters of this chapter this way, a field- and habitus-sensitive analysis allows us to zero in on the factors that inform migration decisions and how development is ultimately practiced.

First, given inputs from diverse migrant industries and backgrounds, I foreground the establishment of migrant typologies. Contextual analysis highlights the material and immaterial factors that compel migration, but such factors are defined, experienced, and narrated differently by actors depending on the social positions they occupy. At the core of each analytical chapter is the need to understand difference. To do this, I set out the migrant typology that I will use to further my analysis of group practices and outcomes. This thesis does not aspire towards a 'grand theory' of migration (King, 2012), but instead prioritises typologies to disaggregate and visualise the longitudinal pathways of migrants: where groups come from, where they are headed, and where they will likely end up. In this chapter, an analysis of intra-subject relations reveals important differences between households of different classed positions, defined in Bourdieusian terms as the capitals they hold and the dispositions they live (see 2.5). Although
there is a general economic rhetoric of familial support, this must be qualified against different needs and aspirational references: low-income workers are more concerned with producing immediate returns whereas high-income workers meditate more on long-term social mobility and experiences.

Second, pre-migration livelihoods must be analysed in relation to the broader distribution of resources and power geometries within the social field. Two fields are of importance to this thesis. First, the pre-migration social field, such as the Myanmar labour market, that dictate livelihood sustainability and distribution of resources. Second, the migrant’s relationship with the Myanmar-Singapore migration field, which is comprised of brokers, households, and migration regimes, which dictate the returns to migration. This chapter examines the former. By ‘following the thing’ and the people (see Chapter 3), this chapter reconnects remittances with their historical-social contexts to explain the impacts they yield (Gregson et al., 2010; Christophers, 2011; Cook and Harrison, 2016). This is achieved by mapping the relational structures between workers who occupy different parts of the field (Marcus, 1995), which dictate the accessibility and distribution of resources – what Bourdieu calls the ‘structure of objective relations’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 23) – as well as structure pathways of international mobility. My findings demonstrate how households are precarious within the Burmese economic field. On the one hand, households are constrained by income insufficiency and poor economic opportunities. On the other hand, although narratives are near-universal, realities are not. In the Burmese context, the labour market is fragmented between formal and informal labour (see Piore, 1978). The former describes stable employment where workers are regularly remunerated; historically, the largest formal employer has been the civil service. The latter generally describes sources of income that are irregular and unstable; in Myanmar, the agricultural sector dominates informal employment. In practice, this means that seemingly ‘universal’ narratives of hardship can be disaggregated to reveal subjective experiences that inform particular migration practices.

Finally, the combination of inter-group differences and their respective relations with the social field structures predictable migration behaviours, which are best understood through a theory of ‘habitus’ (see 2.5; Bourdieu, 1977). For Bourdieu, the habitus comprises the learned habits and dispositions of individuals that encompass both action and thought. This ‘grammar’ of behaviour is durable and determines how individuals interact with the field, and their long-term social trajectories (ibid.). As the last stage of social analysis, the habitus should be understood as a structural-agential interplay where behaviours both shape, and are shaped, by overarching social structures (Wacquant, 1989). The habitus is critical for understanding why people do what they do. This chapter uses the concept of habitus to examine how contexts – of livelihood challenges, limited economic opportunities, and social mobility – translate into action. I demonstrate how the drive to migrate is not just seated in economic calculation, but a layered disposition that is produced through failures of state governance that has engendered a culture of self-reliance. Limited economic opportunities, a lack of social mobility, and an absence of
social protections mean that migration is not so much a random movement of peoples but a product of history (Kashwan et al., 2018).

This chapter works to set out the schematics of the migratory field in order to highlight the circumstances within which migrant and household practices are produced. In doing so, this sets the theoretical and empirical basis from which to springboard into more nuanced, context-specific understandings of migrant practices. In sum, findings call for more complex conceptualisations of migratory drivers and behaviours. Although income figures prominently in the migrant narrative, it is perhaps not so much the need to earn more, but the insufficiency of local livelihoods that compels migration. In the context of agrarian precarity, for example, migration is rarely the first response to hardship. Instead, it is environmental stresses such as crop loss compounded with unsustainable or deleterious coping strategies, such as debt, that drives migration. Conversely, middle-class urban households are more interested in social mobility and career progression. Decisions, in other words, are more complex than currently theorised in migration-development orthodoxy, and this chapter contributes to the literature by injecting structural and social meanings of migration into the development debate (van Hear et al., 2017). Although this thesis did not set out to analyse rural precarity or environmentally-driven migration, findings from low-income agrarian households will be relevant to both Myanmar studies and the growing interest in climate-induced displacement (Zetter and Morrissey, 2014). Similarly, findings from middle-class migrants also contribute towards diversifying narratives of Burmese migration away from forced migration or displacement towards recognising the broader developmental implications of majority movements.

The rest of this chapter is structured to align with the Bourdieusian logic of analysis outlined above. I begin with an overview of survey findings from the Singapore. I use a typology of migrant groups to highlight key group characteristics and structure the empirical analyses I make for the rest of this thesis. This is particularly useful in discerning context- and group-specific experiences to better target analyses and interventions, and to situate subsequent interview data. Second, I analyse pre-migration livelihoods to illustrate how different households occupy precarious subject positions within the Burmese social field. Findings are disaggregated by key worker groups – domestic workers, Work Permit, and skilled S Pass and Employment workers – allowing us to identify important intersecting differences in class, livelihood challenges, and coping strategies. This directly challenges the migration-development nexus by providing grounded empirical evidence for the segmentation of migration groups, each with their attendant migratory contexts and motivations. Third, I combine these findings in a Bourdieusian analysis of the migratory habitus. This section will detail how workers make active, albeit constrained, choices to migrate for self-defined ends. Critically, the migration habitus is reflexive of broader structural realities and micro-level household processes and is therefore capable of change across time. This illustrates the different group dynamics within the sample to uncover nuanced perspectives to group behaviours, offering an opportune segue into analysing experiences of the migration process in the next chapter.
4.1 Migration and Development in the Myanmar-Singapore Corridor: A Baseline

This thesis enriches nexus debates by disaggregating findings and analyses by migrant groups, allowing us to visualise how migration and ‘development’ is differently narrative, pursued, and achieved. Group typologies are the principle variable used to sort this thesis’s data collection (surveys n=459, interviews n=71), and will be referred to throughout analytical chapters. As discussed in 3.3, respondent samples were based on migrant visa categories (see Annex 9), which is consistent with research questions one and two (see 1.1). This typology is valuable for three reasons. First, the expansive amount of data collected needed an organising principle for analyses to be meaningfully structured. Whilst high-level distinctions such as gender might be useful, visa categories allow us to combine and represent intersecting characteristics: demographics, income, education, and likely migration pathways and experiences. Second, the relative durability of these typologies raises questions around the role of structure in migration, the degree to which pathways are deterministic, and whether migrants are able to escape those categories. This is especially important given migration studies’ tendency for sector-specific analysis; in Singapore, the spotlight has been trained on domestic and construction work (see Platt et al., 2016). Finally, as these analytical chapters will demonstrate, this typology is both backward- and forward-looking: findings reveal that visa categories are reliable predictors of both pre-migration contexts and post-migration outcomes.

A typology-driven analysis is useful in the Burmese context given little data exists outside of the Thai-Myanmar corridor. In LIFT’s (2016a: 9-10) special report on domestic migration, the authors set out three key migration types: ‘shock response’, ‘risk management’, and ‘upwardly mobile’. Respectively, these describe how mobilities are compelled by the need to meet acute income needs in response to income loss, the need to seek stable income in the context of ecological precarity, and finally attempts to seek social and class mobility. The report finds that high-income workers are more likely to migrate for risk management and attaining social mobility rather than as shock response. Where low-income migration aimed to manage risk through generating income for subsistence, higher-income migration aimed to mitigate risk through building saving buffers. These typologies are corroborated, to an extent, within this study’s findings.

The rest of this section introduces this thesis’s respondents, sorted into four visa groupings: domestic workers, Work Permit, S Pass, and Employment Pass holders. Both domestic and Work Permit holders are engaged in low-income, low-skilled professions and may be designated as such throughout this thesis. S Pass (SP) holders describe semi-skilled and skilled-workers, whereas Employment Pass (EP) holders tend to be the highest tier of workers in terms of income, skill, qualifications, and experience (see Annex 9 for a full schedule of criteria for each visa group). Headline findings from the worker survey is presented here to sketch out the key characteristics
of each group, and to contextualise subsequent analyses in later chapters. Notable findings are grouped into demographic, industrial, and financial factors.
Table 4.1: Summary of survey respondent demographic, migration, and financial data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>N (% of all responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>188 (4.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pass</td>
<td>73 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>73 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td>90 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>57 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Ethnicity: Bamar (%) | 312 (68%) |
| Religion: Buddhist (%) | 401 (87.4%) |
| Employment agent use (%) | 233 (51.6%) |
| Origin: Yangon or Mandalay | 213 (48.4%) |
| Mean age (SD) | 32.0 (6.9) |
| | 18 (3.9%) |
| | 68 (1.4%) |

Bamar (or ‘Burman’) is the ethnic majority in Myanmar.
Buddhism is the majority religion in Myanmar. Christianity is prevalent in minority States such as Kachin.


Three respondents were students and were excluded from analyses.
The 'Work Permit (Domestic)' pass also includes care workers. This survey did not distinguish these workers because their numbers are negligible; most still refer to themselves as domestic workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry (%)</th>
<th>Construction (100%)</th>
<th>Marine (8.8%)</th>
<th>IT/Technical (19%)</th>
<th>Professional Services (18.5%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Industries (%)</th>
<th>Domestic Work (4000)</th>
<th>Construction (16.7%)</th>
<th>Finances</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<th>Finances</th>
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<tr>
<th>Finances</th>
<th>Current income (S$) (SD)</th>
<th>Pre-migration income (S$) (SD)</th>
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<tr>
<th>Finances</th>
<th>Financial dependants (SD)</th>
<th>Remittances per month (S$) (SD)</th>
<th>Income-Remittance Ratio (%)</th>
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£1 = $1.8 Singapore dollar (approximate average throughout the duration of survey deployment). 

4.31.8 = $1.8 Singapore dollar (approximate average throughout the duration of survey deployment).
Demographics

Owing to Singaporean visa regulations, 100% of domestic workers are female. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the preponderance of construction and industrial sectors in that pathway, women are almost entirely absent in other Work Permit categories. What is surprising is the relative absence of women from semi-skilled and skilled jobs: women account for only a third and 22.2% of S Pass and Employment Pass workers respectively. A strong gender disparity across different migration pathways is thus evidenced (see Chapter 5).

Just under half of all respondents of the survey came from Yangon or Mandalay (Table 4.1). However, there are large intergroup differences: where only 25.6% and 39.7% of domestic and Work Permit holders originate from Yangon or Mandalay, 67.3% of S Pass and 77.8% of Employment Pass workers originate from those two Regions. Elsewhere, respondents principally come from Bago and Ayeyarwady to the south, and Magway in central Myanmar (Figure 4.1). This also means that domestic workers and Work Permit holders are more ethnically diverse: Bamar comprise only 58.7% and 67.6% of the domestic and other WP holders compared to 76.6% and 88.9% of S Pass and Employment Pass holders respectively. Despite this, minority ethnicities within each worker group is highly fragmented and there is no clear pattern to where workers originate from outside of the key urban metropoles.\(^{55}\)

Although it is difficult to evaluate the geographic representativeness of this survey sample, the overall 68% proportion of ethnic Bamar corresponds with the overall ethnic composition of Myanmar. This thesis’s empirical contribution stems from both its geographical focus on Singapore as a distinct destination for labour migration, and the demographic characteristics of its population sample. Extant studies conceptualise Myanmar primarily as a case of forced and conflict-driven migration, prioritising minority ethnic and religious cases (Dudley, 2011; Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012; Weber and Stanford, 2017; South, 2012; South and Jolliffe, 2015; Alam, 2017), overshadowing the experiences of the majority in the process. Conversely, this thesis’s sample is dominated by Buddhist respondents. The contributions of this thesis stem from its focus on everyday experiences of migration and development by the many, rather than shocking crises of displacement experienced by the few. With the exception of Work Permit and Employment Pass holders, who are entirely Buddhist, greater religious variance is found within the domestic worker and S Pass pool, where only 79.8% and 89.8% of respondents identify as Buddhist.

Demographics and visa pathways map onto particular development factors. There is a gradation to the educational attainments of workers: only one-fifth of domestic workers are educated to

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\(^{55}\) According to the Central Intelligence Agency (2010) World Factbook, Bamar (Burman) people comprise 68% of the population, followed by 9% Shan, 7% Karen, 4% Rakhine, 3% Chinese, 2% Indian, 2% Mon, and 5% ‘others’. Moreover, Buddhists comprise 87.9% of the population, followed by 6.2% Christian, 4.3% Muslim (cf. Table 4.1)
the tertiary level compared to 30.9% of Work Permit, 82.7% of S Pass and 94.4% of Employment Pass workers. There appears, in other words, to be a correlation between urbanity and ethnicity and one’s likelihood to have achieved tertiary education. This is likely attributable to Myanmar’s economic-spatial inequalities where the more developed regions of Yangon and Mandalay, as well as Bamar majority Regions more generally, historically account for the bulk of otherwise sparse public spending (Charney, 2009; Poling, 2013; Kumagai et al., 2012). Indeed, migrants from Yangon account for over half of all graduate degree holders in the sample. Finally, domestic and Work Permit holders are also younger on average and more likely to be single than their S Pass and Employment Pass counterparts. The average domestic and Work Permit holder is 29.4 and 30.9 years old respectively compared to 33.6 and 33.8 years for S Pass and Employment Pass workers. Singlehood maps neatly onto these demographics: 71.9% of domestic workers are single compared to just 60.3% of Work Permit, 47.6% of S Pass and 27.8% of Employment Pass workers.

Figure 4.1: Geographical distribution of survey responses
Migration

Within the Work Permit holder category, Singapore employs a total of 280,500 and 253,800 construction and domestic workers respectively, as of December 2018 (MOM, n.d.(a)). Outside of domestic work, the construction is consistently the largest employer for each visa category. With the exception of Work Permit holders, over half of whom work in construction, industry, and marine sectors, S Pass and Employment Pass workers exhibit broadly similar sectoral distribution within construction, IT or technical roles, and professional services. Moreover, there are interesting temporal frames to migration. S Pass and Employment Pass workers are more established in the Singaporean labour market, having worked for 67 and 80.6 months respectively compared to 62.7 months for Work Permit workers. Domestic workers, on the other hand, are anomalously new, the average worker having been in Singapore for just 38.7 months, suggesting either a sampling bias or high turnover in the domestic work industry (see 5.2.1).

In terms of income, wages predictably increase along the visa spectrum, where workers face increasing barriers to entry to different parts of the labour market (see Annex 9). This manifests as strong income gradations across groups: the average domestic worker nets $507 per month compared to $1088 for Work Permit, $2803 for S Pass and $4766 for Employment Pass holders. Survey findings demonstrate how women are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage, low-skilled labour that is funnelled through more restrictive migration pathways. Even within skilled professions men enjoy better remuneration than women: the average male S Pass holder earns S$178.64 (9.4% more) more than his female counterpart whereas the average male Employment Pass earns S$342.57 (9.3%) more. Although migration exhibits gender-specific pathways, these do not escape systemic issues of gender pay gaps even within the same worker group or industry.

Financial dependants and remittances

Amongst the most relevant data points from the survey are to do with migrant finances. Across the visa spectrum, low-income migrants are, on average, responsible for supporting more financial dependants their higher income counterparts. For the average domestic worker, she is responsible for supporting 3.73 dependants versus 3.52 for Work Permit workers, and just 2.72 and 2 for S Pass and Employment Pass workers respectively. This despite the fact that domestic and Work Permit holders are more likely to be single, suggesting that dependants likely comprise parents and siblings.

56 In the survey, ‘industry’ refers to manufacturing and industrial process work, ‘marine’ refers to shipyard and port work, and ‘professional services’ encompasses professions in accounting, law, and other service industries.
57 A financial dependant is defined as someone who relies largely, or solely, on the migrant for income and financial support.
Unsurprisingly, although workers with higher incomes send larger remittances in absolute terms – S$367 for domestic worker and S$640 for Work Permit versus S$1068 for S Pass and S$1662 for Employment Pass holders – it is the lower skilled workers that send the greatest proportion of their incomes home. Some 72.3% of the average domestic worker’s wages are sent home compared to just 58.8% for domestic worker, 38.11% for S Pass, and 34.9% for Employment Pass holders. These findings corroborate existing studies that find women send disproportionately larger remittances than men (see King et al., 2006; Rahman and Fee, 2009). That domestic worker households have more dependants also chimes with studies that find female households might be more financially constrained or precarious (Buvinic and Gupta, 1997). Where workers with the largest number of dependants are also, in absolute terms, the least able to support them suggests there are intricate details around precarity to be uncovered (see 6.3).

Across these headline findings, several intersecting vectors merge to form the starting points of this thesis’s empirical analyses. First, there are clear demographic differences within the sample that points to different lifecourse stages of different worker groups. Domestic and Work Permit migrants are younger, less likely to be married, and have generally migrated for shorter durations than higher income workers. Second, gender plays a large role not only in dictating migratory possibilities, but also the pathways and experiences of migration. Women are concentrated in low-value industries, such as domestic work, compared to men. Third, the local context of migrant origins matters and can have a large bearing on education, and thus the migratory trajectories, of migrants. Instead of focussing exclusively on migration outcomes, looking at migrant backgrounds allows us to visualise how spatial, and inter-ethnic economic inequality at origin creates a path dependency that bifurcates migrant futures later on. Finally, these differences produce compelling evidence to colour the socioeconomic lives of migrants, their dependants, and how they support them. That different migrant groups appear to have distinct financial commitments is particularly important. Together, these constitute the socioeconomic fields within which migration and remittance behaviours are mediated and are critical starting points from which to further interrogate and enrich the migration-development nexus. The rest of this chapter will interrogate in greater detail pre-migration livelihoods to understand the key contextual and motivational drivers of migration.

4.2 Understanding Drivers: The Economic Contexts of Households

This section analyses the material and economic contexts of pre-migration livelihoods in order understand a simple question: why do people migrate? As Research Question Two is interested in the structural-agential interplay that drives migration, this section focusses on structural analyses to shed light on what life was like before Singapore. Across all interviews, the notion that migration was borne of a need to ‘support the family’ (see Khoo and Yeoh, 2017; McKay, 2007; Singh et al., 2010). However, survey findings introduce complexity into this narrative:
Table 4.2: Motivations for Migration by Worker Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DW</th>
<th>WP</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Save money for future</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send money home</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No job opportunities in Myanmar</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs in Myanmar are poorly paid</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for schooling</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience new country</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgently need money</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by friend</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by relative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>913</td>
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The impetus to send money home is present in two-thirds of all response cases and yet there is a noticeable skew: domestic and Work Permit migrants are more likely to appeal to a narrative of family support than S Pass or Employment Pass workers. Indeed, for Employment Pass workers, more are interested in experiencing a new country and saving money for the future than they are supporting their family. Thus, there is a temporal and referential discrepancy between groups: low-income workers are more likely to be interested in generating returns to support their family immediately, whereas higher income workers are more concerned with future-oriented, self-defined goals (see LIFT, 2016a). What accounts for this discrepancy? Moreover, what does ‘supporting the family’ actually mean in practice? Why is it such a prevalent narrative? Why does the family need ‘support’ in the first place?

This section analyses Burmese livelihood contexts using Bourdieu’s theory of fields to understand the social topography of how institutions, field-specific rules, and resource distribution structures combine to shape the decision to migrate (Walther, 2014). Using a Bourdieusian framework of fields to analyse the root drivers of migration, I argue that migration is not compelled by economic considerations alone but comprise just one element of a broad milieu of livelihood constraints. In this context, I primarily use fields to describe households’ relationship with the labour market, agrarian livelihoods, and social protection structures. Critically dissecting family-oriented narratives reveal a complex tapestry of livelihood challenges between income sufficiency, precarity, and stagnant social mobility, which groups define,

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58 Multiple response, frequencies sum beyond 100%. DW, WP, SP, EP, PR denotes domestic workers, Work Permit, S Pass, Employment Pass and Permanent Residence holders, respectively.
experience, and narrate differently. The next two subsections will interrogate how these factors were experienced by both low- and high-income migrants.

4.2.1 Domestic and Work Permit Households: Rural Precarity and Debt

I was jolted awake as the paved road suddenly gave way to sand. The driver parked in the middle of a clearing and gestured that the family lived further down the dirt path, but he couldn’t take us that far. We followed a silty stream for a few minutes until we reached the family’s home, only we were on the wrong side of the stream, with only three stalks of bamboo to carry us across. Making our way across the makeshift footbridge, we were welcomed by an elderly woman – the grandmother – who treated us to some fruit juice and cookies. The bamboo hut was modestly decorated and rose about a metre from the ground to keep the floodwater away. The juice was cool, whilst the air was stagnant and searing. In the corner of the room, a generator the size of a small coffee table powered two electricity sockets; my eyes followed the wiring to a small refrigerator. As if to answer an unasked question, she turned to Min. ‘They didn’t have that before she left’, Min explained.

Memo, 22/11/17

Figure 4.2: Rural interview location, Kawhmu, Yangon Region

Throughout interviews, one idea that failed to translate was ‘quality of life’ (see Behling and Law, 2000). Instead, respondents talked about their worries. In essence, this section examines the material and economic worries of households, and how these compel migration. It is this chapter’s contention that ideas around family support and wage differentials are insufficient to explain why workers migrate. Instead, migration does not flow from, and remittances do not flow into, social and economic vacuums. This chapter finds that ‘development’, which variably
denotes progress, the achievement of one’s ambitions, and the expansion of freedoms (Sen, 1999), is narrated differently by individuals depending on their position and relation within the social field. There is no singular narrative to be told; migration is compelled by different ideologies to achieve different ends. Precarity, in particular, is a recurrent conceptual thread that runs through this thesis’s analytical chapters and provides a useful loupe into understanding the minute details of everyday livelihoods pre-migration. In the literature review, I cited studies of precarity as applied to migration and labour. However, precarity has also been used to describe uncertain livelihoods more generally in environmental, economic, and political terms (Rigg et al., 2016). This chapter takes a broader conceptualisation of precarity to denote livelihoods that are uncertain, risky, and insecure (for more detailed discussions, see Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016; Deshingkar, 2018; Standing, 2011).

Within the broader literature, Myanmar is typically presented as a space of humanitarian need, characterised ‘by a complex combination of vulnerability to natural disasters, food insecurity, armed conflict, inter-communal tensions, statelessness, institutionalised discrimination, protracted displacement, human trafficking and risky migration’ (UN, 2018: 7). It is also worth noting the conceptualisation of humanitarian needs as an intersect between numerous ‘drivers and underlying factors’ that are driven by, amongst other things, ‘trafficking and risky migration’ (ibid.: 7; see also Bastia, 2014), which this thesis corroborates. Although conflict and displacement are important issues for hundreds of thousands within Myanmar, their narratives do not feature in the data collected. Instead, my respondents tended to conceptualise migration as a response to everyday challenges rather than acute humanitarian crises. In particular, domestic and Work Permit respondents, who are more rural and dependent on agrarian livelihoods, seemed disproportionately affected by environmental issues such as rainfall shocks and crop loss. Although this thesis does not look at climate change-induced migration or displacement, which is a growing concern within development research and policy (see Piguet et al., 2011), findings from this chapter reveal environment stresses – especially in the context of agricultural production and subsistence – to be an underlying factor of migration. Accordingly, when conceptualising the material constraints to life, there are interesting nuances to the vernacular of precarity that might be of interest to environmental migration scholars and Myanmar studies more generally.

Though households face intersecting needs, the normative drive for migration often rests on the need for family ‘support’ For Naing, a 31-year old construction worker, support is conceptualised as the desire for a ‘better life’ with ‘less worries’:
'Even though [migration] was very tough for me, I had a motivation, which was my family. I knew that if only I migrated to Singapore, my family would live a better life with less worries.'

(SG20, Naing, WPO, male, 31, 108 months)

There are complex, self-defined visions of a ‘better life’, often rooted in material constraints, that motivate mobility amongst low-skilled or low-income workers. First, incomes are generally unstable or insufficient. Second, the inability to meet expenses often leads to deleterious debt cycles to fund even basic expenditures. Third, even for those with sufficient incomes and no debt, constant material demands coupled with poor income mobility means that workers generally lack savings buffers against potential shocks. These factors are largely attributable to agricultural livelihoods where income is seasonal and increasingly susceptible to ecological shock (LIFT, 2016b), or because workers lacked stable income. 55% of all domestic workers and Work Permit holders said they were self-employed, employed in agricultural activities, or had no paying job prior to migration. Soe, a 30-year old construction worker, summarises the precarity of an agricultural livelihood:

'The income was not stable. The main income was from agriculture and it depended greatly on weather. We earned more money if the weather was nice for crops.'

(SG11, Soe, WPO, male, 30, 18mts)

Soe’s experiences are typical of rural Burmese livelihoods and highlights the economic precarity that many households face as a result of unstable incomes. However, income instability is not the core problem; some households were able to complement their agricultural activity with other sources of income to make ends meet. Instead, it is how instability translates into an inability to satisfy essential expenditures that drives economic hardship. In this frame, migration drivers are complex and diverse, informed by intersecting economic and ecological factors rather than univariate variables (Zetter and Morrissey, 2014). Although Soe’s household income fluctuated erratically according to weather conditions and crop yields, he recalled his time in Myanmar optimistically as his family were able to meet essential expenses. Others were less sanguine, highlighting how shortfalls in income can have spiralling effects:

59 Upon asking, many respondents who answered ‘no paid job’ said they were in school prior to migration.
'It was kind of okay except for not having great amount of money to fulfil all the needs... We only farm because we have our own land to do it. The income from that is only enough to prevent us from starving. We even had hard times to pay for the school fee of the kids... That's why we had debt.'

(SG12, Thura, DW, female, 35, 24 months)

Livelihood precarity is thus layered: household incomes, especially for those in agricultural or informal employment, is often unstable. Precarity, however, does not stem from instability alone, but is produced when households cannot sustain outgoings or incur unaffordable expenditures. It is when incomes are insufficient, therefore, that households are most vulnerable. For Soe, his household finances were relatively stable, if only at subsistence level. For Thura, although her family had enough to prevent from members ‘starving’, educational expenses could not be covered by existing income. It is this breakdown in the income-outgoings equation that drives migration for low-income workers:

‘My income was insufficient to cover daily expenses for the family. That’s why I came to Singapore.’

(SG04, Myaing, DW, female, 28, 13 months)

Although precarity colours the backdrop of low-income migration, the migration equation is seldom so clear-cut in practice. Despite chronic agrarian livelihood challenges and ecological crises, migration is rarely the first response to income insufficiency. Indeed, as Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2019: S47) reviews, ‘people may express an active reluctance to migrate, to be relocated, or to be resettled elsewhere’ despite environmental stress, and that ‘this aversion is a key trend in the Global North and Global South’. In contrast to visions of the profit-maximising, utilitarian individual, migration in these contexts is rarely pursued with the zeal that nexus orthodoxy assumes (Abreu, 2012). Instead, as Khin describes, the first response to insufficiency is to cut spending:

‘If we wanted to eat more, we had to spend more. But we did not have much extra income, so we just kept our daily meals simple... We could only eat meat once a month or once every two weeks... For electricity, the local monastery has two generators and our household only could use about 2 hours of electricity every night.’

(SG08, Khin, DW, female, 29, 36mts)
Although Khin’s family lived frugally, there were times when spending less was not an option; the supply of money into the household might be turbulent, but the material requirements of household reproduction are not:

‘If one year’s earning was not sufficient to continue farming for the following year, we had to borrow money to buy fertilizers... After that, we had to pay back the money and so, the money was insufficient for our family’s expenditures. So, we had to borrow more, and it became a circle that we could not get out of. The interest rate of our debt was quite a lot.’

Thura and Khin’s experiences demonstrate how borrowing money is often the last possible resort when responding to livelihood challenges in Myanmar. Ironically, it is the most ‘productive’ expenditures that are also the most taxing. For Thura, her household debt stemmed from the need to pay for her children’s school fees whereas Khin’s family borrowed money to fund farming production (see LIFT, 2016b). Even though Khin’s family is relatively well-off – they were landed farmers – this does not mean they are immune from shock. One year, they were unable to buffer against unexpected crop loss. A deleterious debt cycle thus ensued:

‘We had our own farm land but because we needed money, we had to pawn our land which just worsened our situation.’

This debt cycle is common in Myanmar, especially for agricultural households that seem increasingly burdened by ecological shocks and natural disasters. Indeed, no other sector appears so precarious and exposed to income volatility as agriculture (see also LIFT, 2016b), which speaks to the growing interest in environmentally-driven migration (Ito and Griffiths, 2016; LIFT, 2016b; 2016a; Zetter and Morrissey, 2014). In the context of Myanmar’s economic structural reform, this is especially urgent (LIFT, 2016b). This bind – the inability to generate sustained and sufficient income, whilst burdened with persistent outgoings or shocks – is the central component of vulnerability amongst low-income, rural households pre-migration:

‘Yes, we had a lot of debt. We borrow money from other people to farm and once we harvest, the money goes to paying back the debt. It was a cycle of borrowing money and paying it back and we did not have much money in our hand.’

(SG28, Thaw, WPO, male, 30, 96 months)

Where incomes are insufficient to meet even basic needs – food, utilities, accommodation, education, healthcare – borrowing can present households with a lifeline. If family support and
credit networks are unavailable, local moneylenders become creditors of last resort, usually charging unsustainably high interest as Thaw and Khin’s experiences show. As environmental shocks appear to occur more frequently, this livelihood gamble can backfire. Beyond education or nutrition, another area of recurrent precarity are healthcare shocks, as the next section will show. Although few interviewees made explicit reference to debt as a migration driver, it does form a staple feature of pre-migration household economics. Examinations of the migration-development relationship must pay equal heed to development contexts and how these translate into actions that produce particular development outcomes.

Not all low-skilled workers come from precarious rural backgrounds. Amongst other domestic workers interviewees, some were engaged in manufacturing jobs, nursing, or ran a small business. As above, spatiality plays a role. Those who came from, or had previously worked in, Yangon were noticeably better off (see Wagle, 2016; Kumagai et al., 2012), and typically worked in the service industry. Yin, 30, for example, was a golf caddy whereas Nyo, 40, was a marketing officer, both of whom enjoyed significantly higher and more stable incomes than their rural counterparts. This also meant that they were more resilient against household shocks. Another domestic worker, Hti, had worked as a nurse aide in a private hospital in Yangon. Though her household was indebted, debts stemmed from business rather than survival spending:

‘The amount of money we had was not stable. Sometimes it depended on our household spending which was different every year. But, my income was stable… We have never experienced such cases [income loss] before. But on regular basis, my household was not facing much difficulty and they could live a comfortable life.’

(SG07, Hti, DW, female, 34, 36 months)

Hti illustrates the income sufficiency argument well: although Hti’s household income varied based on her mother’s business selling groceries, her nursing salary ensured stable and sufficient income, even allowing her to pay for her sister’s education, who has since joined her to work as a domestic worker in Singapore. Similarly, although some Work Permit workers worked in agriculture, many also worked as plumbers, electricians, and drivers. Interestingly, though the interview sample was too small to conclude that male-migrant households were universally better-off, they did seem to exhibit more stable livelihoods:

‘My family is considered middle-income family in our village. We could meet basic needs and are self-sufficient. My family does farms, cultivating beans and thatch-making business’

(SG06, Thein, WPO, male, 23, 5 months)
Beyond sufficiency, households are faced with passive limitations to their livelihoods: a lack of savings. This may be unsurprising given the constraints that many households face, but can explain why workers, even the comparatively better off, decide to migrate. The prospect of higher income represents an ability to save, either out of anticipation for future shocks or out of household financial prudence:

‘I earned about 150,000 per month when I was in Myanmar and I could do nothing with that money… I could not save any money, all of them went to my transportation and food.’

(SG09, Yin, DW, female, 30, 72 months).

‘I was a goldsmith for 15 years… It is a job inherited through the generations… but I want to do something different because the goldsmith work is gradually declining. We had enough money for food and household expenses, but we could not save money for my children’s future.’

(SG26, Htwe, WPO, male, 42, 84 months)

Although Yin was able to pay for her essentials, she had no money left over, largely attributable to the inflationary pressures of living in Yangon (see 6.2.1). Similarly, Htwe was in a stable profession but was doubtful over the longevity of the family business. For Yin and Htwe, precarity was passive, denoted by an inability to cope with above-subsistence expenditure and feelings of insecurity, as opposed to immediate material needs. Financial resilience in the form of savings, or the lack thereof, became an important motivating factor to migrate. This also reveals nested priorities in migration motivations: to generate stable income, to attain sufficiency, and to accrue savings to guard against future shock. These priorities are temporal: most low-income workers indicated they would like to first meet urgent demands and then build savings over time. ‘Support’ takes on a different meaning over time, and is tied to feelings of safety and certainty (Atkinson, 2013).

In sum, interviews painted a vivid image of constrained livelihoods, which colours our understanding of migration motivations. There are intragroup differences that should be recognised: the precarious poor face different constraints and cope with livelihood threats using different strategies. Insufficiency, the most common threat, was both a result of unstable incomes but also material demands that cannot always be mitigated against. This often drove households into debt cycles that served to further drain resources. A large part of this is also down to geography. Put simply, where one’s family is located or works matters; those from urban backgrounds were markedly more financially stable than those from rural backgrounds (see Kumagai et al., 2012). Nonetheless, even the well-off were unable to accrue savings as incomes were minimally sufficient. It is against this backdrop that low-income mobilities must...
be understood: migration is not just compelled by wage differentials but is driven by an inability for households to make ends meet. These livelihood risks might be cyclical, as in seasonal variations in agricultural income, or it could be systemic, as in an absence of attainable economic opportunities. It is not just the prospect of earning more that drives migration, instead migration is driven by aspirations of stability, sufficiency, and sustainability. Though migration is seldom the first strategy adopted in response to livelihood constraints, these do represent the key goals of migration for the majority. Chapters Five and Six will interrogate whether such goals can be meaningfully realised.

4.2.2 Income Sufficiency of High-Skilled Workers

Although the contexts and challenges that higher-income workers faced in Myanmar are less severe, workers share similar livelihood concerns, albeit expressed in different vocabularies. The hierarchy of priorities and challenges detailed above – income stability, income sufficiency, debt, and financial resilience – is partially mirrored in higher-income households, especially in terms of sufficiency and savings. Importantly, S Pass and Employment Pass households are heterogeneous. Save for income requirements, there are relatively few legislative differences between S Pass and Employment Pass visas (see Annex 9), though the latter group does exhibit what one might consider 'elite' characteristics. Within the small Employment Pass interview and survey sample, respondents came from wealthier, upper-middle class families. S Pass holders, in comparison, typically comprised middle-class respondents, although backgrounds were more varied. Few worked in agriculture but, for those that did, they seemed to face fewer issues associated with agricultural incomes than domestic workers or Work Permit holders:

‘Yes, our whole family farmed because it was really productive. I did not have to do it much because I was attending school. I only helped at small errands such as carrying water in the field, but never actually farmed.’

(SG33, Thaung, SP, Male, 34, 96 months)

More commonly, S Pass and Employment Pass workers were engaged in service industries, notably in health, engineering, and a burgeoning NGO and non-profit industry. Despite an orientation towards ‘professional’ backgrounds, both respondent groups insisted that their lives were not devoid of economic struggles. Two familiar issues were persistent: income sufficiency and savings. Htway, a civil engineer, for example, explains how his position as an engineering supervisor in Myanmar could not sustain both his and his retired parents’ needs, despite netting a relatively stable salary:
'In Myanmar... I was working as a supervisor, at that time only S$200-300
only, we cannot survive.'

(SG14)

It is worth repeating here the argument stated above: wage differentials, in and of themselves, do not drive migration. Rather, it is the allure of higher income against a context of unsustainable livelihoods that underwrites the motivation to migrate. Within the Burmese social field, economic capitals accessible do not mirror the capitals simultaneously demanded by the worker and their dependants. This appears to be true across the class-income-skill spectrum. Thus, despite netting what a comparatively favourable salary, the majority still considered these insufficient. This is largely attributable to three factors.

First, there are the real material constraints associated with life in Yangon, where the majority of S Pass and Employment Pass families live. As the country’s economic capital, comparatively favourable economic opportunities are checked against severe inflation in urban areas (Lwin, 2018). This would also have important effects on how remittances impact household finances, which I discuss in Chapter Six. Second, ideas of what is considered ‘sufficient’ depends on the class positions of households (Bourdieu, 1984). To put this into context, the average S Pass and Employment Pass worker earnt a pre-migration income of 300,740Ks and 578,002Ks respectively. Using contemporary exchange rates, these represent the current income range of Burmese domestic workers in Singapore. Notions of what is ‘essential’ or ‘sufficient’ is thus subjective. Whilst many domestic worker and Work Permit workers expressed regret at not attending university, for example, their aspirations were materially limited. For higher-income families, the notion of going to university seemed a given, even if at great cost:

'My dad was previously a dentist... so he’s the breadwinner for our whole life until we started working. My second sister is also bachelor’s degree holder... Then the youngest, at that time, was studying, she also joined medical degree and was a first-year student. It was quite difficult to run all the three kids through university'

(SG16, Mon, SP, female, 36, 72 months)

Though Mon’s father was eventually able to fund his three daughters through university, the household also incurred significant debts as a result:

60 S$1: 1000Ks. The income range for domestic workers was min=S$300, max=S$790. The max is abnormally high and likely represents the wages of a caregiver, who is employed under the same visa category as domestic workers (see 5.3.1). Typically, an experienced Burmese domestic worker can expect wages of around S$500-600.
‘At that time... my mum had to take some loans from relatives and friends and then we were about 10k USD in debt, she was in a very difficult situation trying to pay the debt, it was mainly for education and also for daily household costs, but the majority goes to our education, but some are also for our grandparent’s healthcare.’

Put simply, feelings of ‘insufficiency’, whilst prevalent, are relational. Moreover, higher income households are better both at raising credit for various expenditures and investments, and in their ability to service those debts. Money is often borrowed for business ventures and investments into education, rarely for survival spending. Though debt is prevalent, these tend to fund durable expenditures that might include plans for migration (see Bylander and Hamilton, 2015). Nominally faced with similar difficulties as low-income households, higher-income households are more capable of coping with financial challenges. These drivers cannot be understood as standalone economics. Mon’s family’s insistence on higher education, for example, reveals a classed consumption of education as a cultural good, but also highlights the socioeconomic relations that allow some households to better draw on support to cope during hardship than others. Moreover, although households across the income spectrum face similar challenges, consequences of those challenges are different: the inability for an S Pass family to meet expenses generally does not represent an existential threat as it does for poorer rural households. Nonetheless, better off respondents were keenly aware of the higher income they could earn in Singapore and resolved to migrate not only to meet the demands of the household but, more crucially, nurture their career trajectories.

Though such considerations are not the preserve of the ‘privileged’, these typically emerge in domestic worker and Work Permit narratives only when basic material needs have been satisfied, rather than as the primary goal of migration (see 5.3). The drive to migrate goes beyond push-pull economics (van Hear et al., 2017), but instead reveals in itself a process of how changing priorities over time motivate mobility; for Htway and Mon, they felt limited by the labour market in Myanmar and so decided to seek their fortunes, and personal development, elsewhere. Their migration is more about nurturing long-term social mobility than it is for acute survival needs (Kim, 2010; Waters and Brooks. 2010; Devadason, 2017). This narrative is particularly prevalent amongst Employment Pass holders. Migration drivers is as much about understanding the local economic contexts from which workers originate as it is about the destination.

Third, oftentimes insufficiency is not the product of livelihood constraints, but broader lifecourse changes in the family: the education of siblings, childbirth family development, parental retirement, and loss. New demands are generated in the absence of the material resources to support them. Some of these demands are temporary, as in education, but others are chronic, as in the case of retired parents:
‘Last time my parents also they have their own business, just a small business, but their running their business without having us so that point of time, they stop their business because we cannot help out, they’re getting old.’

(SG21, Tint, SP, male, 36, group interview, 84-108 months)

This is true across households across the income spectrum and these indirect demands represent the key challenges that all households face. For Zaw, this was represented by the loss of her father, which left her as the sole breadwinner when her mother retired, and her sister was still in school:

‘After graduation from medicine school, I couldn’t find sufficient salary to support my family because my younger sister also attending medicine school and my mother was dependent so after graduation, the income depends on me.’

(SG30, Zaw, EP, female, 42, 96 months)

These liabilities mean that workers and their households, as above, rarely have significant savings. For those that do, savings often prove inadequate during crises. Like Mon’s family, many take on debt if necessarily but, unlike Mon’s family, they are not always as adept at repaying those debts. This means that retired parents – and the vast majority of interviewees’ parents are retired – are often entirely financially dependent on their children, without other means of income, as Zaw and Tint demonstrate. Savings are not just for prosperity, but for peace of mind, the absence of which is vernacularized as household ‘worries’ that haunt everyday livelihoods, and which migrants hope to hedge against.

In sum, like their lower income counterparts, higher income households are constrained by worries around insufficient incomes and resilience to shock. Debt remains a common feature but, these families tend to use debt more sparingly and more directedly, as in borrowing for education or investment. Though debts are in larger absolute amounts, households are more able to service them. Though there is variation between S Pass and Employment Pass households, the spatial clustering of these households in Yangon means they are subject to common constraints such as the cost of living and inflation, which I explore in Chapter Six. Nonetheless, in contrast to low-income households, S Pass or Employment Pass respondents did not suffer from serious poverty. The vernacular of precarity that we see amongst low-income households is less prevalent and intense amongst higher income households, and the survival and existential needs that ‘precarity’ typically denotes is largely absent (Bourdieu, 1984). Instead, migration appears to be motivated by more relational wants – social mobility, career development, savings generation – than by absolute needs (Kim, 2010; Devadason, 2017). This
is not to say that ‘privileged’ households are immune to livelihood insecurities, which stem from structural deficiencies in the Burmese social field, as I explore in the next section, but it does demonstrate how the context for migration varies dramatically amongst respondents.

The taken-for-granted narrative of household support seemed intuitive, but by scrutinising household economics and its attendant challenges, we discover a rich tapestry of household worries and strategies. It is into this tapestry that analyses of migration-remittance impacts must be woven in order to complete the arc of migration-development narratives. Methodologically, this highlights the need for disaggregation. Migrants are not a homogenous whole. Instead, households are intersected by their possession of economic, social, and cultural resources, which drive particular understandings and processes of migration (Ye, 2014; van Hear, 2014; Erel, 2010). Theoretically, this complicates our understanding of what constitutes ‘development’ and forces a recognition of emic understandings of ‘progress’. This also explains why migration impacts at the macro-level are so varied, since ‘outcomes’ are derived from an extremely diverse set of constituents who pursue migration to different ends. The next section further theorises how migration might be understood as part of broader structural inequities using Bourdieu’s theory of practice and habitus.

### 4.3 Understanding Motivations: The Migration Habitus

Building upon analyses of pre-migration livelihood challenges and strategies, this section furthers the analysis by tracing the structural and experiential factors that inform a migration-oriented habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). This chapter’s core argument is that people are socialised into migrating. Where the previous sections highlighted the precarity of Burmese livelihoods, contexts are not the same as motivations. Instead, the field must be understood as a collective of structures and institutions that produces particular patterns of resource distribution and, ultimately, a migratory habitus. As I reviewed in Section 2.5, the habitus comprises that ‘ensemble of schemata of perception, thinking, feeling, evaluating, speaking and acting that pre-formats all the expressive, verbal and practical manifestations and utterances of an actor’ (Krais, 1985, cited in Lelatchitch et al., 2003: 738). This basic ‘grammar’ of behaviour does not exist a priori but is produced through a ‘dialectical relationship between objective structures and subjective dispositions within which objective structures are confirmed and reproduced’ (Walther, 2014: 14; Bourdieu, 1977). In a Bourdieusian theory of practice, the habitus is partly shaped by individual’s historical experiences with structures that crystallise in a set of tendencies and dispositions. Put simply, action is driven by context and capacity. The purpose of this section is to highlight the key structures that underwrite the migratory habitus. In turn, I analyse the migratory habitus as the collective behavioural impulses that engenders migration. I leverage the diversity of the respondent sample – in terms of geography, gender, age, class – to triangulate the contours of the field and habitus to examine how intersecting factors inform particular migratory behaviours. Since the habitus is merely the principle from which
unconscious strategies of behaving are derived (Bourdieu, 1977), then it is through triangulation that the mechanics of the migratory habitus can be discovered. In the context of Myanmar, the key sub-fields that inform the migratory habitus are the labour market and governance structures.

First, as above, there is an absolute dearth of obtainable economic opportunities within the Burmese labour market that allows for significant economic accumulation or social mobility (ILO, 2016). Resources are scarce and are rarely commensurate with the volumes required to sustain livelihood maintenance. This scarcity of capitals is not universal, but is a result of distributive inequalities within the field that ultimately represents the ‘immanent structure of the social world’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 242). This inequality is stark in Myanmar: rural workers, for example, are much less likely to be educated to a tertiary level and thus have more limited economic prospects than their urban counterparts both in Myanmar and abroad (see Table 4.1). A trajectory of rural, low-income migration versus urban, higher-income migration thus becomes evident. Though all field inhabitants are subject to similar structural constraints and rules, there are subjective intra-field positions within those objective relations. It is these differences that ultimately provide the empirical nuance to challenge the universalistic orthodoxy of the migration-development nexus.

Second, field structures in Myanmar also dampen long-term social mobilities, even amongst educated urban dwellers. Historically, largely as a result of military rule, one of the few pathways towards upwards social mobility has been the civil service, which continues to employ upwards of one million people (Hook et al., 2015). However, whilst the civil service provided stable incomes, they were wildly out of kilter with the economic realities of civilian life. It was only after nationwide protests that public wages were raised, most dramatically in 2006 when civil servants received a wage hike upwards of 1000% (Horsey, 2008). Similarly, although there are desirable benefits to careers in the civil service, such as access to state housing, such careers offer poor long-term prospects. In 2015, a public servant at the Deputy Director General level can expect an average salary of 310,000Ks (Farrelly, 2015), nearly 40% less than the average domestic worker. Consequently, workers often have multiple jobs to make ends meet. Zaw, for example, recalls working as a private tutor in Yangon to supplement her income as a general practitioner, which was less lucrative:

‘Actually, the study guide job had more stable income compared to GP. So, I really don’t want to go back there, and I cannot survive as a GP.’

(SG30)

This is also revealing of the poor conversion of capitals within the Burmese social field. Although Zaw is medically qualified, the poor conversion rate between her medical training and local

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61 There does not appear to be a significant difference in the wage levels of formal versus informal employment. In their analysis of the garment, textile, and footwear industry, the ILO (2016) found that informal workers suffered only a 5% wage penalty compared to formal employees.
wages point to structural deficiencies in the field where skills and compensation are not commensurate. The idea that one’s skills are undervalued is a strong and common narrative amongst skilled migrants.

Finally, the Burmese field lacks social protection. Under NELM, migration is seen as a means of household risk diversification with remittances acting as a kind of livelihood insurance (see Stark and Bloom, 1985). This is partially supported by the Burmese context, albeit with important political caveats. Across interview and survey data, healthcare and eldercare costs are the two household reproductive functions of key material concern (Khaing et al., 2015), primarily as a result of failings in public service functions and state social protections (Grundy et al., 2014). On the former, Myanmar has one of the highest healthcare-related out-of-pocket expenditures per capita in the world. According to the World Bank (2015) 80% of healthcare expenditures were made out-of-pocket by households. At the time of writing, healthcare programme funding was still highly dependent on overseas development aid (ODA) and the majority of the population relied on community- and religious-based organisations for public health services (Latt et al., 2016). Here, healthcare shocks intersect with insufficient incomes and buffers, and represent a significant risk for households:

‘I did not have to worry much except that my parents are sick, and they had to take a lot of medicines and all I thought about was how to support my parents. Besides that, I did not care much. I cannot afford to treat my mom with the income of a farmer.’

(SG29, Zin, SP, male, 40, 84 months)

Beyond direct costs associated with medical treatment, there are also indirect costs, such as the loss of income due to incapacitation. As Krishna (2010: 87) notes, ‘[t]he human body is often poor people’s main productive asset, an indivisible and, in most cases, an uninsured asset, which unlike most other assets can flip or slide from being an asset to being a liability’. Health shocks are doubly constraining and are one of the most frequent source of debt: 59.3% of households who had debt in the last 12 months incurred debt as a result of health-related expenditures and just under one-half of all respondents said that remittances were spent on health-related costs (see 6.2.2).62 That health features so prominently in both pre-migration and current migrant narratives points to enduring structural deficiencies that remittances cannot guard against, even if they inform a large part of the migration habitus in the first place. I explore this further in Chapter Six.

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62 Multiple response, frequencies sum beyond 100%. Figures do not denote the proportion of healthcare-related remittance expenditures or debt but the prevalence.
On the latter, eldercare also places significant demands on household finances both pre- and post-migration. Household outgoings needn’t be acute to represent a shock. Rather, a more common burden relates to caring for old, usually retired, parents. The imperative to support parents is driven by a combination of material needs and Burmese filial piety, which I explore in Section 6.3.1. As with healthcare, retirement represents not only a loss of income, but an additional demand on the rest of the household. Whilst pensions are available, these are reserved for former civil servants aged above 90, and average payments are just US$48 per month (ILO, 2015b). Unsurprisingly, household strategies prioritise economic and care support for elderly parents, who are by far the most frequent recipient of remittances (see 6.3.2).

The Burmese social field, at least within a migratory context, is one that is typified by varying degrees of economic hardship, and which offers limited opportunities for sustained income or social mobility. Moreover, there are few institutions which provide relief from livelihood precarity, especially in areas of social protection that disproportionately affect the respondent sample: healthcare and eldercare. Similarly, capitals are lacking both in terms of accessibility and conversion rates. There is a heavy spatial skew in the distribution of economic capital and cultural capital in the form of education investment and schools. Accordingly, there is strong rural-urban inequality which also translates into a path dependency for the type of migration that is likely to originate from different regions (Table 4.1). Even amongst those with high cultural capital, respondents lamented the stagnant labour market pre-migration, which offered few opportunities commensurate with workers’ capital levels. Although this is changing – construction, NGO, and manufacturing sectors are beginning to flourish – wages are still considered subpar.

It is within these field structures that we can begin to flesh out the ‘rules of the game’ that informs the underlying mechanics of the migrant habitus. Although a common critique levied at Bourdieu’s practice theory are allegations of structural determinism and path dependency (Bourdieu, 1984), the concept of habitus also implies agency as workers seek to escape oppressive fields for greener pastures elsewhere. Indeed, Bourdieu insists that the habitus is ‘durable, but not eternal’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133), and migration represents one of the more radical habitual breaks possible. The combination of unsustainable livelihoods and structural limitations encourage workers to substitute fields by migrating from one labour market to another. Migration, therefore, is an explicit ‘denunciation of the tacit assumptions of the social order’ whereby ‘the collective disillusionment which results from the structural mismatch between aspiration and real probabilities’ drives the migratory habitus (Bourdieu, 1984: 144). Over time, such flows crystallise into durable dispositions towards migration and a rich literature, too complex to review here, has looked at so-called ‘cultures of migration’ where households, communities, and even countries have become habitualised to migrate (Connell, 2008; Boccagni, 2017; Khoo, 2017). In the Burmese context, this ‘collective’ disillusionment is multi-scalar and informs habitual changes at both communal and household levels.
In their study of parahita organisations in Myanmar – village-level organisations that fund, organise and provide community activities and public services – Griffiths and Soe (2017) describe an ingrained culture of self-reliance. This is particularly prevalent in rural communities which, as a legacy of colonialism, were left to self-govern in the administrative peripheries on Myanmar (Charney, 2009; Aung, 2014). In the context of tension and distrust between the Bamar-majority administration and ethnic minority groups, community-based protection is also salient during conflict and displacement, both internally (South, 2012; South and Jolliffe, 2015; Alam, 2017), along the Thai-Myanmar border (Aung, 2014) and in response to victimisation and oppression overseas (see McConnachie, 2019; Eberle and Holliday, 2011). Consequently, the role of the state has been displaced by ‘non-state institutions, kinship and family networks [which act] as the providers of first and last resort in times of crises, as well as practical partners in delivery of public goods such as roads’ (Griffiths and Soe, 2017: 3). Community organisations are often called upon by residents to provide public services given that state support, whilst welcome, is infrequent and unexpected (Griffiths, 2018b; South, 2012; Mangshang and Griffiths, 2018). In Myanmar, public trust in state institutions has been eroded by decades of economic mismanagement, social turmoil and unequal access to resources (Turnell, 2014). Households thus maintain ‘minimal trust relationships with capital or the state’ (Standing, 2013: no page), and instead orientate towards an internalised culture of self-reliance. In contrast to atomistic conceptualisations of migration decisions and behaviours (Abreu, 2012), households and communities actively coalesce around common experiences. Since fields represent ‘an historically generated system of shared meaning’ (Iellatchitch et al., 2003: 732), the absence of state involvement in economic development and social protection has alienated households. From a Bourdieusian perspective, failure of the state undermines its legitimacy and role as a provider of public services, further driving the ‘denunciation’ of the existing order and towards migration (Bourdieu, 1984).

This forces us to take seriously the role of institutions, in engendering an environment where migration is less a choice than an existential imperative (Kashwan et al., 2018). As Collinson (2009) notes, there is considerable resonance between early migration studies and poverty studies that ignore the structural conditions that produces poverty in the first place. Consequently, poverty is conceptualised as ‘a kind of social aberration rather than an aspect of the ways in which modern state and a market society function’ (Harriss, 2007: 3). In this frame, migration is not a social aberration, but the outcome of a quotidian structural and subjective factors that together inform the migration habitus. Although migration may not be the first solution fathomed (see 4.2.1), it is also by no means spectacular, but a ‘normal, everyday feature of livelihood strategies around the world’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019: S47). The impetus to migrate did not emerge overnight but are borne of historical experiences and future expectations which intersect to render migration the ‘common sense’ thing to ‘do’. Moreover, there is an implicit

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63 These peripheral administrative units typically comprise the modern States that were, at various points, vying for independence. The uneasy relationship States had with the central government are the root of many of the ongoing civil conflicts across Myanmar (Charney, 2009).
consensus that the state should not, or could not, be relied upon to provide meaningful livelihood support. On the one hand, this nurtures a deep-seated resentment towards the political establishment for their failure in providing economic prosperity for citizens:

‘The government cannot provide enough jobs for the citizens. There are some jobs available, but we are not paid enough because the salary is too low, and it is really hard to get them. For most of the jobs we can find, we cannot feed our family with the money earned.’

(SG27, Ko, WPO, male, 40, 60 months)

This thesis finds that dealings with ‘authority’ or ‘formality’, for the most part, represent drains on migrant resources. If at all possible, workers thus try to steer clear of the state (see Chapter 5; Sobieszczyk, 2000; 2002; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015; Davidson, 2013). This will also have implications for how ‘development’ policies are perceived. On the other hand, at the individual level, this further inculcates a culture of self-responsibilisation whereby individuals increasingly shoulder the social and economic risks associated with a lack of effective governance (Kashwan et al., 2018; Douglass, 2012; Woolfson and Likic-Brboric, 2008). As a result, workers see migration as an agential way of taking matters into their own hand:

‘So many highly educated workers don’t want to stay in Myanmar because the government is stupid. That’s why all the highly education people they go to other country and work. Not just for money, but because it is very hard to survive in Myanmar. That’s why come to Singapore. There are many reasons why all workers come to Singapore.’

(SG14)

This tacit denunciation is both past- and future-oriented. As above, migration can be a retroactive denunciation of past experiences of inequities within the Burmese field. However, the schematics of the migration habitus, which ‘creates self-evident rules that determine [the migrant’s] potential cruising radius, i.e. the limits of social mobility within a social field’ (Bourdieu, 1972), is also future-oriented as workers migrate on the expectation of future returns (Bastia and McGrath, 2011; Yeoh et al., 2017; Deshingkar, 2018). Here, migration is premised on the expansion of one’s cruising radius (cf. Sen, 1999), or social mobility which, as I explore in the next chapter, is a subjective and temporally dynamic pursuit that is not always economic. Unlike the habitus, which is more implicit, it is at the intersections between field and habitus that hitherto invisible structures become evident as workers discover the limits to their ‘cruising radius’. Class is an important element in this equation. High-income workers are more concerned with social mobility because they are more confronted with this cruising radius, whereas low-income workers are more concerned with the immediate demands of satisfying material necessities.
The former is more likely to appeal to ideas of futurity, whereas the latter is more constrained by immediacy (Atkinson, 2013). It is primarily when workers are confronted with explicit structural limitations that more critical appraisals of the field are levied. This is perhaps best exemplified by Thaw’s reflections on why he migrated to Singapore:

‘I could not afford to eat and dress like other people. As I got older, my desire to be at the same level with other people in society grew. I wanted to drive a motorcycle, but I could not afford it. I used to borrow my friend’s clothes until I could buy my own, my life was that pitiful.’

(Thaw, 2013)

Although Thaw occupied the same field as his peers, diverging life trajectories increasingly highlighted inequalities in the type of lifestyle he could realistically attain in Myanmar. For Thaw, field inequalities were not readily apparent until different accumulative and consumption capabilities visibilised his comparative disadvantage compared to his peers. Though Thaw’s migration was economically motivated, it was fundamentally tied to notions of self-esteem and his previous experience of his place within social hierarchies. Thaw’s migration is thus as much a denunciation of the existing social order as it is about expanding his future cruising radius, which he defined in material terms. In this respect, migration is not only an attempt to accumulate wages, but also a means of identity cultivation around ideas of social mobility, the dignity of decent work, and social status rather than in the conventional sense of profit maximisation. Social meaning, in short, cannot be isolated from economic accumulation.

4.4 Conclusion: Migrating for Development?

The purpose of this chapter was to give a contextual overview of Burmese livelihoods and how these translate into behavioural drivers that comprise the migratory habitus. Although Myanmar has endured decades of economic turmoil and dictatorship, these factors alone do not explain why workers migrate. Instead, analyses revealed complex historical, structural, and behavioural interrelations that compel migration. Importantly, migrant groups were segmented to afford higher resolution on household-level analyses, which evidence different typologies of migrants. To this end, three conclusions are important for subsequent analyses.

First, the diversity of migrant typologies requires us to examine how migration and development is variously defined, understood, narrated, produced, and experienced. Vocabularies that appeal to migration ‘flows’ must take stock of the heterogeneity of its constituents to understand that neither driver, process, nor impact of migration are uniform. Instead, difference offers a theoretical loupe to interrogate how migration and remittances actually impact on households and individuals. As the next chapter will demonstrate, differences, themselves a product of history, create path-dependencies that structure different types of workers for different jobs.
Categories such as the ‘migrant’, is neither discrete nor homogenous, but should be understood in context-specific histories. This builds on historical-structural perspectives of nexus thinking, but from the grassroots. Instead of macro models that postulate the segmentation of industries (for example Ploere, 1978), a narrative-driven examination of the field allows us to interrogate why the status quo is as it is, and how this engenders migration. The innovation of this chapter is to combine structural insights with lived experiences to establish how motivation is actually transformed into action. The next chapter will examine how workers migrate to Singapore in practice.

Second, referring back to macro-level nexus debates, there are systemic implications for the processes of migration structuring identified in this section. The habitual disillusionment with labour structures in Myanmar will continue to drive out-migration, despite attempts to stem the outflow of labour, as the next section will discuss. Interviewees have demonstrated how nominally ‘economic’ migration converges with social understandings of responsibility, which emerge from negative experiences of governance. Beyond empirical findings, we also need to theorise more broadly the role of the state in engendering milieus where, for some, migration is less a choice than it is a survival imperative (Collinson, 2009). Following post-development critics, there is a need to re-politicise migration, not as a social or economic aberration, but as the outcomes of social and political relations (Ziai, 2013; Ferguson, 1994; Pieterse, 1998). Migration studies would therefore benefit from more historicised accounts of mobility which, I argue, will also shed light not only on where migrants come from, but also where they are likely headed, and how they relate to their places of origin. In Myanmar, policies that fail to account for the historicised meanings of migration will likely undermine political legitimacy during a critical time of democratisation and peace-making, especially in minority States where ‘migration’ is typified by displacement and conflict rather than, as this study examines, ‘labour’ and ‘economics’ (Griffiths and Soe, 2017; Mangshang and Griffiths, 2018; Griffiths, 2018a; 2018b; McCarthy 2017).64 I analyse this further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Finally, these macro issues further entrench a migratory habitus that is sceptical of state management or intervention. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, both migration and remittances flow outside state purview through nebulous networks of informal brokers and agents. On the one hand, this is attributable to absolute constraints on Myanmar’s operational and technical capabilities to monitor the flow of people and capital (ILO, 2017). On the other hand, this is also due to a widespread preference for informal mobility (Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). Failure to recognise such preferences would amount to a sort of symbolic violence which

64 Abstracting away from the most severe conflicts in the Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin States, conceptualising the Myanmar democratisation process in terms of social protection is more relevant to this thesis’s understanding of migration drivers. Historically, public spending in Myanmar is highly spatialised and ethnic minority States have been the most neglected and vulnerable. For many, democratisation is thus tied with ideas of greater political recognition as well as state investment (Poling, 2013). This also calls for a recognition of how historical underinvestment has compelled outmigration from these areas, primarily into bordering countries. Democratisation and peace are thus, in part, a redress of the factors of precarity-driven migration.
undermines the voice of the beneficiaries that development purports to help (Pieterse, 1998). What migration promises is to visibilise one’s cruising radius, expanding one’s knowledge of attainable alternatives. Following Sen (1999), migration-led development might therefore be conceptualised as an expansion of freedom, rather than any assumed preference for particular modes of development (Escobar, 1995). Policy must therefore play a facilitative role, rather than an interventionist one, especially when, as I explore in the next chapter, the latter often rooted in negative experiences of Burmese authority.

The next chapter continues to trace the story of remittances by looking at the actual process of migration. Typologies are again a powerful predictor of outcomes. Workers from different backgrounds are more likely to rely on different pathways to enter Singapore, which in turn structures the likely returns she is able to realise from migration. It is worth reciting the migration drivers identified in this chapter – to seek sufficiency, stability, and savings – when progressing along the migration chain. Although we have troubled the notion of a unified vision of ‘development’, the thematic references of ‘worry’ are an instructive principle through which to examine whether migration can truly allow workers to achieve those ends. Structures again play an important role, and I look at the role of brokers and governance regimes in mediating development outcomes. Specifically, I am interested in how workers might be migrating from one context of precarity to another. Debt and exploitation are central themes, although not experienced or narrated in the same way by all workers. Moreover, I adapt Bourdieu’s work on class to examine the temporality of value realisation. Rather than looking at remittances as temporally discrete monetary units, I theorise migration as a project of capitalising on one’s labour, and I use value to analyse remittances as economic capital in-the-making. By doing so, I trace the spaces and times when workers are more or less free to ‘realise’ that value. If, at least partially, the nominal aim of migration is to generate income to achieve those aims described above, then the next chapter identifies the structures that variously enhance or inhibit the migrant’s ability to do so. On the one hand, this allows for a more grounded theorisation of what ‘migration’ actually entails. On the other hand, we are better placed to interrogate whether migration and ‘development’ are congruent aims.
5. Migration Processes and Practices: Capitalising on Movement

As the seatbelt signs turned off, the cabin rose in unison, desperate to alight from the rainy season flight that made the preceding three hours more eventful than normal. In the adjacent row, two men wrestled with their backpacks to produce two thick document wallets, stuffed with medical certificates and employer documentations. Having made the trip in and out of Myanmar a dozen times, I had come to recognise the workers from the tourists, those travelling for business or for leisure. A few rows down, I caught a glimpse of a young woman who heaved away at her large carry-on with one hand whilst she held in her other what appeared to be a brand-new passport. A letter from Singapore’s Ministry of Manpower was neatly sandwiched between its crisp pages. For many workers, this may be the first time they’ve left Myanmar, or even travelled on an airplane; over time, it became easy to spot the uninitiated. As my fellow passengers alighted, I envisaged the different paths they will take.

Memo, 10/02/18

Figure 5.1: Yangon-Singapore flight, 18/02/18
This chapter addresses research question three by examining how workers move from Myanmar to Singapore, and how brokerage and governance structures determine the returns from migration. Empirically, I demonstrate how one’s method of migration determines how quickly and sustainably one can generate remittances. This requires a breakdown of what migration entails: the processes workers undertake to move, the differing degrees of risk they are exposed to, and whether these contribute towards achieving migrants’ visions of ‘development’. As I trace workers’ journeys from Myanmar to Singapore, I was alerted to the different interests that migration serves, the uneasy entanglement between ‘development’ and commerce, and the uncertain role of states. Since fields comprise the structure of ‘objective relations’ that determines the distribution of capitals (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), and relations of domination (Friedland, 2009), this chapter highlights the agential-structural interplays that contribute towards particular migratory experiences, practices, and outcomes.

First, this forces us to examine remittances as more than just abstract outputs of migration. Charting migration processes and practices through a ‘follow-the-thing’ and ‘follow-the-people’ geography allows us to re-embed remittances in the social contexts of their production (Christophers, 2011). Whilst there is an increasing interest in the role of ‘precarity’ in migration (Deshingkar, 2018), studies rarely examine the broader implications of precarity on dependent households. This thesis’s multi-sited research allows us to visualise how nexus stakeholders are interrelated. Second, this allows us to prioritise the lived experiences encountered on the migratory journey which, I argue, unearth important insights to explain development outcomes. If development is interested in expanding human capabilities and freedoms (Sen, 1999), then this chapter will demonstrate how individuals encounter structures that variously expand and constrict freedoms across time (Davidson, 2013). Finally, by emphasising the social nature of remittances, I argue that an investigation into their impacts is better achieved by tracing value rather than their explicit manifestations as economic capital (Collinson, 2009; Christophers, 2011). Since, as I discussed in section 2.5, capitals are convertible (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), we can also conceptualise economic capitals as latent non-economic capital, hereafter ‘value’. Insofar as this paper seeks to reconnect remittances with the social conditions of their manufacture, so too does this force us to consider how structures and practices mediate value realisation over time.

A focus on the social history of migrant value is consistent with this paper’s aim of tracing remittances in general, and research question three’s aim to understand process-driven migration outcomes in particular. Where the tracing of remittances is limited by their materiality – one can only trace remittances as a tangible asset – a tracing of value moves beyond the material to explore how migrants generate returns across the migration process. For Bourdieu, value – as in class, status, distinction – rests on the individual’s pre-existing portfolio of capitals, the net worth of which is validated by rules of the field (Bourdieu, 1986; Erel, 2010). More expansively, this chapter examines the social history of remittances as economic capital which, for Bourdieu, is the ‘root of all the other types of capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 252), even if other
capitals cannot be reduced to their economic value, as in monetary remittances that confer social membership (see 6.3). It follows that, ‘value’ ultimately distils to an economic origin, even if the sum of one’s capital portfolio cannot be meaningfully objectified as economic capital. Value thus allows us to visualise the generation of remittances as a means to an end, rather than an end in and of itself, which speaks to the need to understand ‘development’ on emic terms (Sen, 1999; see 2.1) In this thesis’s tracing of remittances, I analyse value not just as economic capital in its current, objectified form – as in wages and remittances – but also as potential economic capital in the making that is either catalysed or inhibited by practice which, as I explored in the literature review, is partially driven by one’s resources. As Beasley-Murray (2000) notes, there is a strong resonance between Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and Marx’s labour theory of value, especially in terms of the distinction between use- and exchange-value. The former describes value from the utility gained from the consumption of the good, which in Bourdieu’s writing is principally concerned with education. Conversely, the latter describes Marxist principles of the exchange-value of labour, where profit is extracted from ‘surplus labour’ under capitalism; profits are generated from the sale or transfer of the good commensurate with its cost of production and a suitable ‘mark-up’. This chapter will focus on analysing migrants’ labour power exchange-value.

On the one hand, I am interested in mapping the spaces and times where her capacity to work is differently inhibited or catalysed by temporally dynamic structures (see 5.1). On the other hand, I am interested in how structures determine the degree to which her capacity for work is realised to produce returns: how exactly does ‘migration’ lead to income? Rather than looking at the discrete moments when labour is converted to wages, a focus on value allows us to visualise the spaces of profiteering and extraction throughout the migration chain and how migrants encounter elements of unfreedom during entry, process, and exit (Barrientos et al., 2013). To be clear, this chapter is not interested in critiquing Marxist-capitalist relations. As Friedland (2009: 904) notes ‘Marx’s theory of capitalism has an institutional specificity; Bourdieu’s does not’. Whereas Marx’s theory is grounded in understanding value within systems of production, Bourdieu’s conceptualisation is more interested in individuals’ ‘differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions produced by differential conditioning, and differing endowments of power or capital’ (Brubaker, 2005: 46).

I am primarily interested in how the relational aspects of practices and structures enhance or impede the migrant’s ability to realise returns to her migration. This will have important theoretical and policy implications, especially given a growing interest in migrant precarity and freedoms within nexus debates (Davidson, 2013; Deshingkar, 2018; Lewis et al., 2015), but also in the context of Burmese migration reform more generally (ILO, 2017; Ito and Griffiths, 2016). Importantly, I do not suggest that all migration can be reduced to economic calculation; this is, after all, one of the pillars of the migration-development nexus that this thesis hopes to disrupt. Instead, a focus on economic value is productive because it is primarily from the generation of economic capital that non-economic accumulation take root (Bourdieu, 1986), affording us an
accessible segue into examining how particular migration pathways and processes are structured to produce predictable outcomes. A focus on ‘value’ will help reveal how migrants capitalise, or not, on migration over time and space.

Finally, in his discussion of the conversion of capitals, Bourdieu appeals to a metaphor of energy conservation as ‘profits in one area are necessarily paid for by costs in another’ (ibid: 25). Capitals cannot be lost but are instead transformed in equal measure. A similar metaphor can be applied, I argue, to the labour power of migrants. Insofar as each worker inhabits a migratory field with the same volume of objectively available opportunities, the migrant possesses potential value, which might be realised, inhibited, or catalysed at various points of the migration process. Since all capital acquisitions and conversions require labour, and capital itself is accumulated labour (Bourdieu, 1986), then the returns to migration must also be understood as the capacity for the migrant to convert potential value into wages. Value does not presuppose ownership or accumulation, but rather describes the possible returns to migration by considering the capitals objectively available within each field. The aim of migration is not to accumulate or convert capital, but to realise value. At the heart of this Bourdieusian analysis also sits the uneasy tension between agency and structure, determinism and freedom (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), but perhaps more importantly, highlights the contingent and unstable nature of accumulation (Griffiths et al., 2013; Wee et al., 2018; Yeoh et al., 2017). This analytical framing, I argue, will allow us to better visualise the relationship between migration and development whilst sidestepping structuralist arguments to recognise the diversity of experiences enabled by different spaces of freedom and precarity.

The rest of this chapter follows a broad temporal frame to examine the second step in this thesis’s remittance tracing exercise: experiences during migration. First, I begin with an overview of the migration process. This draws on Bourdieusian understandings of ‘entrance prices’ (Accardo, 2006), how workers gain entry into the labour market, and how migration processes and outcomes might be path-dependent. Second, I go on to discuss precarity during migration and how structures of brokerage and governance can hinder value realisation. Across chapters, a recurrent theme relates to migrant uncertainties, whether in terms of pre-migration livelihoods, migratory trajectories, or futures. This chapter furthers the analysis by examining how structures produce precarity, how this impacts value realisation, and how migrants cope with these constraints. Finally, this is followed by a reflection on the temporalities of migration. In particular, I take a longitudinal view of the migrant lifecourse to examine how plans are made, realised and deferred, and how this relates back to the broader project of ‘development’. In sum, this chapter argues that the migration-development nexus lacks understanding of what ‘migration’ actually entails. People do not just move from one place to another. Instead, how one moves has a large bearing on the likely returns one is able to achieve. If policy is serious about ‘leveraging’ remittances, then the conversation must begin with understanding how they are generated in the first place. To this end, governance and the structures of labour markets and migration regimes have a large role to play in dictating returns.
5.1 Into the Lion’s Mouth: Entry Pathways into Singapore

Orthodox nexus theories hold that workers are not just ‘pushed’ to migrate by environmental and economic factors, but also ‘pulled’ to destinations by the promises of substantial wage differentials (van Hear et al., 2017; Harris and Todaro; 1970; Lee, 1966). Singapore is a compelling case study because, of all major Burmese labour destinations, it likely offers the largest origin-destination wage differential (Testaverde et al., 2017). This is corroborated in survey findings (Table 5.1). Prior to migration, the average domestic worker, Work Permit, S Pass, and Employment Pass holder earnt 113,018Ks, 220,433Ks, 300,740Ks, and 578,002Ks, respectively. These figures corroborate findings from an ILO (2015a) survey into internal migrant wages; benchmarking against sector-specific wages, we find that Singaporean wages represent a 7.6-times increase for low-skill construction workers and an 8.5-times increase for domestic workers. Converted to current Singapore Dollars and benchmarked against current earnings, the average domestic and Work Permit worker earnt five times their pre-migration income, whereas Employment Pass workers earnt six times more. S Pass workers, on the other hand, achieve an anomalously large differential, earning over 12 times more. These findings were broadly corroborated by interview responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-migration income (MMK)</th>
<th>Pre-migration income (SGD)</th>
<th>Current income (SGD)</th>
<th>Average Differential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>113,018.6</td>
<td>108.6</td>
<td>507.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>164</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>220,433.3</td>
<td>222.4</td>
<td>1,088.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>300,741.0</td>
<td>227.6</td>
<td>2,802.9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>164</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>578,002.0</td>
<td>801.4</td>
<td>4,766.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>N</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>214.8</td>
<td>1,712.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>404</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>402,536.9</td>
<td>320.7</td>
<td>1,451.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Myanmar-Singapore wage differentials (MMK and SGD)

Given these differentials, the growing popularity of Singapore as a labour destination is unsurprising. However, migration cannot be reduced to economic calculation. In the previous

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65 These figures are illustrative, and is inhibited by issues of item non-response, irregular or unstable pre-migration employment and income, recall error, and opaque exchange rates pre-2012. The Myanmar Kyat (MMK) is usually expressed with 'Ks' denoting 'Kyats’

66 Low response rates were due to a large number of workers who were self-employed or netted irregular income. Some responses from workers who left Myanmar pre-2012 were excluded due to a lack of reliable exchange and inflation rate data to convert responses.
chapter, I highlighted the key factors that structured dispositions toward migration. But how does disposition actually translate into action? As the rest of this section will detail, ‘migration’ is not a discrete action, but is differently facilitated, funded, and experienced across worker groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DW</th>
<th>WPO</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<td>Direct Hire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>101</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>92.2%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Means of securing employment by migrant category

How one enters into Singapore (Table 5.2) has a large effect on the likely future social mobilities and trajectories of migrants. This, I argue, is the product of defined entry pathways, driven by what Bourdieu terms ‘droit d’entrée, or ‘entry price’ to the social field (Accardo, 2006). As discussed in the literature review, Bourdieu defines field simply as ‘a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). It is the social arena where resources are distributed and where subject positions between domination and subordination are contested. Fields are relational, and delineate social spaces where practices are enacted and governed by implicit rules. In turn, practices – sending money, going to temple – are informed by ingrained habits, the availability of resources, and the contours of the field (see 2.5). Individuals, in other words, behave in accordance to learned dispositions, implicit regulations of the field or ‘the rules of the game’, using what capital they have at their disposal (Bourdieu, 1977). In this chapter, I analyse the field as the sum of social relations between the migrant, intermediaries, households, and the migration regimes of Singapore and Myanmar, and how these intersect to structure practice and economic returns.

An analysis of the field requires us to examine how entry prices are negotiated between the migration industry and governance actors. For some, the entry prices are one-off whereas some might encounter recurrent costs. These are not only a draw on resources, but a means of filtering workers into different sub-fields within the labour market – particular professions, more or less stable immigration statuses – each with different structures and objective relations (Silvey, 2004a; 2004b; Lindquist, 2010; Raghuram, 2008). Legislatively, this is actioned through visa category distinctions, which tend to be durable means of labour control. Put simply, how one enters the field largely determines one’s likely experiences until exit. There are structured migratory

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67 Domestic and construction workers are amongst the most vulnerable foreign workers in Singapore. For some, there may not be an ‘exit’ at all due to workplace accidents and fatal injuries. In the first half of 2016, 20 construction
pathways into Singapore – as in debt-financed or socially mediated – which predict future migrant social trajectories. The next two sections will detail the migratory practices of domestic, Work Permit, S Pass, and Employment Pass workers, and how they come to work and live in Singapore.

5.1.1 Moving with a Purpose: Low-income workers and flirtations with the migration industry

There is remarkable uniformity in how migrants move into Singapore. For those migrating into domestic and Work Permit roles, there is a heavy reliance on the ‘migration industry’ (Goh et al., 2017; Lindquist, 2010; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). As Table 5.2 shows, 92.2% domestic workers surveyed relied on employment agents to facilitate migration and to secure employment. Other Work Permit holders were reliant on a combination on employment agents (50%) and referrals (27.9%), indicating a reliance on a mix of formal and informal brokerage. The general trajectory of low-income migration pathways can be roughly categorised into the following stages:

![Figure 5.2: Migration Pathway of domestic and Work Permit workers](image)

Each blue circle denotes checkpoints in the migration pathway where each orange circle denotes steps usually achieved through intermediaries. Visualising the migration pathway this way allows us to disaggregate the processes and stakeholders that comprise ‘migration’. Importantly, steps may not be linear and may occur simultaneously or in a different order; some workers, for example, may be interviewed before they are trained and ‘processed’. Moreover, each step may be embedded in different social settings and connections. As I explore below, one’s contact with a village-level broker may be facilitated through social and kinship networks. Similarly, brokerage works on maintaining a throughflow of communications between the village-level broker, the Yangon-based employment agency, and their counterpart in Singapore (I explore the intricacies of worker fatalities were reported (Ho, 2016), and cases of domestic worker suicides and abuse, especially amongst the Burmese, appear shockingly common (Htwe, 2018c; Wessels, 2015).  

68 The use of an employment agent by a first-time domestic worker is near universal. For those who did not use an agent, these are likely experienced migrants who relied on referrals (6.1%) and direct hire (1.7%) to secure a job. ‘Referrals’ describe those who secured employment through a friend or family member in Singapore or Myanmar.
of this process further in 5.2.1). Nonetheless, this visualisation throws into sharp relief the monopolisation of migration by intermediaries, who not only facilitate entry into Singapore, but are embedded into all stages of the migration process. A conceptual differentiation between the ‘broker’ and the ‘intermediary’, is useful. Though the two are often used interchangeably within the literature, I conceptualise ‘brokers’ to denote those who directly facilitate the placement of workers overseas, versus ‘intermediaries’ who undertake the indirect facilitation of auxiliary migration functions, such as training (Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). In practice, both play an important role in structuring early migration experiences, and the short- and medium-term financial wellbeing of migrants and their dependants. The next two subsections explore the migratory patterns and practices of domestic and Work Permit workers.

**Domestic Workers**

When Khin decided to travel overseas for work, she was 26. Coming from a rural village in Magway, the experience was daunting and complex. For this reason, reliance on brokerage is common for both practical reasons as well as emotional reassurance:

‘I came through an employment agency. My hometown is very remote and far from everything… Without the help of the agency, I do not think I would ever be able to come to Singapore.’

(SG08, Khin, DW, female, 29, 36mts)

Although wage differentials inform a large part of the motivation to migrate, these are not total (see Chapter Four). For Yin, she left Myanmar when she was 24 to support her ageing parents. Critically, her migration was a combination between the desire to leave and a serendipitous referral to an agent via a friend:

‘A friend who was working here [in Singapore] gave me the agent’s phone number. The agent was really nice at that time. They bought me air ticket and cut my salary for only two months… I wanted to go to Malaysia, but I heard that the working situation there is not good. I heard some bad rumours about working in Malaysia and I decided not to go there. Then, I heard about Singapore from a friend of mine.’

(SG09, Yin, DW, female, 30, 72 months).

To a large extent, brokers shape the opportunities available to migrants at any given moment, who may lack the social or economic capital to enter into a field unassisted (Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). As Harvey et al. (2018) notes, brokers, like Yin’s, may also play an active role in marketing particular destinations above others. Beyond simple facilitation, brokers perform
important functions in conveying information, managing expectations, and shaping the migration imagination. As all domestic workers are female, this also manifests as a highly gendered reliance on brokerage (cf. Section 5.1.2). Yin’s experience was unusual because her friend’s referral allowed her to migrate relatively cheaply. With social support along the way, this made the otherwise daunting prospect of migration more palatable. This is likely due to her urbanised background having grown up in Yangon where overseas contacts are more plentiful. For Yin, her experiences blurred the lines between ‘social networks’ and ‘broker’ (Figure 5.2). Instead, Yin’s pathway was more compressed, expedited by the spatial and social proximity she enjoyed with the factors of migration. For others, recruitment typically begins at the village-level; she may initiate contact, or be approached by, recruiters who transport workers to Yangon for ‘processing’: preparing necessary documents such as health checks and passports to enter Singapore, as well as pre-departure training.69 In Yangon, she is often interviewed by prospective employers or agents in Singapore via Skype. Thinn’s experience was unique in that the Singaporean agent took a more direct role in selecting migrants:

‘The agents from Singapore went to Yangon and conducted the interview there. Once I passed the interview, I was able to come here. I had to take an exam here too.’

(SG17, Thinn, DW, female, 33, 108 months)

Once an employer has been confirmed, she travels to Singapore, where she will be picked up by the agent, and either undertakes further training or is ‘placed’ immediately with her employer. According to interviewees, the entire duration from initial recruitment to arrival in Singapore can happen within one month, although it is common to take up to three. For this service, she does not pay any money upfront. Instead, she migrates with minimal cost but is indebted to the employment agent, who takes a large ‘cut’ of her income in the form of monthly salary deductions, which I explain in greater detail in Section 5.2.1. During repayment, workers are given ‘allowances’ of just tens of dollars for basic expenditures such as phone top-ups and transport and the rest is kept by the agency. In absolute terms, based on a starting salary of $350 and an average repayment period of between six to eight months, the total fees repaid amount to anywhere between $2100 to $2800 and more.70

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69 There is great variance in the quality of training workers receive. This appears to cause significant discord amongst Singaporean employment agents who complain that the workers they receive are inadequately trained and unsuited to life in Singapore. This, they claim, is a large source of employer-employee disputes as well as abuse (see 5.2.2)
70 The average repayment period reported in the survey was 5.8 months. This is likely an underestimate skewed by recent employment charges (such as contract changes, terminations etc.) rather than the cost of the initial placement (see 5.2.1).
The standard employment contract length for domestic workers is two years. This means that workers have negligible income for between one-quarter and one-third of a standard contract, as Figure 5.3 illustrates. If migration is practice, we see how worker exercise the agency to migrate albeit in highly restricted environments: in the absence of information and capital, the employment agency is at once liberating and constraining (Strauss, 2012; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Deshingkar, 2018), enhancing the mobility of workers whilst creating new relations of bondedness and exploitation across time (see LeBaron, 2014; Wessels, 2015; HOME and TWC2, 2017).

**Work Permit Holders**

The migration pathway of other Work Permit holders, the majority of whom are male construction workers (see Table 4.1), is less reliant on brokerage, although workers still adhere to similar processes identified in Figure 5.3. Unlike domestic workers who experience great variability in their pre-departure training (see 5.2.2), Work Permit holders described the need to obtain vocational accreditations as a result of sector-specific requirements. Naing, a 31-year-old construction worker, insists his reliance on brokerage was due to training needs and an absence of personal contacts:

'I did not have any acquaintance like that. So, I went to a training centre which offered varieties for courses for construction such as timbre. I got to choose a subject for the course… overall, I spent about S$4500 including my living expenses during the training period and other miscellaneous fees. I let the training centre take care of everything to send me here.'

(SG20, Naing, WPO, male, 31, 108 months)

As Naing demonstrates, training consistently comprises the bulk of migration cost and, unlike female domestic workers, payment is demanded upfront (Baey and Yeoh, 2015). Interviewees indicate that the average amount paid for migration varies between S$2000 to S$4000 although, as Naing’s experience shows, indirect costs, such as living expenses, can be arbitrary. Critically, not all parts of the migration process are brokered; some parts are self-actualised whereas others rely on intermediaries. Naing’s reliance on brokerage was driven by his lack of ‘acquaintances’; having grown up in Pathein in the Ayeyarwady Delta, Naing’s migratory practice
was typified by a lack of economic information (knowledge of opportunities, job networks) and cultural capital (qualifications). The training centre thus functions as a one-stop shop for all aspects of migration, which entailed higher upfront fees. In comparison, some use brokers more selectively. Thet, a gas pipe technician, trained in Yangon for three months before coming to Singapore. His expenses comprised of training, the cost of travel from his hometown in Sagaing, accommodation during training, travel to Singapore, and various administrative fees:

‘In total it cost me about 3,000,000 kyats to get here. It also cost money for me to stay in Yangon for the training’

(SG18, Thet, WPO, male, 24, 24 months)

For Thet, his older sister, a domestic worker, referred him to his training course and eventually his current job. Nonetheless, his training placement and application for a passport required brokerage:

‘An agent helped me. He was also the one who contacted me with the training. I paid him about 100,000 kyats.’

Thet’s case exemplifies how categorical distinctions between migration pathways are often blurred as workers select brokerage as necessary, which entails different costs. One half of Work Permit holders used an employment agent (n=34), of whom 31% (n=21) said they were required to pay an upfront fee, which averaged S$2308. This indicates different levels of brokerage and financial obligation: not all Work Permit holders rely on employment agents to facilitate migration and not all that do are required to post an upfront payment. For Thein, who was referred to his current job as an electrician by his cousin, social brokerage massively reduced his financial burden:

‘I had to pay for the trainings and my air tickets. Since I did not come with employment agent, I did not have to pay for anything else.’

(SG06, Thein, WPO, male, 23, 5 months)

Findings point to greater variability in the organisation of Work Permit brokerage compared to domestic workers; there is a collective of recruiters, training academies, and document specialists that prospective migrants can approach selectively at various stages pre-departure. Nonetheless, some recognise advantages to using employment agents as they provide security and speed during migration. In contrast to domestic workers, employment agents are often seen as a purchase of convenience rather than access. In comparison to domestic worker brokerage, which is relatively standardised, no singular business model for Work Permit brokerage exists
Highly gendered patterns of brokerage reliance and migration processes is evidenced, which also explains why it generally takes men longer to migrate than women: Work Permit interviewees cited four to nine months to be the typical duration between initial preparations to leave Myanmar and arriving in Singapore.

It is important to examine how Work Permit migration is funded. Unlike female migrants, male workers must typically pay for the cost of migration upfront. Surprisingly, the survey found that only 22.1% of Work Permit workers had accrued migration debt; of the indebted, amounts were similar to the total cost of migration cited above, suggesting those migrations were entirely debt-financed. Nonetheless, the low prevalence of debt overall suggests that the majority of migrants, including Thet and Thein, are at least partially funded by the household. This contradicts existing literature on construction workers, which generally suggest a higher reliance on debt-financed migration (Buckley, 2012; Yea, 2017; Platt et al., 2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Funding</th>
<th>DW</th>
<th>WPO</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>PR</th>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>10.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
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<td>2.4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>47.1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>164</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
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</table>

Table 5.3: Sources of migration funding by migrant category

As Table 5.3 demonstrates, the modal source of migration funding for Work Permit holders were endowments from the family (31.3% of responses), followed by borrowing from the family (28.1%) (see Poirine, 1997), and personal savings (21.9%) (cf. Bylander and Hamilton, 2015). Migration, at least for Work Permit workers, tend not to be undertaken by the poorest of the poor (LIFT, 2016a):

‘Yes, we did have some money. My family gave me the money for the training, all S$2200.’

(SG11, Soe, WPO, male, 30, 18mts)

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71 Multiple response set; responses will sum beyond 100%.
Though Work Permit workers have larger debt obligations compared to domestic workers, they also earn higher wages to service repayments. Similarly, the nature of his debt is also different:

‘My mother-in-law lent me 2,000,000 kyats, but besides that I never had to borrow money from other people… My mother-in-law said I do not have to pay back the money if I do not get the job here.’

(SG26, Htwe, WPO, male, 42, 84 months)

This laissez-faire approach to household repayment is not uncommon, though borrowing from the family does not assume that the household can comfortably afford those costs. Instead, it might entail short-term hardships, as Thet elaborates:

‘I did not have to, but my family did have some difficulties because of the money. I could not send money home right away either.’

(SG18)

What was notable in Thet’s interview is a strong allusion to a ‘household contract’: the household funds his migration in anticipation for returns in the form of remittances (Stark and Bloom, 1985). This contract is not straightforward, but is steeped in familial politics and social relations (Harper and Zubida, 2018; Croll, 2010; Griffiths, 2018b). However, it does highlight the complexity of organisation and financing that goes into male migration.

5.1.2 Leveraging the Social: Skilled Migration and the Social Exchange Rate

Since migration ‘requires the accumulation or possession of amounts of economic, social, cultural, and other forms of capital in various combinations’ (van Hear, 2014: S111), reliance on brokerage, as amongst domestic and Work Permit holders, is necessitated by a worker’s lack of
resources. In a Bourdieusian interpretation, migration is thus classed (ibid.). This explains why, for high-income workers, who may already possess those transferrable and convertible capitals, reliance on brokerage is comparatively rare (see Table 5.2). Anecdotal evidence suggests that some employment agencies charge upwards of twice the sum typically paid by domestic or construction workers. Such fees are considered extortionate and unnecessary:

'Because at that time, I cannot use an agency, agency is so expensive, you know if I use agency I need to spend money like 2k, 5k, or 7k.'

(SG14, Htway, SP, male, 27, 60 months)

Unsurprisingly, employment agent usage amongst S Pass and Employment Pass holders are the lowest amongst all respondents at just 18.6% and 11.1% respectively. Instead, the majority secure employment directly (S Pass 60.5% and Employment Pass 83.3%) or via referrals (S Pass 21%). As above, the distinction between direct hire and referral is sometimes unclear, but S Pass and Employment Pass respondents exhibit a particularly high dependence on social networks to facilitate both migration and employment. There are three potential explanations.

First, the migration process for skilled workers is more simplistic and requires less mediation. Although some workers had to undergo training, the majority were university graduates with work experience. The transition to Singapore entailed fewer barriers to entry. Instead, social networks are a means of expediting the recruitment process. Figure 5.4 describes the trajectory of the 'social visit' method of migration. Workers would come to Singapore as a tourist on a Social Visit Pass (SVP) and use the renewable 30-day period to secure employment. Concurrently, workers rely on social networks to assist in job searches, applications, and the practicalities of staying in Singapore:

'I contact some of my friends, so they also helped me here. First time I come here I'm only here for visiting purpose only, but at the same time I try to apply some jobs... Finally, I joined a company... it was quite long. Some people within 1-2 weeks can find, so very fast. I stay here around 2 months.'

(SG24, Kyi, SP, female, 31, 72 months)

Kyi's story is typical of many S Pass and Employment Pass workers. Prospective migrants would ask friends to scout for job opportunities and then actively apply or interview for jobs upon arrival. Once confirmed, the migrant then completes all the necessary paperwork themselves. This process drastically reduces the costs involved and the necessity for agents but, as Kyi points out, is also risky as migrants continually pay for expenses during their job-hunting phase. This might explain why some migrants, despite the cost, might prefer to use an agent:
'If you don’t want to take the risk you can join with an agent for finding a job here, they will find a job for you first, after that they will give you confirmation, so you can come out here.'

(SG22, Maung, SP, male, 35, 108 months).

This illustrates the potential risks involved in socially-mediated migration. On the one hand, as Kyi explains, there is a great variability in the length of time it takes migrants to secure jobs. On the other hand, there is a sense that, owing to potential savings for bypassing agents, they should only be used as the last resort. The implementation of a 30-day visa-free travel agreement between Singapore and Myanmar in January 2017 likely makes social visit-migration easier, which may unintentionally undermine the need for intermediaries and encourage further labour outmigration.72

Second, although Kyi’s response reflects the risks involved in the visitor-worker pathway, social networks can also reduce group risks (de Haas, 2011; van Hear et al., 2017). Though networks cannot guarantee timely employment, groups exhibit a processual logic to mobility. Tint, for instance, describes his social group that includes his wife and two childhood friends who had all worked in Thailand for one to two years before gradually moving to Singapore. This stepwise migration was crucial because it allowed the pioneer to relay valuable information, build savings, and organise accommodation before others moved:

‘Every decision, every arrangement is our own, even like getting advice, financial help, we get from each other, then we try to move on [to Singapore]. Because we support each other, our courage, we support each other… bunch by bunch we’re coming!’

(SG21, Tint, SP, male, 36, group interview, 84-108 months)

Elsewhere, there is evidence of stepwise migration within kinship groups (see Paul, 2017 for example); the pioneer sets out to ‘test the waters’ and encourage further migration once he or she has adequately settled. In the case of Tint and his friends, he had migrated first with the intention that, should Singapore prove unsuccessful, he would return to work in Bangkok. In this model allowed Tint to pool risk and circumvent the need for brokerage. Often, this stepwise logic is embedded within familial networks:

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72 Implemented from 1st December 2016, citizens of Singapore and Myanmar no longer require visas to visit the respective countries for less than 30 days. Speaking to one policy analyst, she commented how the policy was a ‘low-hanging fruit’ to signal growing diplomatic and economic ties. Official press releases made no mention of its likely impact on labour migration (see Yong, 2016), but may reflect the ASEAN Economic Community’s (AEC) broader commitment to freedom of movement for skilled workers.
‘Actually, my brother is working here, he came here first. My brother is working here in [company], so he also guideline for me how to prepare to come here. He’s two years older than me.’

(SG22)

Beyond social resources, such practices are enabled by, and require, cultural (qualifications, experience, English language proficiency), and economic (start-up capital to fund migration) capital. Language is particularly important since much of Singapore’s administrative processes require some degree of English proficiency. In comparison, domestic worker workers overwhelmingly rely on brokers in Myanmar to fund migration and to translate available jobs in Singapore into culturally accessible opportunities (Harvey et al., 2018). Similarly, Work Permit holders rely on brokers to accumulate niche cultural capital such as vocational training. Skilled workers, on the other hand, have greater social capital they can leverage, and possess greater cultural capital they can validate (see Erel, 2010), in order to negotiate access to the Singaporean labour market. Finally, social migration is accumulative. Amongst engineers and construction workers, there is considerable evidence that universities act as an incubator for future migrants as alumni networks represent an important resource for graduates:

‘All my friends, every engineer come out to here. So around 70-80% of my classmates from university are here.’

(SG22)

There is a strong path dependence for graduates, especially those within geological sciences and engineering from more prestigious institutions. Universities represent a means not only to acquire education but offer a direct route into international migration.

Despite the lower reliance on brokers, there is similar prevalence of migration debt amongst S Pass and Employment Pass workers: 31% and 27.8% of S Pass and Employment Pass respondents had incurred debt as a result of migration although amounts are unclear.73 As with Work Permit workers, S Pass and Employment Pass workers primarily fund their migration through family endowments and personal savings (Table 5.3). For the majority of workers, debts stemmed from the practicalities of travel: applying for a passport and visa, airfares, and the cost of living in Singapore. There is uniformity in migration debt prevalence across groups, even if the source of debt is different.

Overall, skilled migrants face fewer barriers to migration, incur fewer costs along the way, but similarly accrue debts. However, debts are less burdensome as incomes vastly outweigh the

73 This is due to both lengthy recall periods as well as a lack of comparable exchange rate data pre-2012.
initial cost of migration (see Table 4.1). There is a counterintuitive observation to be made about the absence of brokerage: along the income spectrum, there is a decline not only in brokerage reliance, but also of migration certainty. Amongst Work Permit workers, this was reflected in the variable timeframes that workers invest in acquiring accreditation. Amongst S Pass and Employment Pass workers, uncertainty is reflected in the time it takes to secure a job, which involves an element of luck. Depending on the delay, job-seeking can be expensive:

‘Because air ticket, I need to borrow, rent the house, this one nearly 1500. It took two months to find a job. Highly risky.’

(SG14)

These stories are only partial; the survivorship bias of participants does not tell us of the potential for, or experiences of, failure of the social visit migration pathway. Perhaps the defining characteristic of skilled migration is the number of pathways that migrants can take and that, for the majority, brokerage is an option rather than a necessity. The relative simplicity of skilled migration permits greater room for meditations on what migrants’ value – convenience, low cost, speed – that drives greater variability in practices.

5.2 Risk and Precarity

Migration, as the previous sections detailed, can be a lengthy, costly, and risky process (see Williams and Baláž, 2012). As discussed in the literature review, this has led some authors to theorise about the role of ‘precarity’ in contemporary labour markets (Paret and Gleeson, 2016; Anderson, 2015; Waite, 2009; Lewis et al., 2015; Deshingkar, 2018; Castles, 2015). Standing (2011), in particular, is credited with popularising the term ‘precariat’ to describe those in states of profound uncertainty, risk, and insecurity (see 2.4.2). Although commonly used to denote exploitative practices in ‘flexible’ labour policies (Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016), precarity is also experiential and may be multiplicative as one enters into different social relations, for example from one labour market to another (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008; Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016). The notion of precarity has thus been applied to different vectors of migration, whether by gender (Platt et al., 2016; Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016; Bastia, 2014), industry (Wee et al., 2018; Buckley, 2012; Platt et al., 2016), or pathway (Killias, 2010; Sobieszczyk, 2000; Yea, 2015). The usefulness of precarity rests on its ability to conceptualise relations of domination and subordination, produced through structural accounts of intra-field relations. In this section, I use precarity to reveal how such relations prevent the worker from realising value, which I describe as economic capital in-the-making (see the introduction to this chapter). Two field structures are of particular interest: migration intermediaries and governance actors. Although the growing literature on precarity has developed insights to enrich our understanding
of migration processes and experiences, I use this section to explore how such experiences undermine the project of ‘development’ and what this means for nexus thought more broadly.

5.2.1 Broketed Development? Intermediaries in the Myanmar-Singapore Corridor

Though I had read about the notorious shopfronts of employment agents in Singapore, I was unprepared for the otherworldly sight that awaited me. As I roamed around the Beauty World Centre, waiting for a friend for lunch, I was struck by this bizarre retail landscape that did not sell clothes, services, or food, but labour. A cavernous mall that opened in the affluent neighbourhood of Bukit Timah in the 1980s, Beauty World has since fallen into disuse. Cheap and plentiful shop units have since been occupied by employment agents. As I walked through the deserted mall, rows of domestic workers sat in near-silence with a vigilant posture, staring at passers-by who might employ them. Beauty World is by no means unique, and similar malls are dotted around neighbourhoods in Singapore. Over time, it became clear that the employment agent is a ubiquitous feature not only in the lives of migrants, especially domestic workers, but a part of the Singaporean social fabric.

Memo, March 2017

Downtown Yangon is so densely packed that streets may appear non-descript at first. Look up, however, and Yangon reveals a rich verticality of life above street-level. 39th Street, popular with travellers for its concentration of youth hostels, is home to an array of employment agents, training academies, travel agents, and document processors, all of which are housed in aged office buildings. Though various migration bans have eroded business in recent years, I was struck by the ubiquity of these intermediaries and how every aspect of migration can be brokered. Indeed, some businesses operated on the margins of legality, offering caregiving courses for prospective migrants to Singapore, despite the ban on domestic workers. For the average resident in Yangon, stories of migration are familiar; everybody seems to know someone who has migrated or, should you wish, offer services to facilitate migration. This broad spectrum of brokerage forced me to interrogate in greater detail the human and non-human infrastructures that together enable ‘migration’.

Memo, November 2017

74 Caregivers are in growing demand and offers higher pay and better working environments than domestic work. Legally, they are still classified as domestic workers and thus migrate illegally so far as the Burmese state is concerned (see 5.2.2 for discussions on the domestic worker ban).
Migration does not entail a straightforward movement from one place to another but, as the previous sections demonstrated, entails different checkpoints and intermediaries along the way. Recent work has scrutinised the role of brokers and the ‘migration industry’ in facilitating international mobility (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014; Lindquist et al., 2012; Jones, 2015; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). Concurrently, authors have also scrutinised how brokers inform structures of precarity (Wee et al., 2018; Deshingkar, 2018; Goh et al., 2017; Baey and Yeoh, 2015). If the normative goal of migration is to achieve ‘development’, then this relationship seems problematic at best, and perhaps even counterproductive (Raghuram, 2009).

Where the previous sections examined the process of migration, this section interrogates in further detail how intermediaries help, or hinder, migrants capitalise their labour. Specifically, I examine the mechanics of brokerage and how they relate to the broader aims of migration-led development. Since this section examines how intermediaries facilitate migration, analyses will focus primarily on domestic workers, who are disproportionately reliant on them (see 5.1). This is not to say that other workers’ migrations are exempt from mediation, but it does help to visualise how terrains of risk are unequal and gendered. The rest of this section covers macro- and micro-level analyses. The former takes a broad examination of the role of intermediaries in the migration process to examine the ways in which they create precarity, whereas the latter looks at the how precarity manifests in practice, how it is experienced by migrants, and the impacts this has on value realisation. Intermediaries enable mobility, but also produce precarity because they are able to structure the ‘rules of the game’, determine the distribution of resources, and enact different means of exploitation and control over time (Wee et al., 2018). Where Section 5.1.1 described the stages of migration by following the migrant, Figure 5.6 lays bare the different parties involved in intermediation and their differing interests by following cash flows. What is particularly interesting is the monetary exchange between intermediaries. The business model

Figure 5.5: Street in Downtown Yangon (14/03/17)
of brokerage is straightforward (Figure 5.6); almost all revenues are derived from fees paid by the migrant. Profit thus depends on *maximising* fee payments from the migrant on the one hand and maximising the overall number of placements on the other.

![Brokered migration process](image)

**Figure 5.6: Brokered migration process**

To hire a domestic worker, employers first pay a Singaporean employment agency the total cost of ‘importing’ a worker (usually S$2,800 and above) (A). The Singaporean agency then contacts their counterpart in Myanmar to source workers, who in turn rely on village-level brokers to market job opportunities and recruit women. Both parties in Myanmar then divide the fees paid by the Singaporean agency between them (B). As the worker travels from her village to Yangon, and eventually to Singapore, she accrues debt payable for training, documents, health screenings and other preparatory costs. Once ‘processed’, the Singaporean agency then ‘imports’ the worker from the Burmese agent. Upon arrival, a Work Permit is secured with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM). On balance, everything has been paid for by the employer. However, competition within the domestic work industry has meant that costs are increasingly passed onto migrants and employers are able to recoup a large proportion of placement costs through worker salary deductions (C) (see 5.1.1). As Michelle, a member of the Association of Employment Agencies in Singapore, explains:  

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75 AEAS is an industry association for employment agencies in Singapore. They are active in lobbying the MOM to represent agency interests. See also the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agency Federation in Section 5.2.2.
The Singaporean agency generally charge to the employer [a net balance of] S$600-700. Higher end [workers] are about S$1000, but most Singaporean employers do not patronise such agencies because they think they are very expensive. Employers say ‘oh, I pay S$3-5k’, but these are advance placement fees. You are recovering this money from the girl over a period of 5, 6 months. It’s the domestic worker who goes without any salary so you can’t claim to have paid for it when you have only paid around S$1000. Compared to FDW who pays over S$3000."

(2013) This particular model of migration is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it demonstrates the numerous and potentially conflicting interests within the migration chain (Barrientos, 2013). Employers demand cheap labour whereas agencies want to maximise fees, leaving the migrant the obvious candidate from whom to extract rent (Strauss, 2012). Second, the illustration of a literal black box in Figure 5.6 is apt; there is no consensus or transparency amongst interviewed workers about how fees are distributed or incurred. Nominally, agents in Singapore are prohibited from charging more than two months’ salary for placement. However, the hefty sums levied on the worker mean that fees are distributed along the migration chain with little oversight or transparency, exposing migrants to unchecked rent-seeking behaviour (Barrientos, 2013). This is as much a governance issue as a brokerage one and, as I explore below, it would be misleading to attribute the causality of risk to brokers alone. Finally, findings demonstrate the complex economics of migration. Though migration is driven by livelihood challenges faced by households at origin, agents also describe the recent influx of Burmese domestic workers to be demand-driven (see Barrientos, 2013). Recognising this is vital to unpacking ‘migration’ as less of a spatial movement of people, but a continually evolving set of social relations that produce particular spaces of power and vulnerability.

In one interview, an agent explained how brokers in Myanmar deliberately hire ‘girls’ from rural areas because they are considered more docile, innocent, and therefore less belligerent when negotiating wages.76 Those in urban areas, in comparison, are more expensive because they are better qualified, proficient in English, but also more ‘savvy’ as a result of urban exposure and the backflow of information from overseas.77 Elsewhere, authors have also noted the gendered, racialised, and behavioural preferences that employers and agents express in order to produce a population of ‘desirable’ workers (McDowell, 2008; Rother, 2017; Anderson and Davidson, 2003; Yeoh and Huang, 2009; Deshingkar, 2018). In turn, this essentialises and reproduces

76 Throughout interviews, employment agents commonly refer to domestic workers as ‘girls’ regardless of their age. For some, this seemed to be couched in maternalistic or paternalistic discourses of protecting the younger and more vulnerable (see 5.2.1), whereas other used the term in more infantilising and condescending ways.

77 Such framings have also contributed to the trafficking of underage girls. Most notoriously, Al Jazeera (2016) collaborated with HOME to produce a documentary which showed girls as young as 15 being recruited into Singapore for domestic work.
particular classes of workers (Ye, 2014), and strengthens the migration path dependencies evidenced throughout this thesis's analytical chapters.

Workers do not simply migrate but are selected based on more or less desirable traits; Singapore's definition of a domestic work as a female occupation exemplifies this (Annex 9). Following Constable (2007), migration flows are not homogenous, but 'maid to order' commodities. This also means that workers who are preferred, primarily because they acquiesce with lower wages, are also those who are less able to communicate, adapt, and fulfil their job requirements. This drive towards the rural did not occur by accident, but rather forms an important part of the marketing strategy of agents in Singapore, who advertise Burmese domestic workers as the 'affordable' option compared to more 'expensive' Indonesian or Filipino workers. This became increasingly prevalent, as one agent explained, after 2008 when Indonesia – the largest source country for domestic workers in Singapore – threatened to reduce the 'supply' of workers. Migration thus cannot be analysed outside prevailing labour market structures that dictate what opportunities are available, on what terms, and how like the migrant is able to realise value from those opportunities. Again, Michelle elaborated:

'In the last 2-3 years, people have been recruiting them [Burmese domestic workers] very strongly, for all the wrong reasons. They are lowest salary, highest deduction, lowest agency fee [for employers] payable to the agents, so why not? And then they are hired and transferred at least 2-3 times because they are locally trained. OJT they call it – ‘On the Job Training’ – because rarely can a fresh Myanmar domestic worker fit in in the first household, so she will be transferred and transferred. What is happening is during these transfers, the 2-3 transfers, they say she is being trained up, so she is charged again, per transfer.'

Precarity is thus produced across multiple spaces and times to different ends. In order to boost placement volume, Burmese and Singaporean agents collude to identify and hire ‘cheap’ girls en masse. Similarly, in order to increase fee revenue – the majority of which are paid by the migrant – many Singaporean agents offer ‘unlimited replacements' to entice employers (Ye, 2014). On the one hand, price-sensitive employers can ‘test’ the worker with minimal obligation. On the other hand, this is also a transfer of risk (Woolfson and Likic-Brboric, 2008). Upfront fees paid by the employer are ring-fenced whereas, as Michelle notes, the financial risk is shifted to the worker who incurs further fees (Goh et al., 2016). Indeed, it may be in the agent’s best interest to maximise these risks (Wee et al., 2018). As Michelle notes, it is not uncommon for the most vulnerable workers to experience two or three transfers during their initial migration, for which

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78 Unlimited replacements refer to contractual clauses that entitles the employer to request the replacement of their worker at no cost.
they incur anywhere between one to three months of further salary deductions. Compounded with existing debt repayments, the most vulnerable can work for up to a year with virtually no pay (see 5.1.1). This is perhaps the best example of what Lewis et al. (2015: 592) terms ‘hyper-precarity’, which is created when already precarious livelihoods, typified by situations of uncertain ‘immigration and socio-legal statuses whilst under serious livelihood pressures’ combine with ‘unfreedoms in labour market processes’ to create extremely hostile environments.

Hyper-precarity is not just a structural condition but also produces visceral lived experiences, as nearly every aspect of migration can be brokered and capitalised upon (Jones, 2015). As Michelle testified above, one example is that of employment interruptions (Table 5.4).  Of all domestic workers surveyed, 27.2% said they had faced an interruption in the last two years, compared to just 5.3% of Work Permit, 7.8% of S Pass and 16.7% of Employment Pass workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker Category</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>92.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pass</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4: Prevalence of employment interruptions in the last two years by worker category

Disaggregated, the modal causes of domestic worker interruptions were employer-related: 44.4% of interruptions were due to the employer terminating her contract and 37.8% were due to the employee seeking a change of employer:

‘My first boss was really bad. She is already 80 years old and cannot walk. She did not want to give me food sometimes. She scolded me, too… I only stayed for a few weeks and did not want to do it anymore. I asked her son to send me to the agent. After that I have been working at my current house since… They took money from my salary for one month.’

(SG13, Su, DW, female, 26, 60 months)

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79 An interruption was defined as any event or circumstance that prevented the worker from carrying out their everyday responsibilities.
80 The standard employment contract durations for domestic worker and Work Permit holders is two years.
Each interruption represents a loss of income for both the worker and her dependants, as precarity is inherited across familial networks; shocks are not felt by the migrant alone, but ripple through time and space (see 6.3). Moreover, brokerage can also enhance precarity because they constrain workers’ freedoms. Again, risk is a recurring theme as agents sometimes counsel employers to withdraw the right to ‘off-days’ for domestic workers. In doing so, this limits the risk of the worker ‘running away’ and defaulting on her debts and undermining the employer’s legal obligation to monitor the worker (Goh et al. 2016) (see 5.2.2). The prevalence of off-days is difficult to gauge, not least because research would suffer from availability bias. However, findings suggest off-days are more likely to be withheld during the early stages of migration (see also Wessels, 2015):

’I had no off-day previously and no idea where to send my money back to family back home. It saddened me.’

(SG03, Mya, DW, female, 31, 72 months)

Another common means of control is to withhold workers’ documents:

’I had to apply for a new passport as my old one was confiscated by the first employer.’

(SG04, Myaing, DW, female, 28, 13 months)

This thesis does not argue that brokerage automatically entails exploitation, or that all brokers are malicious; some of the brokers I interviewed were prominent activists in lobbying the state for greater regulatory oversight (see 5.2.2). Indeed, as McKeown (2012: 24) argues, the conceptualisation of brokerage as some ‘black box... continues to make it possible to blame brokers for evils while drawing attention away from working conditions, laws and public attitudes that are equally responsible for migrant suffering’. Kern and Müller-Böker (2015) similarly notes how brokers are often vilified within the broader discourse of ‘trafficking’ when in fact migrants may be agential in entering into supposedly precarious relations (Davidson, 2013). Instead, I argue that the current configuration of brokerage – typified by inadequate governance (or perhaps the wrong kind of governance) and unchecked interests – create spaces where workers are more likely to be exploited. Moreover, the migration industry relies disproportionately upon the exploitation of women to generate profit, and business models are fundamentally inequitable as financial risks are passed off to those least able to cope.

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81 Menial services such as a change of employer or a contract extension can be costly, and it is common for workers to be charged anywhere between one to three months’ salary to compensate the employment agency.
82 Even though the MOM has issued new ‘guidelines’ to ensure workers are granted ‘off-days’, these are often flaunted (Wessels, 2015).
Though employer abuses are not uncommon (see Wessels, 2015), it would be erroneous to solely attribute such exploitation to brokers. Instead, we need to recognise how migration, beyond the rhetoric of ‘development’, operates as a consumer-led marketplace, where Burmese (domestic) workers currently occupy the bottom rung as the cheapest, most profitable, and most ‘flexible’ option for brokers and employers alike. Indeed, interruptions – of employment and income – needn’t be spectacular but are integral to everyday employment in Singapore. A more obscure liability, for example, relates to migration maintenance fees, that is, fees charged for the renewal or modification of contracts, or employer changes, for which another one to three months’ salary is deducted. Migration is the ultimate liberal marketplace: everything can be done ‘for a fee’ (Jones, 2015). The continued reliance and prevalence of brokerage throughout migration gives rise to a sort of migration-by-subscription model. Precarity thus cannot be attributable to brokers alone but emerges as a confluence of factors: employer demands, market competition, labour regulation, migration regimes, and compliance.

It is within these social relations that corporal and structural violence is negotiated. Brokers are just one element of the structural field, but they wield a disproportionate amount of power in dictating the resources that workers can accrue. In effect, this produces a migration-industrial complex that is marked by divergent interests, opacity, and rent-seeking practices. In turn, consumer trends have led to a race to the bottom: of cost, assurance, and stability. Precarity is less a condition than a social relation (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008), which has significant impacts on how labour value is realised over time. Part of the issue is the misrecognition of the migration industry – or perhaps migration more generally – as an economic entity (Burawoy, 2012). Bourdieu (1986), makes the distinction between economic transactions, which presupposes market transparency, and social transactions, which presupposes ‘misrecognition’ of the social act as disinterested (Walther, 2014). The field, far from being transparent, is often shrouded in the mystification and misrecognition of exploitative practices that maintains the perceptive ‘gap between experience and reality for all who enter a specific set of social relations’ (Burawoy, 2012).

We must therefore recognise that migration does not entail objective transactions but comprises whole assemblies of social actors with divergent interests that escape univariate ‘economic’ or ‘social’ categorisation:

‘I came with an agent. She is my aunt’s friend from Yangon.’

(SG13)

Where ‘migration infrastructure’ might comprise ties of friends, kin, village-level recruiters, agents, trainers, document processors, and border officials (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014), what ought to be an economic transaction is, in practice, highly entwined with the social, increasing the opportunities for obfuscation and profiteering. There is a statistical basis for such an assessment: of those who secured employment through an agent, 28.3% of all respondents said
that their working tasks were different from what was explained prior to starting work. Predictably, domestic workers are disproportionately affected:

‘At first, I was not informed about the domestic worker job. When I first received information about working overseas, the job description was to take care of the elderly at homes and to work in nursing homes.’

(SG07, Hti, DW, female, 34, 36 months)

Similarly, of those who secured employment through an agent, 12.8% said their salary was different than what was promised prior to starting work. Again, Work Permit workers are disproportionately affected:

‘I was told that I would get SGD 21 per day and roughly, SGD 600 per month. But to be honest, the basic salary was supposed to be less than that as there was no pay for the off-days.’

(SG20)

Mystification requires the wilful submission of the migrant which, for Bourdieu, is dependent on the habitus as the ‘differences in dispositions, like differences in position (to which they are often linked), engender real differences in perception and appreciation’ (Bourdieu, 1981: 315). This alerts us to beware deterministic readings of exploitation; after all, the majority of employment agent users do not suffer exploitation and those that do may be agential in achieving their own self-defined migratory goals (Davidson, 2013). Low-skilled workers, may therefore choose to submit to exploitation within systems of ‘constrained agency’ (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011), where ‘we can always say that individuals make choices, as long as we do not forget that they do not choose the principles of these choices’ (Wacquant, 1989: 45). It is not that migrants do not care about exploitation, but rather they do not think in binary terms: between freedom or unfreedom, then and now, legal or illegal migration (Killias, 2010; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015; Davidson, 2013; Bastia and McGrath 2011). Instead, precarity is often tolerated with a view for achieving long-term goals (see 5.3.1) and is deposited as an internalised drive to fulfil familial and filial obligations (see 6.3.1). Precarity and agency, in short, are not mutually exclusive.

In sum, brokerage and entrance costs have significant impacts on value. Following Bourdieu’s metaphor of energy conservation which posits that ‘profits in one area are necessarily paid for by costs in another’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 253), mobility is paid for by placement fees and constraints on her freedom at recurrent points along the migratory lifecourse. Labour’s value is never lost but has simply been appropriated elsewhere by other parties (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008): in the mundane (as in maintenance costs and debt repayment), spectacular (interruptions and
exploitation), and the fraudulent (contract manipulation). Here, brokerage is the de facto source of labour market mystification where a lack of transparency, governance, and accountability exposes migrants to potentially exploitative practices and rent-seeking behaviour (see Yeoh et al., 2004). Though frameworks like NELM highlighted how migration market information may be imperfect (Stark and Bloom, 1985), they stopped short of interrogating how, besides being imperfect, information might be outright manipulated to produce a particular type of migrant: docile, exploitable, profitable (Piper, 2008a; LeBaron, 2014; Platt et al., 2016). Instead of treating migrant vulnerabilities – and issues of abuse, exploitation, financial burden and precarity – as products of marginality or disadvantage, it should instead be recognised how the migratory field is built around conflicting interests that stacks the needs of the migrants against that of the migration industry (Collinson, 2009). The migratory field, therefore, is functioning normally and is consistent with the interests of the dominant (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013; Anderson, 2010; Paret and Gleeson, 2016; Woolfson and Likic-Brboric, 2008; Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). The next section will highlight the role of governance and regulation in informing migration. In particular, I focus on the policies and regulations in both Myanmar and Singapore and how these converge to inform the livelihoods of migrants.

5.2.2 Governance and Precarity

Four of us crowded around one interpreter on the back row of a room of perhaps one hundred people. The man gesticulated furiously, struggling to translate the rap belted out by the domestic workers who had taken to the stage. It was 15th June and the ILO and the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF) had organised an event to mark the ‘International Domestic Workers Day’. Besides performances, the event also brought together four panellists to discuss Myanmar’s ban on domestic worker migration: a leading CSO activist, an immigration lawyer, a board member of MOEAF, and the Deputy Director General for the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, and Population (MOLIP). As the event wore on, the ‘debate’ became more acrimonious. The first three panellists voiced their misgivings over how the domestic worker ban has failed workers, as the Deputy Director General struggled to reiterate the official position: the government would lift the ban ‘soon’. No one held their breath; as MOLIP and other government departments restructured after the 2015 election victory, the ban has remained in place despite successive pledges to lift it.

Memo, 15/06/17
Migration in the Myanmar-Singapore corridor is generally governed in a laissez-faire manner; interventions are often rare, reactive, and inadequate. Recent literature has paid increasing attention to migration ‘regimes’ as governmental techniques of structuring all aspects of migratory life, from the terms and conditions of entry (Kaur, 2010; Piper, 2010; Hugo, 2009), labour discipline (Killias, 2010), and everyday politics of deportation (De Genova, 2002; Mahdavi, 2013b; Paret and Gleeson, 2016). Such regimes are necessarily transnational and signal varying degrees of coordination and cooperation between labour-sending and receiving countries (Hugo, 2012). In the Myanmar-Singapore corridor, several factors combine to produce precarity and uncertainty in the migration process, which in turn drives particular outcomes of migration. In Singapore, this is typified by labour flexibility and the privatisation of regulation enforcement. In Myanmar this is typified by policy incoherence and incapacity. In this section, I analyse these factors and how they affect migrants’ ability to realise value from migration. Specifically, I demonstrate how the interests of states are often incongruent with the feted ‘triple win’ – that migration and development can be achieved in the interests of the migrant, labour-sending, and labour-receiving states. Instead, ‘migration’ isconceptualised in different terms by each party, which undermines the coherence of nexus narratives and forces us to question in whose interest ‘development’ serves.

**Singapore**

Singapore’s migrant labour policy is focused on maintaining flexibility to serve the state’s dynamic economic interests on a flexible ‘use-and-dispose’ basis (Koh et al., 2016; Yeoh, 2006; Goh et al., 2017; Yeoh et al., 2004). In essence, low-wage migrants are ‘adversely incorporated’ into the global economy through a distinct set of governance mechanisms (Phillips and Mieres,
As with brokers, governance produces precarity when market orientation stacks the interests of the state against the migrant. In De Genova’s (2002) writing on the ‘deportability’ of migrants, the author describes how migrants are increasingly subject to everyday practices of bordering and policing that renders them susceptible to deportation. A similar concept can be applied where the terms and conditions of migration are characterised by a worker’s disposability (Yeoh, 2006). In this frame, Singapore has adopted neoliberal tenets of migration governance par excellence where labour is incorporated flexibly according to national economic development (Piper, 2010). It is telling, for example, that Singapore has not ratified the ILO’s Convention 189, which sets out regulations over the employment of foreign domestic workers. Concurrent with the previous section, this unsettles conventional ideologies around migration-led development and presents a somewhat unwelcome question: what sort of migration are we talking about, and whose interest(s) does it serve (see Raghuram, 2009)?

Domestically, government must answer to the electorate, and growing public discontent with Singapore’s perceived liberal migration policy threatened the People’s Action Party’s (PAP) dominance during the 2011 elections. As one Member of Parliament explained, it would be in the party’s interest not to introduce policies that would ‘really piss off’ voters (cited in Koh et al., 2016). Internationally, diplomatic tensions over the mistreatment of domestic workers has encouraged the Singaporean regime to maintain a hands-off approach to governance, thereby allowing the authorities to ‘pay little attention to the demands of origin states, perhaps until their political standing and legitimacy are called into question’ (Goh et al., 2017: 424; Koh et al., 2017; Piper, 2010). As the previous sections describe, domestic workers are governed through state-sanctioned structures of brokerage. In practice, policy is enacted through gender-specific modes of governance where women’s mobilities are governed differently from men. Where labour market segments are highly gendered – as in female domestic work versus male construction work – the selective governance of each pathway necessarily equates to a gendered policing of migration (Kaufman and Crawford, 2011).

Singapore’s Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is chiefly responsible for setting out the explicit rules of the field, and workers do not migrate into apolitical structures, but interested systems which hinder returns to migration. These might include eligibility criteria for workers of different visa categories (see Annex 9), guidelines for the employment of foreign workers, the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers, and complaint procedures (Koh et al., 2016; 2017). In Singapore, all migrants are legal insofar as they are sponsored by an eligible employer. A visa, therefore, is not so much a legal status but a manifestation of economic demand, and the rights accorded to such, at any given point. In 2019, 60% of demand for construction work is attributed to public-sector projects (Wong, 2019). The Singaporean state is an important stakeholder not only in terms of field regulation, but also in shaping the supply and demand of workers more generally. Similarly, policy decisions may be relatively opaque or implemented at short notice,

At the time of this thesis, Myanmar has not ratified C189 either.
allowing employers and the state to respond strategically to market conditions (see also Buckley, 2012). For Htway, a civil engineer, he describes his uncertainty around staying in Singapore:

‘According to the Singaporean government law, one S Pass can only stay for 2 years only. My project is 5 years. After my S Pass finished, company will extend another 2 years. This is not dependent on the project, but dependent on MOM policy.’

(SG14)

As above, economic risks are thus passed off from state and employer to the migrant (Woolfson and Likic-Brboric, 2008). This is particularly prevalent in the construction industry, where the vagaries of construction finance can affect labour demand at short notice (Buckley, 2012). This highlights the regulatory and disciplinary power that is vested in employers:

‘For work-permit holders, we have a contract and we are given, let’s say, two years to work in a company. If the employer is not willing to continue our contract, we will lose our job. Even if we want to transfer job, we need a transfer letter from the employer. A lot of things are in the hands of our employer.’

(SG20)

Policies, therefore, are indicative of state neoliberal logic, and not the interests of the migrant:

‘I’m S Pass, before first 2 years I was holding Employment Pass, but then MOM asked my organisation to S Pass, because S Pass the organisation has to pay levy, but the Employment Pass they have a headcount limit, so this squeezes the organisation, but for me no change, all the package are the same, the salary.’

(SG16, Mon, SP, female, 36, 72 months)

Although high-income migrants are generally less precarious, they are not immune to state priorities. In Mon’s experience, changes in Employment Pass quotas demonstrated how macro-level policy are delegated to individual employers to implement as commercial decisions. When her firm’s Employment Pass quota was met, Mon’s visa was ‘downgraded’ to an S Pass, even though her job remained the same. Though this had little impact on her personally, Mon faced greater barriers in keeping her daughter in Singapore as a dependant:
'We went for a new application, but the criteria have already changed; we cannot meet the salary requirements. I tried using my visa because I work for the government, so I thought it was easier, but my salary fell 80SGD short of the requirements!'

Although Mon’s husband had worked in Singapore previously, the uncertainty around her daughter’s legal status meant that husband and child returned to Myanmar. Although ‘precarity’ is conventionally used to denote conditions of extreme risk, exploitation, and uncertainty, Mon’s experience demonstrates how all migrants are transient and disposable in one way or another, belonging to a vulnerable citizenry with contingent rights (Standing, 2011). A recurrent theme within interviews is the disproportionate dependence that households have on migrants. Where migrants increasingly shoulder the risks presented by flexible contracts, low-value work, and economic instability, any shock they experience are inherited and magnified by their dependents.

Finally, although the state has implemented instruments to foster best practice in employer foreign workers, these can also translate into means of control. This is perhaps best illustrated by employment bonds. In Singapore, employers of domestic and Work Permit workers must post a S$5,000 security bond with the Singaporean Government, which is forfeit should employers fail to uphold responsibilities such as paying the worker’s salary on time but also if the worker goes missing or violates the terms of his or her stay (MOM, n.d(c)). These bonds produce power distortions by financially incentivising employers to exert discipline and control over workers lest they forfeit their bond (LeBaron, 2014). For Myaing, she complained that her first employer was paying her below-market rates:

'I had to apply for a new passport as my old one was confiscated by the first employer… I believe, the reason for doing so is because they were scared, they might get involved with government organization in Singapore for paying such low salary to their domestic helper.'

(SG04)

Like salary deduction periods (see 5.1.1 and 5.2.1), employment bonds incentivise employers to exert control over the freedoms of the employee. Bringing these empirical strands together, we see how governance not only affects precarity, but also determines the degree to which migrants are able to realise value (Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). This is achieved by setting out, in Bourdieusian terms, the conversion costs that migrants incur when transforming labour into economic capital (Erel, 2010). Where the previous sections analysed entrance fees, these can be segmented into active and passive fees. The former describes fees levied for the right or privilege of access, as in employment agency fees (see Platt et al., 2016). The latter describes the costs – and its attendant precarising effects – that migrants tacitly ‘accept’ as a condition of their mobility (Davidson, 2013). These conversion costs, I argue, are inscribed within the
migration regime which determines the potential returns to migration. This is best exemplified by Singapore’s tiered migration regime, which sorts migrants by different visa classifications, which in turn accord different rights and responsibilities (see Annex 9).

The migration regime sets out capital conversion rates by manipulating borders and capitals validation (Friedland, 2009; Erel, 2010; Raghuram, 2008). First, the labour-economic rate is dependent on scarcity, and regime structures ensure the abundance of cheap labour. As the previous detailed, in 2008, Indonesia pledged to reduce the number of domestic workers it sends overseas, which drove Singapore to ‘open up’ new ‘source countries’. Similarly, the construction industry is dominated by low-wage Bangladeshi workers (Baey and Yeoh, 2015). Supply is manipulated to ensure that cheap labour is plentiful to support Singapore’s development and social reproductive functions. The power of migration governance is thus exerted through its ‘capacity to manage the relation between mobility and immobility’ of groups relevant to its interests (Franquesa, 2011: 1028). Second, conversion rates are also determined by the validation of capitals. For Burmese domestic workers, 20% are educated to university level (Table 4.1). De-skilling is thus evident as the state defines the parameters of what should be recognised as ‘appropriate’ cultural capital (Raghuram, 2008; Bauder, 2003). Though it is the possession of capital that ‘yields profits of distinction for its owner’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 245), so too is the state ‘the central medium by which legitimate classification is accomplished and imposed’ (Friedland, 2009: 903). Finally, migration pathways engender strong path dependencies (Lewis et al., 2015); by the terms and conditions of their visa, Work Permit and domestic worker are only entitled to work within particular industries, whereas S Pass and Employment Pass holders may freely move between sectors. Job mobility, employment freedoms, and wage development are thus circumscribed. Although the data demonstrates how women are disproportionately concentrated in low-value work – 72.8% of all female survey respondents were domestic workers – there is also evidence of a gender pay gap within migrant groups as male S Pass workers earn S$178, or 6.5%, more than their female counterparts.

**Myanmar**

In contrast to Singapore, Myanmar lacks a coherent migration policy. This is manifest in both domestic and foreign affairs. On the one hand, the administrative arms tasked with the regulation and enforcement of migration is antiquated (ILO, 2017). Since the NLD came to power in 2015, ministries have seen dramatic restructuring and reform, but migration policy remains low on the agenda. On the other hand, this means that international migration has largely occurred in

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84 The average monthly salary for all domestic workers is $508, whereas the average domestic worker with a university degree earns $519. Education does not appear to be something that employers or agencies value.
85 There have been recent trends of domestic workers moving into caregiving (Ma, 2017b). New pathways open up to serve Singaporean needs, in this case care for young children and elderly parents.
86 S Pass is the only visa category with a sufficiently large number of respondents from both genders to make a meaningful comparison since domestic workers are 100% female, Work Permit holders are 97.1% male, and there were only 14 Employment Pass responses.
absence of regulation. This has led to well-documented incidences of abuse of vulnerable groups such as domestic workers, notably in Singapore and Hong Kong. In the absence of ‘quick fixes’, the Burmese authorities have banned the outmigration of domestic workers, ‘citing [the] ill-treatment and abuse of maids’ (Wei, 2015: no page) since 2014. In the context of the Myanmar-Singapore corridor, this manifests as a ban on female mobility. As Table 4.1 details, domestic workers account for 73.5% of all female migrants in the sample. Although Myanmar had temporarily banned outmigration to Malaysia from 2017 to 2018 for similar reasons (see 2.3.1), the ostensible urge to ‘protect’ workers from a single industry meant that female agency and freedoms are disproportionately undermined (see also Kaufman and Crawford, 2011). Despite issues faced by men in the construction industry, for example, such migration channels remained open. Couched in gendered understandings of female vulnerabilities and the broader discourse of ‘trafficking’ (Chapkis, 2003; Yea, 2015; Mahdavi, 2013a), migration governance in this example demonstrates how women’s movements are subject to scrutiny and intervention in a way that men’s are not. Though various groups are ‘vulnerable’, Myanmar’s domestic worker ban illustrates how, so far as the state is concerned, perhaps it is better if certain workers, namely women, did not migrate at all (Chapkis, 2003). Although successive attempts to lift the ban was met with political inertia (see Jacob, 2014), the ban was finally lifted as of 26 April 2019, more than five years after it was initially implemented (Straits Times, 2019). Nonetheless, incapacity means that foreign missions are still poorly equipped and unresponsive to labour-related complaints and grievances.88

This culture of governance – reactive and myopic – drives a milieu of precarity where workers are caught between two regimes. First, the ban has increased the cost of migration. As Thiha, an employment agent in Yangon, explains the ban is easily circumvented due to poor enforcement, but instead introduces new spaces for rent-seeking. In conversations with the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agency Federation (MOEAF), one representative claimed that illicit exits required a bribe of between 150,000 to 200,000Ks.89 The inefficacy of the ban is reflected in the survey findings; correlating migration durations against the ban, over one-third of domestic workers would have migrated ‘illegally’.90 Policy incoherence is also laid bare by the fact that these women, though ‘illegal’, are eligible to renew their passports at the Myanmar Embassy in Singapore, signifying some degree of official recognition. All the ban has done is to compound costs; where the previous section discussed brokerage in terms of entrance fees, corruption has erected checkpoints where actors extract exit fees from migrant women who are

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87 Given how recent the ban was lifted, impacts are still unclear, and this thesis will continue to analyse the ban as it had been implemented throughout the time of fieldwork.
88 At the time of fieldwork, despite Singapore’s large Burmese population, the Myanmar Embassy did not have a labour attaché.
89 The MOEAF is an industry body that represents overseas employment agencies and is principally responsible for lobbying the government to represent agency interests. They can be thought of as the Myanmar equivalent of Singapore’s AEAS.
90 The ban was implemented in September 2014. As survey work began in September 2016, those who responded that they had been working in Singapore for less than two years would have migrated without authorisation. Such responses accounted for 36.1% of all domestic workers.
already amongst the poorest and most vulnerable (see 4.2.1 and 6.2; Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016).

Second, according to the MOEAF, the ban has forced networks of brokers, agents and intermediaries underground (McKeown, 2012).91 In turn, this delegitimises migrants and their rights to diplomatic protection; to report malpractice would be self-incriminating. The ban thus enables ‘governance’ actors to extract, without adding, value to migration (see LeBaron, 2014; Strauss, 2012). Migrants thus have few, if any, recourse to representation or arbitration when faced with exploitation. Domestically, Myanmar officials have recognised how the ban is not only inefficacious but has driven workers and brokers to leave via illegitimate means. Minister of MOLIP U Thein Swe, for example, explains how ‘workers are leaving for Singapore as part of a tour. They find domestic jobs via agencies when they got there. So, we have difficulties regulating them’ (cited in Htwe, 2018a). Transnationally, this also impedes CSO and NGO attempts to protect workers. Since Singapore makes no attempt to prevent domestic worker migration from Myanmar – migrants are considered legal insofar as they gain clearance from MOM – abuses that arise become a game of political football.92 The boundary between legal and illegal migration becomes blurred; women leave Myanmar for domestic work irregularly, only to be regularised by the Singaporean regime. This mystification of migration further pushes workers outside the conventional ‘rules of the game’ into a sort of jurisdictional no man’s land (Lewis et al., 2015). In doing so, failures in governance and protection can simply be bundled into the overall ‘migration cost’, depoliticising the very system that renders migrants vulnerable, and pardons the institutions that are charged with their protection (McKeown, 2012). This explains the prevalence of corruption in the social field:

‘When I was ready and about to leave the country, the airport officer said I needed a labour card and I had to pay 500,000 kyats.’

(SG18)

Finally, the drive to find cheaper workers, combined with clandestine brokerage, means that workers are poorly equipped for life and work in Singapore. Agencies lamented how the ban drove recruiters underground, prompting poorer ‘quality control’ in the screening and training of workers, which contributes to issues of abuse, exploitation, and employment uncertainty. For some agents, precarity is a supply issue rather than a structural one. The ban, in sum, has precarised already vulnerable workers by enabling exploitative practices across the migration chain.

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91 The interviewee lamented how illegal recruiters offer little to no training, which undermines the migrants’ ability to adapt to life in Singapore (5.2.1). To avoid detection, agents move offices every few months, further undermining attempts to regulate them.

92 Despite both Al Jazeera’s (2016) documentary, which drew international attention to the trafficking of underage domestic workers, and Myanmar’s domestic worker ban, the outflow of underage workers has continued (Lee and Leong, 2018).
The inefficacy of migration governance in Myanmar engenders a vicious cycle. Migration, almost in its entirety, occurs outside the purview of the state. In the Singaporean corridor, all domestic workers are nominally ‘irregular’, as are ‘social visit’ S Pass and Employment Pass workers and unregistered Work Permit workers (see 5.1). Interventions thus far have worsened, rather than enhanced, migrant protections. Coupled with a longstanding history of corruption and failure from actors within the migration regime, civic trust in the state is low. In Myanmar, there are more than nine types of passports, each classified for different purposes.93 Similarly, up until 2011, Myanmar was one of the few countries in the world to levy income tax on foreign-earnt income.94 The complexity of policies that extract value from migrants whilst contributing little in return has led workers to regard officials with cynicism and suspicion (MacLean, 2010; Callahan, 2010; Cammett and MacLean, 2011). This appraisal is true across the income spectrum. Zaw, an ex-general practitioner in the Burmese civil service, recalls migrating with great trepidation:

‘At that time, I was illegal. I could not leave the country. All the doctors who were not in the government service, were in debt to the government for education, so they will not allow us to leave. I was afraid to go back to Myanmar, in case I was held at the airport not be released. I dare not go back. The passport itself is not legal.’

(SG30, Zaw, EP, female, 42, 96 months)

Regulations, however poor, are flaunted with assistance from corrupt officials, and migrants are generally undeterred about the illegality of migration. In turn, the state is rarely seen as a provider of justice or support, but rather a parasitical entity that extracts rent (MacLean, 2010). In Singapore, incidences of abuse have typically been met with assistance from migrant organisations and NGOs, with only supplementary support from the Myanmar Embassy (see also Prasse-Freeman, 2012).

Relating back to the literature, nexus theories generally fail to recognise the conflicting interests within state-level discourse and policy (Raghuram, 2009; Hugo, 2012; Wee et al., 2018; Goh et al., 2017). Put simply, Singapore imports labour for very different reasons compared to why Myanmar exports it. To misrecognise these relations as politically disinterested transactions would be naive. Where the Singaporean migratory regime is highly sophisticated and is operationally delegated, de-risked, and market-oriented, Myanmar’s migration policy is best characterised by its absence of one. Discord has created voids in which corruption fester and interests are left unchecked. Moreover, where Singapore proactively imports labour to

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93 Passports categories include PV, PJ, PE and so on. These denote documents obtained for travel for vacation, job, and education respectively.

94 This was a highly unusual position. On the one hand, this may have allowed the state to directly capture some of the returns to migration, although there is strong opposition against doing so (Ratha, 2017). On the other hand, there was widespread concern amongst interviewees that income taxed in Singapore were embezzled by corrupt officials.
strategically satisfy visions of economic development, Myanmar exports labour largely without supervision; interventions tend to be reactionary. Migration, the privatisation of its governance functions, and its flexibility functions in favour of state interests, which often goes hand-in-hand with an industry of migration intermediaries both in Singapore and in Myanmar. Precarity, in other words, is good for business and state, but the party tasked with achieving this misaligned ‘triple win’ – the migrant – is conspicuously missing from the equation. There is a mismatch of interest, not so much between sending and receiving jurisdictions, but between migrants and the migration regime in general.

Although policymakers have called for bilateral cooperation in order to reduce migration costs and expand information availability (Testaverde et al., 2017), these overlook the fact that governance works to very different ends. Policies, at both ends, are not implemented with the welfare of the worker at heart (see Koh et al., 2017; 2016). Tangential policy innovations in the Singapore-Indonesia is illustrative of this. In 2016, a new scheme called the ‘Household Worker Industry Scheme’ (HIS) was launched, which allows aspiring domestic workers to borrow the cost of migration from a local bank. The rationale was to allow workers to centralise and document their debt obligations without relying on brokers, gain access to formal banking services, and benefit from transparent transactions – key ambitions within nexus rhetoric. However, as Michelle explains, uptake of the HIS has been poor:

‘People [employment agents] are avoiding HIS because no one can profiteer from it anymore’

(AEAS)

The transparency of HIS makes it unprofitable and therefore brokers shy away from advertising it, which also neatly demonstrates the policy challenges that lay in the way of achieving ‘migration-led development’. The nexus, put simply, is not a congruent body of stakeholders unified in single vision of ‘development’, but a loose ideological construct of interests where there are winners and losers. Migration regimes structure the objective availability of opportunities for migrants, as well as their capacity to attain them. Precarity is not just a state of being, but also undermines the ability for the worker to realise value from her migration, and coherence of nexus rhetoric (Raghuram, 2009). This might manifest as temporal uncertainties, legal status uncertainties (both of the migrant herself and her dependants), practices of labour control, de-skilling, the creation of irregularity through limits on mobility, and corruption. The relationship between governance and brokerage is not mutually exclusive, but mutually constituted, since much of the day-to-day governance has been delegated to the private sector (Koh et al., 2017; Goh et al., 2017). This section has highlighted how migration regimes create both active and passive precarities that aim to extract migrant value, rather than to enhance it. Migration regimes are powerful, misrecognised forces hitherto under-theorised in nexus thought. Migration does not occur outside of the purview of interested regulation, and policy
recommendations must be couched in a firm understanding of the state's various interests if they are to see any significant uptake (Koh et al., 2017). As Myanmar undergoes rapid political reform and becomes a growing exporter of labour to the ASEAN region, this is a vital lesson and an opportunity to crystallise migrant interests in policy.

5.3 Finding Time

Migration does not imply stasis, but an ongoing process. The purpose of this chapter was to analyse value as capital in the making, and how migration works to realise value. Implicit within this analysis is the temporal rhythm of migration: from the first steps taken with village-level recruiters, to the travel to Singapore, and the ebbs and flows of employment whilst there, these are dynamic processes that play out over space and time. The latter is often overlooked within migration studies (cf. Griffiths et al., 2013). As lived realities change, so do the priorities and imaginations deposited in the migratory habitus (Boccagni, 2017). This requires research to be more temporally-aware. Adam (2010: 362), for example, laments how social science's 'logic of inquiry... encompasses completed processes that have ossified into empirically accessible phenomena which can be located in a temporal frame of clock and calendar time'. Although temporal fixity allows us to isolate neat pockets of analyses, this also prevents us in picking apart the intricacies of how experiences play out over time (Griffith et al., 2013). Instead, this paper has explicitly prioritised an analysis of the temporal, by asking interviewees to reconstruct livelihoods pre-, during-, and post-migration.

Such an approach highlights the points of time where migrants are more or less free, precarious, and able to realise value. This section will focus on the temporality of migration from both economic and social frames. The core argument of this section is that migration is processual. Aspirations are not always concrete, precarity is not absolute, and structures are not total. Instead, they fluctuate across what I term the 'migrant lifecourse' (Ma, 2017b), which describes the temporal frames common to migrants, such as periods of preparation, arrival, achieving employment and social stability and, for some, permanent residence. This lifecourse is not necessarily linear, as migrants recall setbacks and catalysts. This section will retell some of those stories.

5.3.1 Temporality of Returns

As I walked into the HOME office at Peninsula Plaza one Sunday, one of the volunteers from the shelter was beaming. ‘How are you?’, I asked. ‘Good! I am finally going to court next week!’ The young lady, with whom I had scarce contact, had been locked in a protracted court case with her previous employer due to physical abuse. However, legal stipulations meant that she was unable to leave Singapore or work during legal proceedings, a regulation which activists have long lambasted as undermining the justice system for foreign workers. By the time we had any
meaningful interactions – she had shown me shocking photos of the cuts and bruises she endured – she had been staying at the HOME shelter for months. As I began to conduct interviews, I spent less time at Peninsula Plaza. Returning one Sunday after several weeks of absence, I was surprised that she was no longer there. When I asked other volunteers about her, she told me she had won her court case and had returned home to Myanmar.

Memo, February 2017

There is a strong temporality in how precarity and migrant narratives play out over time. For domestic and construction workers, the most precarious timeframe is during the initial move from Myanmar to Singapore. Precarity is front-loaded during the earliest stages of migration, when workers are most indebted, which lead to repercussions on their short- and medium-term freedoms. According to HOME, physical abuse, overwork, and wage non-payment were amongst the most common issues and the shelter received 17 such complaints every week (Myanmar Times, 2019). The memo cited above illustrates how these abuses are not only common, but also how they disturb the temporal trajectories of migration. ‘Migration’ does not simply entail the movement from one place to another, but workers often encounter disruptions along the way. For S Pass and Employment Pass workers, the initial migration is precarious but is generally undertaken quicker and with fewer constraints. The time lag between the decision to migrate and actual migration could range, as in S Pass and Employment Pass holders, from days and weeks, to the several months it takes construction workers to undergo vocational training. Time lags hinder value because the migrant is rendered economically unproductive during that time; the absence of income and the incurrence of debt means that precarity is additive across time and space.

Consequently, there is a temporal dimension to the realisation of value, the impacts of which are inherited across dependant networks. This is primarily attributable to debt repayments, but also miscellaneous expenditures associated with accommodation, travel, and administrative fees. Notably, higher debt burdens tend to be shouldered by those lower down the income spectrum. In turn, those workers are more likely to experience protracted repayment periods, during which their freedoms are constrained (Davidson, 2013). Brokerage structures time-delineated precarities; domestic workers will not see a positive return until at least 6 months into their migration.95 For the worker, the inability to remit translates into emotional as well as material stresses:

95 The modal salary deduction period is six months, but this is hopeful. Similarly, this does not take into account miscellaneous household debts and outgoings that must be repaid until there is a true net positive to household finances (see 6.2).
‘My mother kept saying everything’s fine but at that time, I knew that she had already used up all the three-month salary I sent beforehand which means money was tight for her. But my mother covered it up to make me less worried.’

(SG04)

Surprisingly, this thesis did not find deduction periods to have a major impact on household finances. Although spending was squeezed, households were generally able to plan ahead, provided deductions were transparent (see 5.2.1). As with pre-migration livelihoods, when income was an issue, borrowing was the most common coping strategy:

‘We had to purchase some money from friends and relatives. In this way, we coped the situations at that time when there was no remittance from my daughters.’

(MM04, Myo, DW, mother, 20 and 4 months)

Migrant and household freedoms are entwined and are likely to get worse before they get better, an important rebuff to atemporal accounts of ‘migration-led development’. Although only one-third of Work Permit holders and domestic workers surveyed incurred debts as a result of moving to Singapore, they also described the longest repayment period at an average of 13.7 months (see 5.1.1). This seemingly ubiquitous model of debt-financed migration means that the migrant, in effect, ‘mortgages’ her present to the future (Bastia and McGrath, 2011; Yeoh et al., 2017). Only when the ransom is paid off can the ‘future’ – the true project of migration – truly begin. For those who with household debts to repay, the future is delayed further still. ‘Net-positive’ returns rarely materialise quickly, and Work Permit, both domestic and ‘other’, interviewees cite a period of two to three years as the typical duration before they are able to accrue savings and for their household to feel financially secure (see 6.3.4). Entrance into the migratory field shapes the short- and medium-term lifecourse trajectories, but this uniformity tends to break down over time, both within and between worker groups.

First, though groups tend to have broadly similar experiences on entry, intra-group trajectories diverge dramatically over time. In Section 5.2.1, I revealed how domestic workers are disproportionately affected by shock, especially employment interruptions. This is vital because,

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96 This is likely a factor of Yangon-based interviews, where households tended to wealthier than households in rural regions.
97 Like worker interviews, Myanmar interviews are referenced to include the interview ID (MM04), the interviewee’s alias (Myo), migrant type (domestic worker), and the migration duration of the worker(s) (20 and 4 months).
98 31.8% of Work Permit holders said they had accrued debts. For S Pass workers, 31% said they had accrued debts, with a modal repayment period of 9.63 months. Employment Pass and domestic worker responses were omitted due to significant missing data.
for every shock, the worker incurs financial setbacks. For domestic workers, interruptions can be deleterious. Since debt is usually expressed in the number of monthly deductions rather than in absolute terms, shocks, in this temporal vocabulary, leads not so much to loss of income but a loss of time:

‘[Since arriving] I changed job for 5 times. The longest period I worked is 8 years, taking care of a grandma. So, for the first two years, I changed jobs 4 times… I had to pay 2-month salary every time I change job.’

(SG05, Thiri, DW, female, 44, 198 months)

The threat of instability, in turn, constrains agency; most consider it in their best interest to acquiesce if conditions are still tolerable, lest precarities compound (Davidson, 2013). Mya, for example, was employed to look after an elderly woman who only spoke Hokkien, a Chinese dialect. The language barrier proved grating and Mya was dismissed as a result:

‘I am in between job and staying at HOME shelter after some disputes with the previous employer… The money I can send back to Myanmar [when I was working] was a lot more. Sometimes I regret having disputes with my employers at a timing like this.’

(SG03)

Wee et al. (2018) describe these experiences as a game of ‘chutes and ladders’; workers encounter mechanisms to both enhance and hinder their migratory project and value returns at various points in time. In this frame, interruptions re-expose the worker to risks associated with brokerage and uncertainty. The chute is of indeterminate length; mundane descents might include loss of income due to maintenance fees, whereas in extreme cases workers may find themselves without an employer and subject to repatriation. Although Wee et al. (2018) rejects the notion that migratory shocks are truly random, but are instead structured, the gameboard metaphor nicely illustrates how migrants encounter risks over time. Importantly, risks can convert to shocks, which conspire to undo various elements of progress, whether it is financial or employment stability, or even legal certainty. Domestic workers are often conceptualised as amongst the most ‘vulnerable’ workers in terms of their susceptibility to physical, mental, and labour abuse (Wessels, 2015), but experiential differences are largely unforeseeable; precarity is not total and some have forged long and amicable relationships with their employers. For some, stability only came after significant turbulence. The inherent precarity of low-income migration means that uncertainty reigns. We can identify the drivers of chutes, but we haven’t the luxury of foresight. Instead, the components of the game materialise in real-time, according to changing market, regulatory, and social dynamics. In turn, there is no single migrant ‘story’.
At the aggregate level, the unequal distribution of chutes and ladders, economic opportunities, and structural limitations means that workers in low-income groups tend to stay there. The key difference between low- and high-income workers is the former’s continued exposure to precarity throughout the migrant lifecourse, whereas the latter are more secure. In turn, this exacerbates inter-group inequality as group social mobilities diverge. Across all workers, there is a mild correlation between the duration of stay in Singapore and average monthly wages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration in Singapore (months)</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearser Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td></td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current monthly income (S$)</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.5: Pearson correlation, migration length and monthly income**

This correlation is strongest amongst S Pass workers and weakest amongst domestic workers.99 Social mobilities for domestic workers are circumscribed by poor sectoral mobility and few opportunities to develop marketable skills (Raghuram, 2008). Conversely Work Permit jobs tend to involve different levels of seniority, allowing greater wage development over time, evidenced in the statistical variance of wages (see Table 4.1):

'I have more responsibilities as I stay longer… They trust me with the job and no engineer is involved in the projects I lead. Different from when I first got here is that I can do whatever I prefer instead of just following people’s order.'

(SG26)

For S Pass and Employment Pass workers, there is significant scope for wage development as well as job mobility. The combination of transferrable skills and recognised professional experience means that economic opportunities are more plentiful and accessible. As Win, a former IT entrepreneur who now works in banking technology explains:

‘[Previously] I was working with IT and programming things; I had a business in software. I sold my consultancy and support. Now I’m doing pretty much the same.’

(SG31, Win, EP, male, 42, 108 months)

To return to the gamified metaphor, there are simply more ladders and fewer chutes for high-income workers. Social mobility pathways diverge over time because skilled workers have fewer barriers to entry to different parts of the labour market, greater exit opportunities between jobs, and more portable skills. Nonetheless, social mobility is not the preserve of the privileged; behaviours and aspirations are temporally dynamic and as Thant, a construction worker, explains, there is a temporal dimension to social mobility as initial priorities give way to new ones over time:

‘I had salary increase in my first company. But I am quite footloose. I do not want to stay in one place for too long. So, I kept changing jobs.’

(SG34, Thant, WPO, male, 39, 108 months)

Thant’s description of being ‘footloose’ challenges the notion that low-income migrants are passively immobilised, instead Thant has constantly sought out more lucrative opportunities. Similarly, although domestic work is constrained by visa limitations, employer-tied agreements, and poor career development, some have sought to enhance social mobility through the acquisition of vocational skills during their rest days (Ma, 2017b). Historically provided by migrant NGOs, private accredited learning centres targeted at foreign workers are also growing rapidly, offering migrants new ladders into more desirable jobs. Such courses are often aimed at domestic workers, and a growing niche in Singapore is caregiving work (Yeoh and Huang, 2009).\(^{100}\) Within interviews, two former domestic workers had taken classes at HOME and had become caregivers, which offers superior salaries, better working conditions, and greater stability.\(^{101}\)

This reveals the tendency for individuals to recalibrate their practices, aspirations, narratives, and priorities across the migratory lifecourse. A common critique of Bourdieu’s practice theory is its alleged structural determinism (Wacquant, 1989; Yang, 2014). To an extent, these limitations are shared with classical migration models that conceive of a static migratory goal: to generate and send remittances (see 2.1). Instead, there is an implicit temporality in the migrant

\(^{100}\) Although vocational training courses are available for male Work Permit holders, anecdotal evidence suggests these are less popular.

\(^{101}\) The two interviewees were paid around 80% more than their previous job. Although working tasks tend to be more delineated, caregivers are not designated as a distinct occupation from domestic workers and are thus employed under a standard Work Permit (Domestic) visa.
vernacular as interviewees compartmentalise time, differentiating between precarious times of arrival and debt bondage, and more aspirational, if elusive, times of stability and accumulation (Ma, 2017b). In everyday conversation the former is often vernacularized as ‘last time’, as if to delineate a new, hopeful time – the ‘future’ – where aspirations can be pursued (ibid.). It is during this time that we find a more dynamic economy of practices; although migrants remain precarious, their relationship with the field has changed, and the institutions, capitals, and agents that inform practice have shifted.

For Thant and the caregivers, their social mobility emerged from new priorities and desires to break away from low-paying jobs. Although chutes remain, workers also acquire powerful means to mitigate against precarity. For Thant, it was his close-knit group of friends whom he relied on for mentorship and support. For the former domestic workers, it was greater access to information:

‘I was not aware of these caregiver courses due to the lack of access to mobile phones. After working for more than four years, I learnt about these various courses.’

(SG05)

In this temporal frame, ‘value’ is not restricted to the migrant’s labour, but also her non-economic accumulation. First, social capital is invaluable for workers’ emotional and economic wellbeing and tend only to accumulate after the migrant is freer post-debt bondage. On the one hand, it provides migrants with opportunities for greater social participation. On the other hand, social networks, as Thiri testifies, are also key sources of information that expand migrants’ obtainable resources. Second, aspirations of self-development are particularly prevalent amongst domestic workers, often premised on ideas around obtaining modernity – to ‘improve’ oneself (Ma, 2017b). Over time, migration, whether by accident or circumstance, becomes a project of social and cultural accumulation, as much as economic. Finally, at the beginning of this chapter, I argued for a tracing of value as economic capital in-the-making. Over time, we see how migrants’ value can increase as her social and cultural portfolio expands. Moreover, though economic capital is the ‘root of all the other types of capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 252), we also see how migrants strive to accumulate non-economic capitals over time, which requires at least a partial abandonment of material necessity as the motivation referent for continued migration (see 6.2.1). This reconfiguration of priorities is accompanied by, and perhaps premised on, the loosening of the shackles of debt-bondage and precarity, allowing migrants to pursue broader self-defined aspirations, which may or may not have as its primary purpose economic ‘productivity’.

Mapping the migratory lifecourse does not aspire towards universalism; ‘progress’, as the previous chapter demonstrates, is understood differently across groups. Moreover, even as workers enjoy greater freedoms, they are not exempt from stochastic precarity and migration
shock. Instead, time sees greater degrees of agency unfolding within constraints (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011). Dispositions change and, for many, the narrative of generating income diversifies to include other considerations. This also helps explain intra-group differences and why social mobility is not equally accessible or pursued by all. Where Thant displayed a strong conviction to maximise his wages, this is a path seldom taken. Employment stability, especially for low-income workers, is a premium in an otherwise precarious migratory regime and workers are rightfully apprehensive about gambling it away (Ma, 2017b). In the absence of major employment issues, most workers value stability:

‘[My employer] treats me as a family member… They are good to me and I also serve them with my best. If they were not good to me, I don’t think I would stay this long. The owner of the first house was really bad.’

(SG17)

‘The boss is really nice and that’s why I am staying here this long. We have Sundays off, and we get paid even though it is a holiday. I don’t think I will move to any other company.’

(SG28, Thaw, WPO, male, 30, 96 months)

Migration is a profoundly human process. Where the preceding sections and chapter have emphasised migrant economic orientations, it is during stable times that we see more considered and diverse meditations on migration unfurl. In the absence of debt burdens, employment interruptions, and acute household survival needs, the economic imperative loosens and the dogged ambition to earn yields declining returns. Indeed, changes in priorities not only reflect changes within migratory timeframes, but of one’s lifecourse more generally:

‘We are [aged] 40 plus. Because we have a kid, we cannot look for a job that’s very challenging, where we have to work until 10pm or something. That’s why I’m not working on Saturday or Sunday, this is not possible because of our kid, we have to take care of him… When we came here, within one month we have to look a job, so we cannot delay, ask for higher pay, cannot find a good environment, we have no choice. So, whatever we get we just take it. Then if we get more experience, we slowly look for a better job’

(SG21)

Tint’s response encapsulates the typical trajectory of migrant priorities and practices. For the newly arrived, the imperative to find a job (or for brokered migrants, to repay debts) is compelled
by urgent financial and legal requirements and having ‘no choice’. Over time, professional experience, social networks, financial security, and livelihood demands compile to inform a different set of priorities. For Tint, fatherhood meant he shied away from jobs with long working hours, allowing him to spend more time with his family, even at the expense of higher income. For others, it might be to prioritise relationships, even if at the expense of wage mobility. What these testimonies demonstrate are that migrants are not always value maximisers (Ma, 2017b), and priorities are temporally dynamic. If the primary driver of migration is to maximise economic returns, it is during later timeframes that secondary, more malleable priorities emerge as self-defined meanings of ‘success’ are reworked.

5.4 Conclusion

Labour migration from Myanmar has grown in recent years, accompanied by an increase in academic and policy interest in the country. This is driven, in part, by the scale of these movements, but also greater recognition of the constrained livelihoods that Burmese face at home, which has necessitated varying degrees of mobility both within and outside of Myanmar (LIFT, 2016a). Nonetheless, to migrate is not to simply move from one place to another. Instead, one becomes entangled within complex social systems where different powers and interests intersect. The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the key structures and stakeholders involved in enabling migration, what it entails in practice, and it is experienced over time. This addresses research question three by examining how variations in the migration process shape outcomes. Structural configurations of mobility are varied, and individuals do not move through the same means. Specific pathways and means of entry into Singapore, to a large extent, structures the rest of migrants’ journeys and their relative exposure to precarity. Individuals’ positions within the Myanmar-Singapore field are informed by their pre-migration resources, but also regulatory and market instruments that promote particular path dependencies in terms of debt, precarity, and social mobility. Migration is thus an interplay between social relations, migration regimes, agency, and temporality, which render its relationship with development problematic.

First, the notion that workers can simply migrate their way out of poverty seems naively optimistic. In aggregate terms, migration affords a major income boost for workers. Nonetheless, uncertainties around labour protections and rights, especially amongst low-skilled migrants, mean the benefits of higher income and remittances must be weighed against new relational structures of exploitation and precarity created through migration (Wise, 2015). These themes have been discussed in broader conversations around precarity as both a corporeal, experiential state (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008; Killias, 2010; Sobieszczyk, 2000), but also as a system of social and economic relations (Standing, 2011; Siegmann and Schiphorst, 2016; Paret and Gleeson, 2016). Importantly, precarity is not just an aberration of the labour market but represents the fundamental mechanics of how contemporary migration regimes work to extract
value from workers (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008; Wise, 2015; Lewis et al., 2015). Although authors note a waning optimism within nexus research (de Haas, 2012), greater access to a hitherto secretive regime has renewed interest in leveraging Burmese labour migration for development. The World Bank has been leading this charge. Within a flagship report on migration in Southeast Asia, analyses on the key barriers to migration rested primarily on cost, and restrictive labour market and destination country policies. Accordingly, recommendations centre upon the need to improve governance, deepen collaboration, and ‘balance protections for migrant workers with the needs of economic development (Testaverde et al., 2017: 25).

Though valid, these arguments miss how precarity hinders economic returns, especially within specific gendered pathways and industries (Waite, 2009). Moreover, the nominal objective of ‘development’ is problematic since ‘protection’ and ‘economic development’ seem to be cast in diametrically opposed terms. The implicit assumption that there must be a trade-off raises the urgent, if uncomfortable, questions: first, whose development are we talking about (Raghuram, 2009)? And second, is it possible to have equitable development? While women in domestic work are perhaps in the greatest need of ‘development’ (see 4.2.1 and 6.2), they are also among the most precarious and constrained due to protection deficits (Schierup et al., 2014). Though migration is welcomed as development policy, there is a general reluctance to accept, or recognise, the precarities that it entails. The rhetoric of ‘balancing’ migrant protection with economic development without due diligence on intersecting axes of precarity, notably gender, renders the former something of a hollow promise (Bastia, 2014). In the context of the domestic and construction industries in Singapore, it would appear that the value returns sway towards economic development in general, and Singapore’s social and environmental reproduction in particular (Yeoh, 2006). Given that the idea that one can ‘migrate out of poverty’ still permeates, the legitimacy of the nexus rests on clarifying these relationships (Bastia, 2013).

Second, analyses of precarity have coincided with intense scrutiny of brokers and intermediaries within the migration process (see Lindquist et al., 2012). An analysis of brokerage is critical because it is primarily with the assistance of brokers that workers are able to migrate in the first place. This chapter has demonstrated how migration is rooted in profoundly social, rather than economic, relations. In social terms, networks can facilitate the attainment of economic opportunities. However, the sociality of brokerage also enables opacity; the mystification of the social field enables opportunistic profiteering from agents across the migration chain (LeBaron, 2014). In economic terms, costs are inflated, and migrants’ value returns are eroded. Though brokerage is not always negative – some interviewees report successful relationships with brokers – the social field is nonetheless configured in a way that disproportionately exposes migrants to exploitation. The state is complicit in structuring these precarities; in Singapore, enforcement of migration regulations is delegated to employers and employment agencies. In Myanmar, gendered mobility restrictions and an absence of migration policy has left migrants without protection. What this chapter reveals, and which policy and research has been reluctant
to fathom, is the possibility that migrant interests are currently incompatible with the interests of the state and market.

Third, migration is not a discontinuous state, but an ongoing, contingent, and dynamic process. This thesis’s ambition is to trace remittances across space. Equally important, however, is how migration practices and experiences develop over time. This is not only relevant for more targeted policy interventions, but there is also a growing recognition of the role of temporally-mediated debt, and how this impacts migrant freedom and ambitions for ‘development’ (Deshingkar, 2018; Platt et al., 2016; Davidson, 2013). There are predictable temporal frames when workers are more or less able to realise value returns, which affect the material wellbeing of her dependants. For low-income workers, time is a particularly powerful mediator of precarity and returns due to their disproportionate reliance on debt-financed migration and exposure to employment-related shocks. More generally, the motivational reference for migration which, at first, is primarily economically-defined, might give way to more diverse meditations on non-economic goals. Though low-income workers, especially domestic workers, abide by more predictable temporal trajectories, ruptures are possible. Though the most predictable timeframes of precarity are upon entry, trajectories tend to splinter thereafter. In the previous section I describe group experiences in terms of the ‘migrant lifecourse’, however such temporalities are not linear, and the migratory project is never complete. Instead, this chapter has demonstrated how experiences are an amalgam of social and structural processes that produce an unstable gameboard of contingent, self-defined accumulation (Wee et al., 2018). Agency changes and dynamic structural realities differently hinder or enhance migrants’ capacities to achieve their goals.

The next chapter looks at the final stage of the migration–remittance chain: households in Yangon, Myanmar. I focus on how money is transferred from Singapore to Myanmar, and how remittances are managed and distributed to particular ends at both the household and communal-level. Several themes are recurrent: temporality of practices, social structures, and precarity. This resonance it not entirely coincidental, but rather indicates the synchronicity between migrant trajectories and the household. Indeed, although these analytical chapters reflect a broader ‘follow-the-thing’ methodology, they also evidence path dependencies: workers who migrate a certain way are likely to experience particular issues, which in turn drive predictable outcomes at the household level. It is this internal logic that this paper hopes to reveal; the final empirical chapter will trace remittances back to the hands of recipients to complete the narrative arc of migration, remittances, and development. By combining sequenced findings from pre-migration, during migration, and post-migration stories, we are better placed to explain why outcomes are the way they are.
6. Follow the Money: A Genealogy of Remittances

At its core, the migration-development nexus is interested in the impacts of remittances. Although nexus sentiments remain optimistic, there are increasing discursive and empirical concessions around what remittances can and cannot do. The realisation that migration is generally too limited in magnitude to independently set in motion processes of structural reform and social transformation also known as “development” is a rude awakening in otherwise hopeful debates (de Haas, 2012: 19). This chapter analyses the relationship between migration and ‘development’ at the final stage of this remittance tracing exercise – recipient households – to answer research question four: what are the impacts of remittances on households? For Carling (2009: 584), remittance practices are underwritten by ‘profound contextual differences’, including ‘migration dynamics, the nature of families and households, and the norms and values relating to migration and remittances’. Where the preceding chapters looked at pre-migration livelihoods and processes of migration, this chapter closes the narrative arc by assessing remittance impacts as grounded in social history. In doing so, I not only describe their impacts, but also to explain how they came to be. Although much work has been done on remittances in-kind (Parreñas, 2008; Camposano, 2012; McKay, 2012), this chapter will solely focus on monetary remittances even if, as I will explore, remittances carry extra-economic meanings and value. Returning to the core arguments set out in the literature review, I examine how motivations to ‘support’ translate into practice, giving voice to emic visions of development to see whether they are consistent with the rhetoric of the broader nexus orthodoxy. This chapter argues that current nexus thinking fails to explain the remittance-development relationship because analyses are abstracted away from the structural and social contexts in which they are produced, mediated, and consumed. By prefacing this discussion with analyses of pre-migration contexts, group dynamics, migration processes, precarity, and temporality, findings from this chapter must be understood as products of agential-structural interactions that vary over time. This chapter finds that remittances have a positive impact on households. Recipients have greater latitude to spend on a day-to-day basis but are also more able to cope with shock expenditures and debt obligations. However, there are important caveats.

First, remittance impacts are not durable, but tied to the migrant’s ability to sustain value creation in Singapore on the one hand, and the household’s ability to accrue meaningful savings and durable investments on the other. To a large extent, this is hindered by deficiencies in social protection that see remittances disproportionately spent on health, eldercare, education, and debt repayments. Though remittances raise households’ capacity to consume and alleviate some of their ‘worries’, they are not able to address the underlying structures of precarity that, in many cases, engendered migration in the first place. Newfound resources are superimposed onto existing livelihood structures and do not alter those structures to any significant extent for the majority of interviewed households. ‘Shocks’ are not shocking, merely unanticipated eventualities of the precarious status quo. To this end, temporality plays a large role in
understanding the migration-development relationship as remittance receipts, savings, investments, shocks, and expenditures lack defined linearity. Instead, uncertainty looms large.

Second, remittances are as much social and cultural capitals as they are economic. Accordingly, ‘development’ is not pursued as a distinct, coherent objective. As with livelihoods, remittances are also superimposed onto existing cultural and household structures, which engender defined logics of distribution and management which may be more or less durable. Though narratives around filial piety are enduring, consumption tastes and family formations are not. Similarly, household politics obscure how the obligation to remit might undermine migrants’ agency. On the one hand, remittances are not abstract economic flows, but are bundled with culture and ingrained habits, some of which counter the normative aims of developing individuals’ freedoms (Sen, 1999). On the other hand, the beneficiary of ‘development’ may change over time as migrants start families of their own. The relationship between remittances and development is tenuous not only because of material uncertainties but because of its discursive framing: recipients do not understand ‘development’ in the same vocabulary, not everyone is united in a common mission to ‘develop’, and for some, remitting is an end in itself. Instead of exceptional flows to be ‘leveraged’, remittances are received as rather mundane resources. As a result, much of the assumed dichotomies – formal versus informal, productive versus unproductive – are no longer analytically useful. Similarly, ambitions to financialise is thus unlikely to see meaningful uptake in the short-term as households are yet to be convinced by the value proposition of formalisation and financialisation, and this is reflected in respondents’ persistent preference for informal transfers and services.

Finally, the sociality of remittances means that their effects also diffuse into other arenas of exchange. Notably, this study finds remittances to be an important source of support for hometown associations and religious organisations, which perform important risk sharing functions (Mercer et al., 2009). In addition to filial piety, donations and religiosity are perhaps the strongest pillars of the Burmese habitus. Findings demonstrate how local solidarity provides an important social safety net in lieu of state intervention, and how remittances might strengthen these relationships. This will be an important field of enquiry in future research.

The rest of the chapter will analyse how remittances are sent, distributed, and consumed by migrants and households. First, I provide an analysis of informal remittance mechanisms and how the sociality of remittances impacts policy aims to formalise and ‘leverage’ remittances for development. Second, I explore how remittances are used on a day-to-day basis, the consumption habits of different households, and how remittances are used to guard against shock expenditures, especially health-related shocks. Third, I examine the household as a site of distribution, performance and politics. Specifically, I pay attention to sociocultural scripts of filial piety and how these underpin the obligation to remit and support, but also how these lead to particular household power geometries. In doing so, we are better attuned to the qualitative factors of remittance management practices, and the ends these serve. Nonetheless, I remain
attentive to the possibility of structural change and how the migrant household encounters
diffe...section then looks at the place of savings, investments, and donations in day-to-day remittance
tion of practice. I end on a reflection of how these findings relate back to broader debates around
the relationship between migration and development, paying attention to debates around
precarity and practices.

6.1. The Mechanics of Remittance Distribution

A man and his associate pulled up to the entrance to the lobby in a white pick-up truck. He spent
a moment or two retrieving large bricks of cash from the glove box of the beat-up Toyota,
stopping occasionally to count, albeit with worrying nonchalance. As he emerged from the
vehicle, he took a thick ledger with him, barging into the building with an air of authority. ‘You
Alex?’ he asked in an unplaceable accent. ‘Yes’, I replied. He jabbed a ballpoint against his chest,
against which a thin gold chain rested. ‘Sign here’, he ordered. I squiggled something illegible in
the book, which heaved with signatures from his other customers. Before I even thought about
counting the money, the men had left, ledger swinging in hand, wading through the puddles that
had formed from last night’s rain. I was left bereft with two stacks of notes that filled a small
shopping bag.

Memo, 29/06/2017

I had run out of money. Forgetting that my B&B did not take card payments, I found myself
cashless after handing over most of my kyats upon arrival. Knowing I would incur a multitude of
fees, I decided against withdrawing money from an ATM. Instead, I decided to send myself
money from Singapore. I asked an acquaintance whether I could send S$1,000 to his Singapore
account and for him to remit the same amount to me in Myanmar. He agreed and, a name,
address, telephone number, and one day later, my money was delivered to me; I didn’t even
need to leave the house. Quite by accident, I had gained first-hand experience of the hundi
system, the remittance method of choice used by 87.6% of my survey respondents (Table 6.1).
In order to understand how money gets from the pockets of workers in Singapore to the hands
of recipients in Myanmar, this section examines the transactional process of remitting and how
the method of transfer impacts upon broader projects of migration and development.

Empirically, hundi straddles the divide between the economic and social, formal and informal,
and thus cannot be said to constitute a straightforward financial transfer. This complexity is
important as development policy strives towards formalisation (Hudson, 2008). Ambitions for
establishing formal remittance channels, the ‘deepening’ of financial services, and the expansion
of market-oriented policies (Zapata, 2013; Cross, 2015; Kunz, 2011), is unlikely to take root
without understanding how current transfer systems work. As Figure 6.2 illustrates, Hundi is less
a financial instrument than it is a social formation, comprising complex transnational social and commercial relationships. These transactions are held together relationships between businessowners and migrants, business partners and traders, and the dispensing agent and the recipient. The sociality of *hundi* means that practices are relatively durable and resistant to change (Bourdieu, 1990). Transfers are processed through telephone calls, hand-written notes, and cash-in-hand transactions. Documentation, as Figure 6.1 shows, is minimal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shop Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sender:</strong> Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyat TRF: 550,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG$ Amnt: 482.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US$ Amnt: 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiver: Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC/Ph/Addr: Address</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.1: Hundi Transaction Receipt**

The sociality of *hundi* means transfers are based on trust, and migrants do not think or behave in the transactional terms assumed by financialisation advocates. Where nexus literature generally focus on remittance flows – as in volumes and frequencies – analyses are generally interested in ‘correcting’ market aberrations: to formalise services, introduce competition, and to drive down costs (Cross, 2015; Hudson, 2008; Ratha, 2007). In turn, these studies offer little insight into why there is a preference for ‘informal’ transfers. Instead, a mapping of *hundi* transfers satisfies this thesis’s theoretical ambitions for a follow-the-thing methodology and allows us to understand practices on migrant-defined, emic terms.

Informal remittances, which account for the majority of global and Myanmar-Singapore transfers are seen as less productive and less secure (Cross, 2015). On the one hand, the potential of remittances is more likely to be squandered because they fall outside of financial markets where, proponents argue, they can be leveraged to spur growth and development (Hudson, 2008). On the other hand, a post-9/11 security agenda has seen increasing control over capital flows due to anti-money laundering measures (Atia, 2016). Myanmar was outside both agendas until 2012, financial sector reforms permitted the establishment of private bank branches overseas in recognition of Burmese remittance demand (Htwe, 2015). Concurrently, transfer operators (MTOs) such as Western Union and MoneyGram also began to introduce inward remittance services to commercial customers (Lay, 2012). Regional integration also means the Singapore Dollar is now legally accepted as a foreign currency deposit in Myanmar (Turnell, 2014). Moreover, the exchange rate was liberalised to foster economic transparency and formal

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102 This receipt is recreated from a real transaction obtained from a participant.
transfers (Turnell, 2014; Kubo, 2013). Despite these dramatic changes, the Myanmar-Singapore corridor is still dominated by *hundi* transfers.

Table 6.1: Remittance method by migrant visa category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remittance method</th>
<th>DW</th>
<th>WPO</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friend</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hundi</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bank</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Union/ MoneyGram</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.2: Hundi remittance transfer system

*Hundi* is an informal method of remitting that is commonly used in South Asia. Transfers are based on trust, relying on a complex network of IOUs. *Hundi* is prevalent in Myanmar not only due to its roots in traditional value exchange, but also because of foreign currency crackdowns during the military regime, which limited imports. During this time, *hundi* transfers from overseas workers became an important source of foreign currency. A typical *hundi* transfer involves four parties: the sender and broker in Singapore, the dispensing agent in Myanmar, and the recipient:

![Diagram of Hundi remittance transfer system]

Throughout this thesis, I trace value rather than remittances. This is apt; under *hundi*, money does not physically cross borders. Rather, *hundi* transfers work by creating liabilities elsewhere. First, the migrant hands her wages to an agent in Peninsula Plaza, providing the recipient’s name, address, contact details and an transfer fee. In the survey, the modal fee was S$3. The agent then instructs the agent in Myanmar to pay out the equivalent in Myanmar Kyat. For urban areas, the cash can be delivered to the recipient’s home for free. Elsewhere, a small delivery fee is levied. Otherwise, the recipient can also pick up the funds herself. The entire transfer takes 1-2 days. The speed of the transaction is made possible due to the fact that money does not change hands; the *hundi* instructs the agent (via phone) to pay out a certain amount without first transferring any money to the agent. Instead, the *hundi* can repay the agent by paying for imports using Singapore Dollars the agent otherwise has no access to. At other times, the *hundi* and the agent are the same business entity and profits from currency trading and manipulation.

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103 Previously pegged to the US dollar without adjustment since 1977, the Kyat was moved to a market float in April 2012. As Kubo (2013: 460) explains, prior to the reform, ‘the official exchange rate was pegged at 8.50847 kyat per [US Dollar]... and did not change for over 30 years’. Consequently, an erratic black market for foreign currency soon developed.

104 At the time of the survey, these were the only two major commercial, non-bank money-sending services operating in the Myanmar market.
### Table 6.2: Remittance recipient by migrant visa category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>DW</th>
<th>WPO</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>364</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yourself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Visa</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>413</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Across all respondents, *hundi* dominates the demand for remittance transfers (Table 6.1). Although uptake has likely increased since the time of the survey, penetration of bank transfers remains minimal.\(^{105}\) This reflects a preference for particular services. The majority of interviewees considered *hundi* to be superior to bank transfers because they are cheaper, faster, and more convenient (Freund and Spatafora, 2008; Ballard, 2005). Though bank usage is more prevalent amongst skilled workers and permanent residents, likely due to their greater access to, and familiarity of, financial services, respondents claim that bank fees and processing times are actually comparable to *hundi* agents. A perception gap exists between formal services and the majority who continue to prefer *hundi*. Where *hundi* does excel is in its geographical reach: banks are largely concentrated in urban centres and the rural peripheries are generally poorly serviced by banks.\(^{106}\) *Hundi*, in comparison, offers unparalleled capabilities in the delivery of remittances across Myanmar (Turnell et al., 2008). Beyond this, the popularity of *hundi* is premised on the social and cultural reliability of the service.

First, *hundi* agents tend to be more personable and culturally aware of the demands of both sender and recipient (Rahman and Yeoh, 2008). Over time, relationships with *hundi* agents slowly evolve into friendship, which confers benefits such as delivery speed and exchange rate negotiability during otherwise clinical transactions:

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\(^{105}\) Since the beginning of fieldwork, there have been attempts by the state and NGOs to bank migrant workers. In Singapore, the Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE) was founded in 2017 through the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) to provide domestic workers services such as telecoms, insurance, and financial services at preferential rates. Although this signals Singapore greater recognition of workers and commercial interests in entering an ‘untapped’ market, there is yet to be compelling evidence of significant uptake.

\(^{106}\) The IOM (2019) notes the relative formality of the Thai-Myanmar remittance corridor; 34% of remittances sent are through formal channels. This is unique and similar levels of penetration are not observed in the Singaporean sample.
‘With the agent, if I want to pay in MM tomorrow, they can arrange for us, but bank not like this. Transfer is transfer only. If agent you want faster or something, you can still talk to them. Exchange rates are also different. If we transfer money that is a little bit high, you can ask for a higher transfer rate. Let’s say S$1,000 they give you 950 [kyats to the dollar] or something, I want to transfer 20k, you can give me higher rate? 952, 953, something like that.’

(SG24, Kyi, SP, female, 31, 72 months)

In comparison, banks are considered socially sterile: where a ‘transfer is transfer only’. Moreover, though banks offer greater transparency, the memories of banking collapses in Myanmar are still fresh:

‘You cannot trust Burmese banks too much! We have experienced bankruptcy suddenly being declared, what to do!’

(SG21, Tint, SP, male, 36, group interview, 84-108 months)

Where hundi transfers are fulfilled by respected community members, the embeddedness of hundi within social systems confers trust. Similarly, face-to-face interactions with hundi agents offer, to some extent, peace of mind and accountability. Hundi thus reaffirms its popularity through social presence. In Singapore, I spoke with an employment agent who also ran a small hundi operation, allowing him to offer his clients a one-stop shop for all migration-remittance services. It is not without irony that policy aspirations of leveraging migration to foster financial deepening is already being achieved, albeit in the ‘wrong’ market.

Another factor research fails to take into account are recipients’ preferences. Across worker groups, the modal recipient of remittances are parents (see Table 6.2). Migrants are mindful of the convenience of hundi, who deliver money directly to the recipient, reducing the need for elderly parents to travel lengthy distances and endure wait times at the bank:

‘The [hundi] shop is very close to my house in Yangon. My father can even walk there. If it is through the bank, they will have to travel quite far to get there and it is not convenient for them.’

(SG09, Yin, DW, female, 30, 72 months).

Money-sending is not unilateral, and workers often evaluate whether service are appropriate for recipients. Indeed, it is common for workers to use different services when sending to different recipients; parents may prefer hundi, whereas spouses prefer bank transfers. Concurrently, the
distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ services is troublesome. Numerous respondents explain how hundi and banks are not mutually exclusive since money is often deposited into the recipient’s Burmese bank account:

‘She sends the money with the agent there. They deliver the money straight to our house here... Sometimes, it is transferred through the bank. Transferring with the bank has to go through the agent as well. In that case, we have to withdraw the money from the bank.’

(MM02, Nyein, DW, sister, 120 months)

These findings complicate otherwise optimistic visions of formalisation. Money-sending, like all practices, are underwritten by durable dispositions that are resistant to change (Turnell et al., 2008). In the absence of service failures, migrants are ambivalent about formal services. Indeed, until recently, there were few accessible remittance services available to low-income Burmese workers in Singapore.

There are important policy implications to these findings. First, informality does not denote migrants’ passive succumbing to a lack of available services. Rather, practices convey migrant and dependant needs and preferences, based on context-specific considerations such as geography, financial capability, and the mobility of the recipient. In addition to cost, preferences rest on qualitative appraisals of convenience, safety, and assurance; this thesis find remittance costs between formal and informal transfers to be similar (cf. Makina, 2012; Ambrosius and Cuecuecha, 2016; Kubo, 2015). Consequently, a dogmatic commitment to formalisation reduce choices available to migrants where the ‘amateur development apparatus’ of hundi has hitherto evaded the hegemony of market finance (Mercer et al., 2009: 143). The prescriptive tendency of nexus thinking, the import of market-oriented policies and, an increasingly securitised agenda obscure context-dependent demand for services, and subject migrants to structural violence under the rhetoric of ‘development’ (Kunz, 2011; Zapata, 2013).

In 2016, I reached out to the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) for comments on the persistence of hundi. A representative replied, ‘MAS regulates the remittance industry for anti-money laundering and the countering of the financing of terrorism’. Hundi appears caught in a regulatory no-man’s land, where it is tolerated by authorities owing to a lack of accessible alternatives (at least for now), but is increasingly threatened with legal action should they be caught:

107 Based on comparisons between hundi and private bank (KBZ, Yoma, and AYA) transaction and exchange rate fees in Myanmar.
Figure 6.3: Unlicensed money-changer warning post, Peninsula Plaza (06/10/16)

Around Peninsula Plaza were large posters that warn both owners and clients of ‘unlicensed money-changers and remittance agents’ against providing and using such services (Figure 6.3). In addition to the precarious conditions of migration, it appears the very returns to migration that nexus proponents seek to capture – remittances – are being rendered precarious. On the one hand, this increasingly structures migrant choices towards those endorsed by the market (Kunz, 2011). On the other hand, the discursive goalposts of what is the ‘right’ or ‘legitimate’ way to migrate, remit, and ‘develop’ are slowly narrowing (see 5.2.2). The idea that migrants are somehow ‘missing out’ on development because of the lack of financial services distracts away from broader structural issues that underwrite both migrant and household precarities (Naylor, 2011), as I discussed in previous chapters.

Second, the distinction between ‘formal’ versus ‘informal’ is overplayed, and this thesis casts doubts over whether such a distinction is analytically or practically useful. Extant studies typically classify remittances by their means of transfer at origin (Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit, 2009). This thesis finds such classifications to be problematic. Given constrained economic development in Myanmar (Charney, 2009), hundi agents are deeply entwined with commerce as businesses rely on hundi for foreign exchange (see Figure 6.2). As a result, it is common for hundi transfers to be deposited into a commercial bank account. As one interviewee alleged, it was only recently that hundi agents in Singapore stopped accepting bank transfers due to crackdowns on unlicensed moneychangers:
‘Last time, we can transfer online to the agent. Now, they will not allow. The agent account cannot allow a lot of money in one day so we will have to pay cash.’

(SG22, Maung, SP, male, 35, 108 months).

In an interview with a director at one of Myanmar’s largest private commercial banks, she proudly declared that her company is favoured by hundi agents to deposit and distribute large sums within Myanmar. When asked how she identifies hundi clients, she said that the bank can detect sizeable deposits and transfers to repeat locations and beneficiaries, which typify hundi operations. These testimonies point to the blurriness of ‘formality’. Rejected by empirical findings, the designation of hundi as ‘informal’ and thus illegitimate, dangerous, or subversive is a political statement that invites greater interrogation. The notion that remittances should be formalised is noble but is not instructive of how this should or could be achieved. In the case of Myanmar, where hundi is systemically entwined with commerce, true formalisation is infeasible.

Finally, as far as migrants are concerned, neither informal nor formal remittance methods are inherently superior. Although critics have attacked the alleged import of neoliberal market-centrism into policy (Zapata, 2011; Kunz, 2011; Hudson, 2008), this should not obscure real and growing preferences for bank services or the benefits they bring to users. Though no interviewee encountered issues with using hundi, the community is awash with stories of unscrupulous agents making off with tens of thousands of workers’ money. Accordingly, some have shifted towards using banks:

‘Using banks is safer. Because if [the agent] runs away, we cannot catch…
Police will not care, will not take action because [hundi] are illegal!’

(SG14, Htway, SP, male, 27, 60 months)

The key is not to romanticise either ‘formal’ or ‘informal’ transfers but to recognise diverse preferences (Pieterse, 1998). As de Haas (2012) notes, the majority of contemporary ‘efforts to link migration and development have focused on maximizing remittance transfers through legal channels. However, such policies do not address the larger issue of “contextuality” and will ultimately have very limited effects.’ (ibid.: 20). If the goal is to maximise migration-remittance returns for migrants and their dependants, then policy must preserve choice and leverage the scaffolds of existing social infrastructure to build trust and legitimacy in a context of mistrust (see 6.3.5; Griffiths, 2018a; Mangshang and Griffiths, 2018; McCarthy, 2017). Remittances represent habitual practices borne of ingrained preferences and structured choices. Though


\[108 \text{ Since hundi transfers are outside formal monetary regulations, users have no recourse to legal or monetary redress should transfers fail.}\]
important reforms have been implemented in Myanmar’s banking sector, the Myanmar-
Singapore remittance corridor has seen muted impacts. Policy must recognise the needs of
migrants and their dependants if interventions are to see any significant uptake. Manipulating
choice structures without due recognition of those ingrained preferences is likely to be
counterproductive.

6.2. Remittance Management

Once the money arrives, what happens to it? How is it spent, saved, or invested? This section
looks at how remittances are used and why. Beyond material necessity, there is a strong element
of class at play, where distinctive tastes are reflected in the preference for certain kinds of
expenditures. Disaggregating spending, we see a sort of path dependency in expenditures:
households that were poor pre-migration spend on the things that compelled migration, such as
groceries, debt repayments, health, and housing. Conversely, for better-off households, their
consumption is more varied because of their relative freedom from material constraints.

Nonetheless, there are some unifying factors amongst respondents. Economic conditions such
as inflation has squeezed household budgets. Structural precarities, manifest in health shocks
especially, are another drain on resources. Remittances, this section argues, allows households
to cope with some of their ‘worries’, the referent against which ‘progress’ is understood, rather
than eradicate them. As such, remittances, at least in the short-term, are unable to effect
‘development’.

6.2.1. Remittances and Expenditures

Migration is intimately tied with sending remittances: 92.4% of all survey respondents said they
sent money home regularly. By this thesis’s estimation, the Burmese diaspora in Singapore
remits S$1bn home annually which, at the time of fieldwork, equated to about US$765m,
US$100m more than Myanmar’s annual health budget during the same period (Htwe, 2017), and
just over half of the US$1.5bn Myanmar received in international aid in 2016 (World Bank.,
n.d.(a)). On a day-to-day basis, remittances are often the largest and most stable source of
income for many migrant households. Interviews suggest that, even with other earners in the
household, remittances typically outweigh the amount earnt by other members of the family,
except in cases where remittances serve tokenistic, rather than supportive, purposes (see 6.3).

109 ‘Regularly’ means at least once a year, though 86.8% of respondents sent money on a monthly basis. This excludes
PR (n=22). Including PRs, the regular remittance rate is 92.1%. Of those who did not send remittances, most wanted
to but were unable to do so due to migration debts. The prevalence of remittances is a function of the temporality of
responses.

110 This is a conservative estimate and is calculated by multiplying each migrant group’s average monthly remittances
by the estimated number of workers in each group (see 3.3). The figure is multiplied by 12, and then by 0.921 to
reflect the overall prevalence of remitting behaviour. This figure excludes PR remittances because of a lack of data
on their population. As the second largest remitter (see Table 6.3), total remittances from all Burmese nationals in
Singapore would likely be much higher.
Accordingly, remittance amounts vary more amongst S Pass and Employment Pass households, which may also be a result of greater variances in income (see Table 6.3), as well as differing levels of need and dependants to support:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa</th>
<th>Monthly income (S$)</th>
<th>Avg. Dependents</th>
<th>Average remittance pcm</th>
<th>Income-remit ratio(^{111})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td>Mean 507.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>367.0</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 164</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 75.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>176.1</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>Mean 1,088.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>640.4</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 58</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 644.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>496.8</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>Mean 2,802.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1,068.3</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 164</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 930.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>862.2</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pass</td>
<td>Mean 4,766.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1,661.9</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 1,873.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1,094.6</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
<td>Mean 5,030.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1,576.6</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 3,999.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2,218.9</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^{112})</td>
<td>Mean 7,900.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1,236.7</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 5,798.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>923.6</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean 1,919.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>806.1</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 429</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation 1,900.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>893.4</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average sent per month (S$)</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Current monthly income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average sent per month (S$)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.69**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current monthly income</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current monthly income</td>
<td>N 359</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3: Average income, number of dependants, and remittances by visa

Table 6.4: Pearson correlation: monthly remittances by monthly income

The size of remittances compared to local salaries means that remittances are drawn upon for myriad expenditures ranging from everyday food items to donations and home renovations. Across interviews, remittances are typically conceptualised as mundane resources to be drawn upon rather than a windfall that is exempt from the usual distributive patterns and politics of the

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\(^{111}\) Ratio of monthly income sent home. Computed from average monthly remittances divided by average monthly income.

\(^{112}\) ‘Others’ include those who have migrated to study.
According to remitting migrants, the three most frequent uses of remittances are associated with food, health, and charitable outgoings (Table 6.5). These findings are validated by households; interviewees cited food, utilities, medicines, school fees, and donations as their most frequent expenditures.¹¹³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DW</th>
<th>WPO</th>
<th>S Pass</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home improvements</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt repayment</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durable goods</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business development</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Visa</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5: Remittance expenditures by migrant category (multiple choice)¹¹⁴

Although it was not possible to quantify the absolute amounts spent on each category, findings reveal three key vectors of differential impacts across household groups. First, domestic worker remittances are more likely to be spent on housing and debt repayments compared to other workers. Moreover, domestic worker households are between two to four times more likely to have some form of household debt in the last 12 months than other households (Table 6.6):

¹¹³ Donations are defined as voluntary outgoings to a non-family third party for religious or charitable causes. In Myanmar, the primary recipients of donations are temples, monasteries, local community organisations (see 6.3.5), schools, and disaster relief organisations.

¹¹⁴ The survey did not ask for absolute amounts for each expenditure category, but the typical outgoings funded by remittances.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrant Category</th>
<th>Count Yes</th>
<th>Count No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pass</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
<td><strong>315</strong></td>
<td><strong>442</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.6: Prevalence of household debt in the last 12 months by migrant category

In Myo’s family, despite remittances from her two daughters working as domestic workers in Singapore, the household still relied on debt to pay for high school fees for her two grandchildren:

’60% of the remittances is use for repaying loans and the rest percentages for education and house rent.’

(MM04, Myo, DW, mother, 20 and 4 months)

Domestic worker families tend to be more precarious in terms of debt susceptibility and income sufficiency both pre- and post-migration. In the first instance, domestic workers earn the lowest wages but are also responsible for supporting the largest number of dependants (Table 6.3). In the second instance, domestic and Work Permit migrants are the most likely to be the sole breadwinner in their household (Table 6.7):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrant Category</th>
<th>Count Yes</th>
<th>Count No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pass</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>129</strong></td>
<td><strong>319</strong></td>
<td><strong>448</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.7: Prevalence of migrant as household sole breadwinner by migrant category
For Myo, her two daughters remit 7 lakhs per month (around S$700), which is used to support eight dependants.\(^{115}\) The broad dependant base amongst domestic worker households means that surplus is rare. This is counterintuitive, given wage differentials (see Chapter 5 introduction). However, domestic worker wage mobility is limited, and remittances often behave as a substitute, rather than a supplement, of local income (see Chami et al., 2003). This is usually because the left-behind are unable to work, either because they are too young or too old. This draws our attention to household lifecourses that render members more or less economically productive over time (cf. Section 5.3), and the prevalence of retired parents and children also alert us to the multiple obligations that remittances service. Remittances thus alleviate some material pressures, but this is dependent on the temporalities of migration (see 5.3.1), and the demographic and economic contexts of the household (see 4.2).

Second, although surveys demonstrate a similar proportion of respondents using their remittances for groceries, this obscures how expenditures are mediated in broader macroeconomic conditions. A strong theme to emerge from interviewees has to do with the impact of inflation on household budgets, especially on food expenditure. According to the Asia Development Bank (ADB) (n.d.), Myanmar’s inflation rate averaged 6.7% from 2015 to 2018, consistently ranking amongst the highest in Southeast Asia. Between July 2017 and 2018, Myanmar’s Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 7.6% (Lwin, 2018), falling from the 10-year peak of 14% in October 2015 (World Bank, 2016c).

![Figure 6.4: Neighbourhood rice and oil store in Yangon](image)

\(^{115}\) Lakh is a unit in the Indian numerical system, which is widely used in Myanmar. One lakh equals 100,000.
These factors affect how remittances are managed and spent. Low-income households are more vulnerable to inflation, as food represents the largest single expenditure for most households. For Nwe, whose daughter has been working in Singapore for seven years as a domestic worker, inflation has driven up her food expenditures, which account for about half of all spending:

‘I have to reduce the amount of food I buy... I have to calculate and buy things. Sometimes I just eat whatever I have. If the prices increase, I eat less. If the prices go down, I eat more.’

(MM06, Nwe, DW, mother, 84 months)

This is corroborated by Thwet’s family, one of the few Work Permit household respondents in Yangon:

‘[Prices] increase every month. The price of goods is getting higher as well... That’s why it is affecting our income. We have to spend carefully.’

(MM11, Thwet, WPO, wife, 144 months)

Though higher earners are not immune against inflation, impacts on expenditures do appear more muted; amounts received exceed expenditures and spending habits stem more from choice than price-sensitive necessity (Bourdieu, 1986). However, even higher income migrants can struggle to support large families; as above, the demographics of the family matters. Htay, for example, heads a house of eight, and describes how rising costs constrain nutritional choices:

‘When we cook food, it is normally enough for the morning, but for the evening, we experience some insufficiency. Since I am the father, I eat rice with only fish paste soup in that case... The elders do not complain. We care about the young ones.’

(MM15, Htay, SP/EP, father, 72 months)

Macro-economic environments temper remittance impacts. Although poorer households are more susceptible to inflationary pressures, exposure is more acute in urban centres. Moreover, pressures are a function of household demographics as food comprises the key expenditure affected by inflation.

Third, S Pass and Employment Pass households place greater emphasis on saving, investment, and leisure compared to low-income households, whose consumption is dominated by ‘essential’ expenditures (Wagle, 2016). In the first instance, these households tend to be better off pre-migration and are less reliant on remittances (see 4.2.2). In the second instance,
remittances received typically support fewer dependants, and are more likely to be surplus to requirement. Finally, S Pass and Employment Pass households tend to have greater exposure to urban and international tastes pre- and post-migration (Paerregaard, 2015; van Hear, 2014; Levitt, 1998). This produces both a disposition towards strategic ‘investment’ that development theorists recommend (Yang, 2008; Adams and Cuecuecha, 2013; Ratha, 2007), and a classed consumption of particular lifestyles.

In Bourdieusian terms, surplus capital affords households a departure from material necessity, informing practices that signal ‘an aesthetic indifference to the sensuous tasks of survival’ (Friedland, 2009: 892). Surplus is deliberately enjoyed as leisure, but which by itself does not preclude other ‘productive’ activities, such as ‘investment’. Migration both reflects and reworks class habitus towards different lifestyle demands. During one interview, Mon (from Chapter 4), lamented how inflation in Yangon undermines her preference for certain brands of food items and leisure spending:

‘You can get local Yangon milk, but if you want to go for Singaporean brands, then I don’t think it’s worth it. Here it’s S$4, but in Yangon I have to pay S$6-7. I have no choice, I have to go for the market milk. I can still survive with market milk, but if I want branded milk what can I do? I want some cheese, I want some wine, you know? To maintain my Singaporean lifestyle in Yangon is out of the question… If you go for Australian cheese, something like that, here also expensive, but at least I can afford it. I don’t need to think twice to buy one, but in Yangon I have to think twice.’

(SG16, Mon, SP, female, 36, 72 months).

Mon illustrates neatly the discursive underpinnings of ‘privileged’ migration, where the need to ‘survive’ is compartmentalised from broader ambitions of satisfying ‘want’ without the need to ‘think twice’. In a sense, this manifests as a different ‘worry’ that compelled migration in the first place (see Chapter 4). Visions of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ are differently narrated and not everyone has the same goals. Similarly, not all migrants share Mon’s taste. For low-wage workers, their practices ‘bespeak the coercive force of necessity’ (Friedland, 2009: 891), and structures a lasting disposition towards frugality. Even for ‘successful’ migrant households (see 6.3.4), memories of hardship deposit within them what Bourdieu (1984: 374) terms a ‘taste of necessity’. In turn, this shapes households’ ‘temporal consciousness’ of perceived future relationships with necessity, and particular spending patterns thereof (Atkinson, 2013). This is why ‘consumption practices’, as LeBaron (2005: 97-98) notes, ‘can vary significantly at the same level of revenue or wealth, showing the importance of lifestyles that relate to class living conditions through the mediation of class habitus’. Class manifests not only as a mediator of practice in the present, but also inform individuals’ readings of the future and the practices they
undertake to get there. Across this thesis’s analytical chapters, I have demonstrated how the past produces present and future. In the case of remittance management practices, although there is possibility of agential change, they largely reflect dispositions forged from migrants and households’ past dealings with necessity, precarity, and taste.

Amongst these differences are universals. Education is a frequent outgoing and again speaks to the need for demographically-sensitive analyses. For some, paying for education is a primary goal of migration and is intimately tied to notions of ‘success’ (for example Hoang et al., 2015). Though Myanmar provides free primary education, families are often burdened with miscellaneous fees. Expenditures become increasingly taxing in secondary and tertiary education. Even though there are patterns of relationship statuses across the sample – domestic and Work Permit workers are mostly single, whereas S Pass and Employment Pass workers are mostly married (see Table 4.1) – remittances often support the education of the broader family, especially nieces and nephews:

‘My younger brother has three children, but he passed away. I came here to earn money so that I can support them to attend school. I could not do that with the money I got from the shop.’

(SG12, Thura, DW, female, 35, 24 months)

Beyond planned, everyday outgoings, there are also larger expenditures that dominate the survey and interview sample, such as healthcare, business development, donations, and home improvements. It is to these expenditures that the next sections turn.

6.2.2. Household Shocks: Risk and Resilience

Beyond the everyday, remittances also define households’ responses to shock. As Chapter Four reveals, a recurrent source of precarity is health-related expenditure, which is near-ubiquitous across the data. Nearly half of all survey respondents said remittances were spent on healthcare-related outgoings (Table 6.5). Across interviewed households (n=26), all but two had incurred some form of major health-related expense in the last two years. Health expenditures are significant because of their prevalence, magnitude, and unpredictability. In the absence of social protections, Myanmar citizens face one of the highest out-of-pocket healthcare expenditures in the world; 74% of all healthcare provision in Myanmar is paid for privately (van Rooijen et al., 2018; Grundy et al., 2014; Latt et al., 2016). Across analytical chapters, a recurrent theme is that of debt, both incurred by the migrant and the household. Disaggregating the source of household debt, healthcare is the modal source of debt across all workers (Table 6.8):
Table 6.8: Source of household debt by migrant category

Healthcare is a financial burden that remittances cannot wholly guard against, as Phyo describes the morbid trade-offs between spending on health and the rest of the household:

‘Lately, [my son] has been sending me 5 lakhs per month… I have to spend it so that it will be enough. It was not enough when my father-in-law was alive because of his medicinal costs. I can say the amount is okay for us after he passed away.’

(MM26, Phyo, SP/EP, mother, 264 months)

When Phyo’s father-in-law was diagnosed with diabetes, remittances alone were insufficient to purchase medicine, requiring cutbacks in household spending. Acute shocks can be accompanied by chronic outgoings, as was the case of Thwe, who suffered a stroke about one year after his daughter left to work as a caregiver in Singapore:

‘I am still receiving the treatment now. [The initial treatment] cost about 20 to 25 lakhs. I buy the medicines first when I receive the money and it usually cost around 50,000 kyats.’

(MM09, Thwe, DW, father, 48 months)

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116 Agricultural cycle debt refers to borrowings used to fund production, subsistence, and cultivation across agricultural seasons.
117 Sudden income loss may include unemployment, crop failure, or loss of business.
118 Multiple response, frequencies sum beyond 100%. Survey did not capture the amount of debt in each category.
Remittance savings can buffer against shocks but are typically accessible only to households with significant savings which, as explained in Chapter Five, depends on the temporalities of migration (also 6.3.4). In the absence of savings, remittances provide limited assurance against larger shocks. Htay’s daughter, for example, has been working in Singapore as an engineer for six years. Leveraging those remittances, they were able to build a second house across the street to rent, saving the extra income for emergencies. When asked how their household would be affected by sudden expenditures, Htay responded:

‘If something like that really occurs, we have the money we saved for emergencies. [We have saved] about 14 to 15 lakhs. When my wife was hospitalized a while ago, we used that money as well.’

(MM15)

Healthcare needs, although common, are not universal. Although the sample here is too small to seek statistical verification, it does appear that healthier households tend to be more financially stable (Krishna, 2010). Indeed, as I explore later, it is the absence of shocks that allows households to build meaningful savings. For the less fortunate, health shocks can be financially devastating. On her father-in-law’s chronic liver disease, Hnin explains:

‘We did not have much money for cleaning the liver [dialysis]. We did it about 20 times. If we were able to continue doing it, he would have lived, but we could not afford that. Some people suggested that we should sell the house for the treatment, but he did not want to burden the family. It cost about 50,000 kyats for cleaning. Including medicine, it was about 100,000 kyats each time. Finally, he could not survive.’

(MM23, Hnin, SP/EP, mother, 84 months)

Hnin’s family experienced health crises on an almost annual basis. After her father-in-law passed away, Hnin was hospitalised and required blood transfusions, intestinal surgery, and tuberculosis treatment. Although her daughter had been working in Singapore for seven years as a nurse, Hnin’s family made comparatively modest returns. In Krishna’s (2010) exploration of poverty triggers in India, Uganda, Kenya, Peru and the US, he finds a strong correlation between poor health and household descents into poverty. Similarly, in Khaing et al.’s (2015) survey of households in Magway Region (n=700), the authors find that up to a quarter of households spent more than 40% of their annual non-food expenditures on health, primarily due to inpatient care. This resonates with interview findings; save for the highly financially secure, households invariably sold assets and borrowed to cope with shock, factors which often drove migration in the first place (see Chapter Four):
‘We [borrowed] money and overcome that problem. There was no support from the government and others healthcare services for us and we faced the problem by ourselves.’

(MM04)

Borrowing, for the majority of respondents, is thus rarely for ‘productive’ purposes (Guérin et al., 2012). Instead, they are usually used to smooth consumption during shocks (Rammohan and Pritchard, 2014), given the conspicuous absence of state-provided social protections (see 4.3 and 6.3.5). For Nant, two of his daughters had been working in Singapore as domestic workers for six years. Although one recently returned to study, Nant recalls a series of healthcare shocks in the last two years:

‘Around the time when my wife gave birth, my son got injured on the nose. I treated my son at Asia Taw Win [a private hospital] and it cost more than 4 lakhs. I also had a motorcycle accident. It cost about 5 lakhs for treatment and everything else. All of this happened in two years, but if anything happens here, my daughter sends us money.’

(MM08, Nant, DW, father, 72 months)

For Krishna (2010), households are often ‘one illness away’ from descent into poverty, a bind he illustrates as game of probability (see also Khaing et al., 2015). Though remittances are not revolutionary, they are economically remedial and stabilising, and households reported being and feeling more financially resilient.

First, even if remittances cannot fully negate shocks, households still have more resources to leverage and to service debts; remittances themselves can be collateralised to better raise funds (cf. Ketkar and Ratha, 2011):

‘Now that my daughter is working there, I can borrow money when I do not have it and pay back after my daughter receives her salary at the end of the month. The financial situation is better now.’

(MM06)

Households are ‘better off’ with remittances, even if they are no panacea; for most, the ‘insurance’ they provide is partial (cf. Stark and Bloom, 1985). For households like Hnin’s, recurrent health emergencies push beyond what remittances from one family member can feasibly provide. Though households are more materially secure, without adequate social
protections, remittances are simply sunk into critical expenditures with limited capacity for accumulation in the short- and medium-term.

Second, remittance amounts can be dynamic and both migrants and households report sending and receiving larger sums during shocks (Yang and Choi, 2007; Lim and Morshed, 2015). Transnational household strategies mean that ‘savings’ are rather nebulous; some migrants opt to save money in Singapore whereas remittances may also be saved by parents in anticipation of their children’s return (see 6.3.4), offering a third layer of financial protection during shock. There are ‘pots’ of money that complicate the straightforward tracing of capital, as Lay’s experience show:

‘If there’s a health problem for my son, my husband used to send the money back to us.’

(MM21, Lay, SP/EP, wife, 120 months)

Again, this should be read as a function of the conditions of employment of different worker groups. For the average domestic worker who sends 72% of her monthly income home (see Table 6.3), her capacity as a buffer is exhausted. Conversely, S Pass and Employment Pass workers enjoy a larger savings margin with which to mitigate shocks.

Finally, the relationship between remittance and resilience is likely to be of great interest to policymakers. Resilience broadly denotes the ability of households to withstand shock and crises and, as Rigg and Oven (2015: 175) note, ‘has become a normative goal of the development sector’. Underwriting the nexus is the notion that migration provides households with remittances as a counter-cyclical insurance to smooth consumption (Yang and Choi, 2007; Ratha, 2007; Orozco et al., 2006). Whilst this study supports the normative argument that remittances allow households to meet both everyday and shock expenses with greater ease, impacts are not straightforward and, I argue, distract from the stubborn structural precarities that households encounter (Standing, 2011). Although healthcare expenditures are generally unanticipated and can place acute burdens of household finances, they are less a ‘shock’ than part and parcel of the precarious status quo (de Haas, 2012). Consequently, ‘poverty is conceived in terms of marginality and exception rather than as the consequence of normal economic and political relations (Mosse, 2007: 3). In the frenzied drive to ‘capture’ or ‘leverage’ remittances, we must not overlook the political structures that necessitate migration in the first place (see 4.3). Remittances are able to mitigate vulnerabilities, but not reduce or eradicate them; households still face structural challenges though they are better placed to cope. The implicit ethics behind the migration-development nexus are based on principles of ‘self-reliance, self-help, self-sufficiency and personal responsibility’ (Rigg and Oven, 2015: 176). However, as the previous chapters demonstrate, the same self-reliance that necessitates migration as a survival
strategy may expose workers to new forms of precarity, which undermines the very notion of ‘migration-led development’.

This section has demonstrated how remittances have a positive impact on households. Recipients are able to meet expenditures, which are diverse and classed, with greater ease. Moreover, households are also more resilient to shock expenditures, notably health, as remittances buffer against sudden expenditures. However, the relationship between remittances and ‘development’ is mixed. On the one hand, remittances allow households to cope with precarity without addressing underlying causes, which are variously attributable to an absence of social protection and macroeconomic stability. It is neither possible, nor should it be the task of remittances to address these issues (de Haas, 2012). On the other hand, households simply do not understand remittances as capital for ‘development’. For some, they are underpinned by ideas of security and assurance, whereas for some they are used to fund lifestyles. For poorer households, remittances are disproportionately spent on survival goods because they are exposed to severe precarity. Thus, the notion they should be more ‘productive’ is insensitive to the difficulties they face and depoliticises the structures that produced these precarities in the first place. For better-off households, they can afford to be unproductive, and ought not to be the primary beneficiary that policy should concern itself with. Instead, policy should focus on creating structural milieux where the responsibility of social protection does not fall on the shoulders of those least able to carry it (ILO, 2015b).

6.3. The Household Remittance Economy

Tracing remittances across space is relatively straightforward. Understanding their impacts as a factor of distributive processes ‘on the ground’, on the other hand, is mired in context-specific complexity (Carling, 2009). This section delves into the remittance recipient household to shed light on how remittances are actually received, managed, spent, saved, and invested to different ends. Specifically, this section examines why remittances are spent and managed the way they are, and the implications of these practices. This section finds that remittances are rarely sent or managed with strict economic utility in mind. Instead, remitting may be an end in and of itself, where family support confers meaning to migration and one’s identity. As a result, the progress-oriented narratives of ‘development’ must be tempered the everyday habitus rather than any deliberate attempt at ‘leveraging’ remittances.

6.3.1. Filial Piety

Where early migration-development scholars have typically conceived of the ‘household’ as a unitary whole which act in the interests of collective utility (Clemens and Ogden, 2014; Stark and Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999; Cabraal and Singh, 2013), later feminist scholars have critiqued the household as a place of unequal power relations and politics (Chant, 1998; Brickell and Chant,
2010; Bastia, 2013; 2014; Kusakabe and Pearson, 2016; Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012; Safri and Graham, 2010). The purpose of this section is to highlight the internal power structures of the household and how these effect particular politics of remittance management. I will demonstrate how household members may harbour divergent interests and how remittances are often used with non-economic principles in mind. ‘Development’, in short, is not pursued as a discrete, intentional goal, but is instead mediated through everyday habits (Page and Mercer, 2012).

Across interviews, the person who receives remittances is usually also the person who manages the funds, although some workers send remittances to multiple parties (see 6.3.3). To this end, households are not apolitical, but arenas within which finite resources are distributed and managed across power geometries. This is also a product of household dependency structures. As Table 6.9 illustrates, parents are the modal financial dependant, followed by children, spouses, and siblings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of Visa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
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<td>Work Permit</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
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<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of Visa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
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<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<table>
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<th>% of Visa</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
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<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<th>In-laws</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of Visa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
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<th>Count</th>
<th>% of Visa</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>401</td>
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</table>

Table 6.9: Composition of household dependants by worker category (multiple choice)

Remitting, though common, is not universal. There are incidences where migrants choose not to remit or where sending money is not possible due to debt repayments (see 5.1.1). Nonetheless, deviations are rare; 92.4% of surveyed migrants said they sent money home on a regular basis. There also appears to be consensus on how money is spent. According to survey results, 88% of all migrants send remittances to their parents, and 16 of 26 recipient interviews were with parents. Parents are not only the key beneficiaries of migration, but also the primary referent of the normative goals of migration: for many migrants, to give their parents a better life is development. This calls for a partial recalibration away from economic rationalisation; money is

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119 Migrants may send remittances to multiple parties or may send remittances to one recipient who then distributes it to others. Table 6.9 describes the multiple response question of who migrants send money to but does not reveal the specific amounts sent to each recipient.
important, but so are cultural meanings of obligation. Analyses of remittances must be couched within the broader political economy of the household in order to analyse how and why they are distributed the way they are (Collinson, 2009; Safri and Graham, 2010). In the Burmese context, implicit household contracts that service both material and immaterial needs are best understood through the lens of filial piety.

Filial piety can be broadly understood as a set of Confucianist principles for children to demonstrate respect and care for one’s elders, especially parents. It is a powerful device of obligation because it places the ‘family’ as the organising principle in social life, and informs a large part of migration-remittance behaviours. On the one hand, there are strong material bases for remittance demand albeit with strong inter-group differences. On the other hand, remittances are not just monetary, but also carry social value as a ‘currency of care’ (Singh et al., 2010: 246). Unlike their economic value, which fluctuates relative to material necessity, the social value of remittances is comparatively durable. Ideas around why one remits might change but the underlying logic remains consistent to ideas around virtue, responsibility, and karma, especially in one’s physical absence (Singh et al., 2010; Parreñas, 2005; McKay, 2007).

There are multiple layers to filial-piety-as-practice. First, remittances are an essential part of ‘doing’ filial piety and underwrite what Paerregaard (2015: 507) terms the ‘moral economy’ of the household. In the broadest sense, remittances satisfy the migrant’s need to perform both material and symbolic practices of care (Singh et al., 2010; Piper, 2008a; Camposano, 2012; McKay, 2007). It is precisely from the alleviation of hardship that many workers derive the impetus and meaning to migrate, as well as the meaning and definition of ‘success’. Importantly, it is when household feel removed from material necessity that migrants take an ‘un-instrumental’ view on migration and reflect on the cultural meanings of money (Bourdieu, 1984). Indeed, filial piety is premised on voluntary support, ‘irrespective of their personal economic situations and the absence of any circumstantial needs’ (Harper and Zubida, 2018: 240). Lim, who initially came to Singapore to study but had since obtained citizenship, reveals his motivations for supporting his father:

‘He’s independent and has other sources of income. He’s a doctor and also a writer. I think it’s more the culture. In general, Myanmar people think that when you are being brought up by your parents, you kind of owe a living to them, and you are expected to look after them one way or another when they are ageing. It’s pretty natural in Myanmar.’

(SG02, Lim, PR, male, 36, 156 months)
Implicit within filial piety are notions of indebtedness to one’s parents and the fulfilment of intergenerational contracts (Croll, 2010). Remittances thus straddle reciprocity and performativity, and satisfy a tacit expectation from both migrant and parent:

‘I don’t think we can explain it from an economic perspective; it is more from the cultural and the way how you are taught about your parents and your elders. It is very natural, no need to even ask.’

(SG30, Zaw, EP, female, 42, 96 months)

Remittances are self-referential and about self-respect. On the one hand, they fulfil the material and performative roles of filial piety. On the other hand, these flows also ‘render feelings of value and provide a rationale for migrants’ sacrifices’ (Harper and Zubida, 2018: 9), thus giving meaning to the migratory enterprise and helps sustain it.

Second, support is not unidirectional, and the filial-household contract also affords material and emotional support to migrants especially at the beginning and end of migration (Poirine, 1997). Filial piety thus serves an instrumental purpose as it allows migrants to avoid what Peter (2010: 231) terms ‘social death’. For Peter, ‘social death’ occurs when one is ‘socially without rights, utterly marginalized, and of being the most degraded members of society’. Where migrants are already vulnerable, transnational ties are an important means of identity formation and maintenance, and failure to fulfil filial piety leads to an erosion of selfhood:

‘I am supporting my parents because I cannot let them live with no money. I see other people who ignore their parents, and I feel very bad about that. I can never let my parents be in that state.’

(SG09)

Remitting allows migrants to maintain what Harper and Zubida (2018) terms ‘visibility’, or one’s identity, self-esteem, and membership in homeland, community, and family. Given that capital is more mobile than bodies means that remittances are an effective commodity of care that garners visibility (Singh et al., 2010, Camposano, 2012). In this frame, the avoidance of social death alerts us to bilateral flows of support; remittances provide gains for both migrant and recipient. Indeed, there is a growing trend of education migration of middle-class Burmese studying in Singapore with a view to remain and work after graduation:120

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120 Three household respondents said their son or daughter had initially migrated to study. This education-led migration pathway is increasingly common amongst the Burmese middle class.
‘I had to support him for the first three years when he was attending school [in Singapore]. He earned money for food and snacks by doing part-time jobs. For the school fees and the rest, I supported him.’

(MM13, Myat, SP/EP, father, 36 months)

This reveals a temporally dynamic filial contract: household stakeholders provide support at different stages of the migrant timeframe with a view of future reciprocity (Croll, 2010). These systems of reciprocity are the cultural manifestations of the migration-insurance function posited by earlier theorists (Stark and Bloom, 1985), which reinforces the social constructions of the responsible migrant and all her attendant rights and responsibilities (Harper and Zubida, 2018).

Although remittances provide material support, these do not absolve the migrant of her obligations of care. As household economic conditions stabilise, economic concerns give way to more ethical ones. In Singapore, respondents describe a growing awareness of the needs of aging parents, which anchors them to a narrative of return:

‘I stay in Singapore because of my family. My parents are old now. They are quite lonely. Even though the money I earn in Myanmar might not be as much as I earn here, I can be beside them and take care of them.’

(SG34, Thant, WPO, male, 39, 108 months)

The migration and household support project becomes unified, yet divergent at the same time; remittances may alleviate material needs, but itself cannot fulfill all the physical and emotional facets of ‘care’ (Pearson and Kusakabe, 2012). Indeed, there is an underlying guilt for some as they attempt to reconcile their pursuit of careers in Singapore with a growing restlessness for return. For Htway (also in 3.5.4), reflections on parental care took a morbid turn as he reflected on the life expectancy of his parents:

‘They are very old already. My father is 65. Not the same as London! 65 in London is young because your country [life expectancy] is 80 years, my country is 65 years. Average 80-90% will die at 65. But luckily, they’re healthy. That’s why I say old 65 years, for London 65 is not old, 80 is old.’

(SG14)

Examining the motivation to remit reveals the terms and conditions that define practice, the durability of obligations, and visualises the developmental contributions capitals have. Especially relevant to Myanmar is how relations of filial piety have often been advocated by Asian states as a form of quasi-social security in the absence of state-provided social protection (Croll, 2010). Though theorists have critiqued the overlap between neoliberalism and nexus policy (Kunz,
2011), it is ironic that ‘traditional’ forms of resilience are deployed as a discourse towards self-responsibilisation (Khoo and Yeoh, 2017). Remittances, though not always economically productive, are socially and culturally productive. They lend meaning to migration and support migrants in fulfilling their care duties which, in many cases, are their vision of ‘development’. Objectives and narratives of migration do not always overlap with economic interpretations of ‘progress’, and it is only when households are more removed from material necessity that considerations of ‘leveraging’ remittances really emerge.

6.3.2. Power and Distribution

Migrants rarely, if ever, object to how monies are spent and managed. Nonetheless, migrants and households display a spectrum of decision-making strategies and degrees of involvement; although filial piety describes intergenerational relations of respect, power is not absolute and unilateral. At one end, some workers are explicit in their non-involvement. Asked whether he provides feedback on how his parents manage the money he sends, Htwe replied:

‘I do not say anything. They can use it the way they want it as long as they are pleased with it.’

(SG26, Htwe, WPO, male, 42, 84 months)

Accordingly, most migrants take a laissez-faire approach to the management of remittances. The implication is that, to have – or to want to have – a say is disrespectful. Instead, filial piety ought to be unconditional; conditionality is unbecoming, thus migrants shy away from ‘interfering’ in their parents’ financial affairs (Gallo, 2013). More commonly, workers may take a more supervisory role to remittance management. This rests on an implicit trust that recipients would use the money wisely or economically (Lianos and Pseiridis, 2013):

‘They only use the money where they really need it. They save the rest… I never ask what they do with it. I do not think they use it for unnecessary things.’

(SG18, Thet, WPO, male, 24, 24 months)

At the other end of the spectrum, some migrants have taken an active role in shaping remittance management strategies. Interestingly, this is more common in cases where recipients are spouses (Lianos and Pseiridis, 2013):
‘Growing up, I was very independent and so in terms of managing the money, I was pretty good at it. Even though I discuss with my wife, I am the one who made the most decision.’

(SG20, Naing, WPO, male, 31, 108 months)

Depending on the recipient, remittances entail different meanings, power relations, and different methods of obligation and control that play out across space (Gallo, 2013). Class also plays a role. S Pass and Employment Pass workers are more laissez-faire because they can afford to be; a hands-off approach is made possible by the absence of material constraint, which appeals to more symbolic, performative functions of care (Friedland, 2009; Bourdieu, 1984). In Bourdieusian terms, the legitimacy of filial piety relies on one’s seeming disinterest in the strategic realisation of symbolic capital (Brubaker, 2005). Remittances are thus a means of identity making as well as material support (Harper and Zubida, 2018). Nonetheless, ‘strategies’ are not always voluntarily. For Paerregaard (2015: 507), ‘family remittances are the long-distance ties of bonds of commitment and concern’. However, such bonds are not easily broken, and commitments are often satisfied at the expense of one’s goals; obligation obscures the erosion of individual liberties which is in itself a goal of ‘development’ (Raghuram, 2009; Sen, 2004). Household relations of power dictate, to a large degree, the control migrants have over not only the resources they generate, but also their migratory trajectory:

‘My parents want to buy a house and ask me if I can earn money for that in the coming two or three years. I want to go back and have a family of my own, but I said yes anyways.’

(SG09)

‘Power’, in this context, does not denote relations of domination, but rather the means by which the everyday habitus is reproduced and lived. In Page and Mercer’s (2012) analysis of remittance behaviours, the authors distinguish between diasporas as ‘decision-makers’ versus ‘option setters’. Where the former simply choose from available remittance options, the latter actively contribute towards the formation of the options available (Kashwan et al., 2018). The majority of my respondents fall into the former category. The centrality of filial piety to Burmese culture and a strong reliance on remittances mean that ‘options’ are relatively sparse. For some migrants, not only is there a material basis to remit, but filial piety can also translate into a sort of enforced non-intervention:

'I do want the money for myself, but I also cannot not send it to my father. So, I have to be satisfied with it.'

(SG17, Thinn, DW, female, 33, 108 months)
Intra-household politics is primarily intersected by age. Recent work has looked at the role of gender in determining household divisions of labour, resource distribution, and power (Buvinić and Gupta, 1997; Silvey, 2004a; Chant, 1998). In contrast, this thesis finds that gender alone does not figure as a major vector of household power relations (cf. Kusakabe and Pearson, 2015). Within households, mothers and wives accounted for about half of all remittance decision-makers; other respondents said that either the father made the decision, or that decisions were jointly made between parents or between parents and the migrant. In terms of migrants, gender is only significant, if incidentally, when intersected with class and age. As Paerregaard (2015: 515) explains, remittances are imbued with ‘social and moral values’ that ‘mark hierarchies of gender, generation and class within and between migrant households’. In my findings, class and generation outweigh gender as a factor of distribution and control. Across interviewed migrants and households, domestic workers seem to command less control over their remittances compared to other groups. I argue this is primarily due to age and household precarity rather than the fact they are women. As Sections 4.1 and 4.2.1 demonstrate, domestic workers are, on average, the youngest workers, and belong to the poorest households. The combination of material necessity and their relative youth means they enjoy less latitude in determine how remittances are managed. Patterns of remittance control do not stem from gendered scripts, but filial and material ones:

‘[My parents] told me what they want to use the money for, and I just let them for whatever they wanted with it. I cannot decide because I am younger.’

(SG17)

Indeed, male migrants seem no more involved in the decision-making process:

‘They are elders and they can decide whatever they want to use the money for.’

(SG28, Thaw, WPO, male, 30, 96 months)

As ever, there is also a strong temporal dimension to power. Migrants are more likely to be decision-makers during early migration as remittances are spent on absolute survival needs; the worker has little latitude to decide where her monies are spent. Over time, she becomes an option setter as household financials stabilise, demand for remittances plateaus, and the goals of migration diversify (see 5.3). Option-setting power is thus primarily determined by household necessity and the seniority of the migrant in the household.

Similarly, wealthier households are less reliant on remittances, thus the migrant is freer to set the terms and conditions of her support. Migrants, in other words, actively rework their relationships with their households as circumstances, expectations, power relations, and priorities change over time. For the average domestic worker, ‘migration and development’ is often a zero-sum
game; either she supports her family, or she supports her own pursuits (Harper and Zubida, 2018). For some, this can be wearisome:

'My father asked me to support them for a few more years. Now that I think about it, I will not be able to support my parents if I get married. That’s why I am still single.'

(SG09)

As above, ‘options’ are less set by community, but by material necessity (Friedland, 2009; Bourdieu, 1984; Brubaker, 2005). Nonetheless, not all migrants acquiesce against prescribed roles. An unerring commitment to remit obscures agential strategies that migrants deploy to take greater ownership and control over their income. Perhaps the most radical step one can take is to forego sending remittances altogether, as Thinn did:

‘They spend as much as I give them. All they spend on is not something that will improve their lives either. That’s why I no longer send it to them. They did not know how to manage it.’

(SG17)

Such drastic action is rare; of all interviewees, Thinn was the only respondent who rejected sending money due to alleged mismanagement of funds by her sister (cf. Lianos and Pseiridis, 2013). On the one hand this demonstrates the potential for more agential remittance management. On the other hand, it also illustrates the enduring obligations of filial piety as Thinn continued remitting to her father, who she insists is more ‘organised’. It is notable that migrants themselves have definitions of what constitutes a ‘productive’ use for remittances. For Thinn, she had supported her sister when her nephew was in school. However, upon graduation, her sister began using her money for what Thinn perceived to be unnecessary luxuries, prompting Thinn to withdraw support. More commonly, migrants may choose to limit the amount of remittances they send; rather than to send everything, workers might develop savings of their own in Singapore. Interviews suggest that domestic and Work Permit remittances remain constant or, in some cases, grow over time. Instead, it is S Pass and Employment Pass remittances that are more temporally dynamic:

‘There is no regular amount that she sends home. It is between 5 and 7 lakhs. It is not fixed. If we need money, she sends us the amount we ask for as well.’

(MM15)

In the absence of acute need, semi-regular transfers and needs-based remittances suffice as displays of filial piety whilst allowing the migrant to manage his or her wages more actively in
Singapore. This particular strategy is important when extant studies have generally failed to interrogate the proportion of remittances sent, i.e. why do certain migrants send more than others? On the one hand, there is a leaning towards gendered assumptions of altruism (Brickell and Chant, 2010; Lim and Morshed, 2015; Silvey, 2006). On the other hand, econometric studies have tried to regress factors that would lead to particular changes in remittance amounts (Yang and Choi, 2007; Adams, 2009; Orozco et al., 2006). What this analysis shows is that remittance behaviours are an outcome of complex structured practices. Remittances are sent to address needs, both material and performative. This must be weighed against the relative power migrants have to define those needs on his or her terms: remittance amounts, regularity, management power, and how these relate to their own migratory ambitions (Page and Mercer, 2012). Broadly, migrants derive pride and satisfaction from sending remittances, though this can also come at the expense of personal liberties. Adapting Bourdieu’s (1986: 25) metaphor of capital conversion, this section has demonstrated how migration can be profitable, but ‘profits in one area are necessarily paid for by costs in another’. Throughout this thesis, analyses have demonstrated how migration yields profits for states, brokers, and households, often at the expense of the migrant. If development is about the expansion of self-defined freedoms, then the migrant herself sometimes seem conspicuously absent from these narratives.

6.3.3. Lifecourse and Temporality in the Migrant Household

Nexus studies often conceptualise the household as the primary unit of organisation, and migration as a collective decision to hedge against livelihood risks (Taylor, 1999). In contrast, one key theme to emerge from this study relates to the fragmentation of households over time at different stages of the migrant lifecourse. This section focuses on migrant lifecourse as a source of internal structural disruption. As Harper and Zubida (2018: 7) explains, earlier migration-development research tended to rest on an assumption that, over time, ‘the initial remittance agreement remains unaltered, regardless of any internal, external, social or legal status changes in the lives of the migrants, their families or any external political, economic, social or physical… conditions’. Instead, the institution of ‘family’ is dynamic; though practices and dispositions tend to be durable, the referent beneficiary is not. One critique of Bourdieu’s work has been the alleged inattention to behavioural changes as a result of structurally-driven analyses (Wacquant, 1989). However, this section demonstrates how behaviours are dynamic precisely because organising structures, in this case the household, change albeit in oftentimes predictable ways.

In my analysis of domestic worker social mobility in Singapore, I describe frames of ‘migrant times’: migration-specific experiences, such as arrival, debt repayments, adjustment, and stability that typify life in Singapore (Ma, 2017b; Cwerner, 2001). These migrant times also map onto broader lifecourse milestones of marriage and childrearing. Survey data suggest that both domestic and Work Permit workers are younger, more likely to be single, and have worked in
Singapore for shorter periods of time than other migrants (Table 4.1); most domestic and Work Permit interviewees described leaving Myanmar shortly after graduating from high school or university. This is important because domestic and Work Permit migrants are more likely to experience financial stress resulting from lifecourse transitions (see 6.3.2).\textsuperscript{121} For Work Permit holders, aspirations for establishing a family is often deferred due to household need, whereas higher-income migrants tend to be more able to plan for stability:

‘Now I plan for my marriage, I save money, planning 2021. When I 30 years old. I have girlfriend. Now only 400-500 I send, because I started new life. I have to save myself. Because 5 years already, they’re stable.’

(SG14)

Importantly, these are not unilateral decisions. On the one hand, Htway illustrates how his family’s needs must be satisfied before he embarks on his ‘new life’. On the other hand, parents are generally understanding of this drive and support their children’s lifecourse ambitions:

‘My younger son is married. He has to walk his own way. Now he has a house and a car with his wife. But this house is for both of them brothers.’

(MM14, Sandar, SP/EP, mother, 108 and 84 months)

Household fragmentation threatens to return the family to income insufficiency as remittances splinter across multiple recipients; new family formations do not absolve one’s responsibility as the web of dependants expand, and the household threatens to regress back into hardship. Concurrently, there is a reappraisal of how resources should be distributed:

‘Initially I got over S$400 and my husband got nearly S$700… When we got married, my husband didn’t support his family anymore and he send to me directly.’

(MM05, Thandar, DW, mother, 96 months)

For Thandar, both she and her husband had worked in Singapore. However, upon getting married, Thandar and her husband wanted to build their own home in Myanmar. Thandar then returned to Myanmar to oversee the project whilst her husband remained to work in Singapore. Not only did this reduce the pair’s income, but also meant that Thandar’s family was without a regular means of support as before. For those who have built up savings buffers or investments, the withdrawal of regular support has muted impacts. However, for those who remain financially unstable, dependence in the absence of substituting income exacerbates precarities, and is an

\textsuperscript{121} This is due to smaller salaries supporting a larger number of dependants, as compared to S Pass or Employment Pass workers (Table 6.3).
active reason against migrants starting their own family. On his feelings about his daughter working in Singapore, Nwe explains:

‘When she first left, I felt bad. But I have to be okay with it because if she does not work, no one will. She is the youngest child. Plus, she is still single and that’s why she can support the family.’

(MM06)

As above, there is no obvious gender divide as to who remains responsible for whom. Rather, care responsibilities are passed down to single sons and daughters as married siblings start their own families:

‘The remittance from my sister is for my parents so it is just substitutes in my place because I already married and difficult to support to my parents. Most of the remittances from my husband is using for building the home and to rent the apartment for living in Yangon.’

(MM05)

Though Harper and Zubida (2018: 14) suggest lifecourse milestones entail that ‘migrants generate a new family and thus have new obligations which trump previous financial (and emotional) obligations’, I counter that these obligations are neither new nor do they ‘trump’ previous obligations. The ethic of material support remains, though with different beneficiaries, and tokenistic support for parents often continue, albeit sometimes less frequently. In turn, household fragmentation entails not just a restructuring of the absolute flows of support, but also a restructuring of the discursive politics of distribution. Although there is an enduring appeal to the support of the ‘household’, what exactly constitutes the ‘household’ changes over time (Cabraal and Singh, 2013). On the one hand, the frame of dependency shifts from the parental household to the spousal nuclear family, which recasts obligations of care in new configurations. On the other hand, the assumption that migrants remit less because of dulling relations with the origin country is challenged (Brown, 1997; Turnell et al., 2008; Yang, 2008), as new bonds emerge:

‘When I was single and both my parents were alive, the main purpose was to support my parents for them to live a happy life. Now that I have a family, I also need to worry about the future of my family. My current priority is to buy a house.’

(SG33, Thaung, SP, Male, 34, 96 months)
This is also very much a factor of income as wealthier households transition with relative ease, whereas poorer households must reconfigure to deal with new livelihood challenges. Perhaps what is most telling, however, is that no matter how sustained remittances are, they do not address the underlying structures of precarity that compelled migration in the first place. The establishment of a new family lays bare the structural deficiencies in the Burmese field once again as the veneer of ‘development’ from years of support are peeled back to reveal the same struggles anew.

6.3.4. Savings and Investments

Although nexus rhetoric appeals towards remittance-financed investments, these are not typically possible until the migrant and her household has achieved adequate degree of financial security (see Chapter 5). Remittances are prioritised for immediate material needs and it is not until these are met that excess can be accumulated in savings and investments. Though nexus proponents laud savings and investments as an apparent good, this section demonstrates how such endeavours are less concerned with ‘development’ than they are about achieving ‘peace’ and security. The development imagination is narrated differently from nexus rhetoric, and reflects the priorities identified pre-migration (see Chapter Four). Though the survey did not collect data on investments, two variables did capture information on savings prevalence (Table 6.10) and amount (Table 6.11).

<table>
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<th>EP</th>
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<td>% of Visa</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.10: Prevalence of savings by migrant category

122 ‘Regular’ denotes saving at least once every three months.
Triangulating survey data with interviews demonstrate an increasing propensity to save along the income scale; domestic workers are the least likely to save regularly whereas S Pass and Employment Pass are the most likely to save. This is likely to do with the former’s existing household economic challenges (see 4.2.1), as well as her lower wages and debt obligations (see 5.1.1). In practice, this means she is unable to accrue meaningful savings until the medium-term:

‘My first two-year salary from working in Singapore, was used to pay off the family debts.’

(SG03, Mya, DW, female, 31, 72 months)

Nonetheless, wages can be constrained even for higher waged workers; between paying for living expenses in Singapore and supporting basic household expenditures, incomes are just about enough to allow the migrant and household to break even:

‘The first four years did not go really well because I had to pay back the money I borrowed in preparation for coming here. I was not able to save anything. I did send money home but they all went to paying the debt.’

(SG33)

Resonating with the previous chapter, the temporal dimensions of realising value from migration is intertwined with the accrual of resources (see 5.3.1). For those who can, the majority of survey respondents cited business development, the acquisition of property, and ‘emergencies’ as the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worker Type</th>
<th>PCM income</th>
<th>$ Saved PCM</th>
<th>Sent PCM ($)</th>
<th>Save Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DW</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>507.6</td>
<td>134.4</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>126.3</td>
<td>176.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPO</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1,088.2</td>
<td>412.5</td>
<td>640.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>644.4</td>
<td>796.0</td>
<td>496.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2,802.9</td>
<td>741.2</td>
<td>1,068.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>930.0</td>
<td>670.1</td>
<td>862.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4,766.4</td>
<td>1,872.4</td>
<td>1,661.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>930.0</td>
<td>670.1</td>
<td>862.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5,030.4</td>
<td>2,025.0</td>
<td>1,576.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>3,999.7</td>
<td>2,094.0</td>
<td>2,218.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1,891.2</td>
<td>710.8</td>
<td>802.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>1,838.8</td>
<td>996.3</td>
<td>893.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.11: Monthly income, savings, and remittances by worker type

Resonating with the previous chapter, the temporal dimensions of realising value from migration is intertwined with the accrual of resources (see 5.3.1). For those who can, the majority of survey respondents cited business development, the acquisition of property, and ‘emergencies’ as the
key motivations to save (Table 6.12). Although some had defined saving goals, the majority do not and simply save for the sake of saving. This is unlikely to resonate with policy ambitions that demand more directed applications of remittances (Zapata, 2013; Kunz, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DW</th>
<th>WPO</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of visa</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase property</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of visa</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of visa</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of visa</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of visa</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of visa</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.12: Reasons for saving by migrant category (multiple choice)

Although emergency savings enhance household resilience, how money is currently managed does not resemble what policymakers envisage as the virtuous cycle of remittance-, savings-, or investment-led ‘development’ (Aggarwal et al., 2011; Hudson, 2008). Instead, funds are a means for households to cope with precarity. Part of the reason why remittances have not spurred economic growth is that they are not intended to serve as investment capital (Barajas et al., 2009), but as resources and buffers to fund everyday necessities as well as shocks. Where orthodox development policy conceptualises ‘resilience… as a self-evident ‘good’ (Rigg and Oven, 2015), then this kind of non-productive, non-marketised saving signals the wrong kind of resilience (see Kunz, 2011). More practically, workers also exhibit different methods and patterns of saving.

First, S Pass and Employment Pass workers are paid more and send a comparatively smaller proportion of their income home. Thus, they have greater margins of excess with which to save. Interviews also reveal they are more likely to save using bank accounts, whereas Work Permit holders tend to save in cash. This likely reflects the degree to which different migrant groups are ‘banked’ (Makina, 2012), the accessibility of services (Turnell, 2014), and the financial capabilities of users (Gibson et al., 2012). Interestingly, household uptake of banking services is much more
prevalent than among migrants and it is common for low-income households to hold bank accounts. However, usage remains ‘shallow’ as respondents primarily use banks to safekeep money rather than for any specific service, although interviewees cite high interest rates as a draw. Elsewhere, households rely on precious commodities, such as gold, and community-based rotating saving schemes, to save.\textsuperscript{123}

Second, there are spatial patterns to the accumulation of savings. Extant literature tends to adopt a kind of methodological nationalism in analysing remittances (Faist, 2012); research either prioritises perspectives from remittance origins or the destination but rarely in unison (Kalir, 2013). Adopting a transnational frame, we see how monies are actually managed across spaces, as Figure 6.5 illustrates. As ever, there are interesting differences between workers: Work Permit holders are more likely to save in Myanmar, whereas S Pass and Employment Pass are more likely to save in Singapore. Moreover, where the latter tends to concentrate all income and savings in Singapore, the former often has minor amounts saved with their employers, or in cash in Singapore. Not all income is sent, not all that is sent is spent, and not all that is saved is saved in one location. This also explains why, despite sending the majority of their income home, domestic workers are sometimes still able to respond to household shocks by sending more, even if in small amounts (see 6.2.2). It is unclear why savings are so spatially fragmented, but it does indicate a greater complexity in the transnational management of resources than hitherto theorised. Thus, instead of a transfer from A to B, a more realistic remittance and savings map might look something like this:

\textbf{Figure 6.5: Distribution of Savings Across Space}

The degree to which migrants and households are able to accrue savings are a measure of the migrant’s ability to realise value in her migration (see Chapter 5). Even though the majority of low-income migrants have yet to accumulate significant amounts, there are strong material and

\textsuperscript{123} Rotational saving schemes, as one interviewee explained, comprises a group of participants who pool financial resources to enable peer-to-peer lending and borrowing. This seemed particularly prevalent amongst older respondents.
emotional motivations for doing so. Here, Nant’s two daughters rotated working in Singapore as domestic workers for about six years. Together, the remittances they generated allowed Nant to build a shop in Kawhmu, a small rural village about two hours away from Downtown Yangon. Nant’s experiences embody the ambitions of the migration-development nexus and perhaps sums up the general philosophy behind migration:

‘Compared to the old days, we are not as much burdened as before. We have better livelihood. We are in the condition when we do not have to work strenuously. We can live just fine with the money my daughter gives us. Plus, we don’t have debts anymore and no one can control us. We do not have to lower ourselves just to borrow money from other people like before.’

(MM08)

For Nant, savings signal a break from ‘before’ and is part of the linguistic frame that migrants and households use to describe the temporalities of migration (Ma, 2017b). Savings signal resilience, progress, and self-esteem such that households no longer have to ‘lower’ themselves as they once did. The reduction in livelihood worries by building a savings buffer is a hallmark of migration success:

‘Yes, it [livelihood] is becoming secure. It’s like I have a backup guarantee. There are fewer worries.’ (MM25, Phyu, SP/EP, mother, 120 months)

Success is also visual as savings are used to realise household aspirations for investment, especially in building, acquiring, or renovating property. For many, the renovation – or construction – of a home commands significant meaning within the migratory imagination and is often a goal households want to achieve before the migrant returns to Myanmar (Boccagni, 2017):

'I want to buy a piece of land. I want to save money in order to do that. Our current land is not our own. We have to move when we are told to. That’s why, I want to save money to buy our own land and build a house there.’

(MM07, Lwin, DW, mother, 48 months)

This is especially true for low-income households who, pre-migration, oftentimes lived in precarious wooden structures:
Where earlier stages of migration are premised on meeting absolute needs, migrant and household priorities tend to change over time and recalibrate towards quality of life-oriented considerations. Mirroring with the initial impetus to migrate (see Chapter Four), the desire for a ‘peaceful’, ‘convenient’, and ‘worryless’ life underpins savings and investments (see 6.3.4). As Lwin demonstrates, a home is not just a physical environment, but is further bound up in feelings of security, ownership and self-determination (Kaika, 2004). Such narratives are forward-looking, where the migration imagination is about sustaining ‘peace’ and certainty in one’s life (Atkinson, 2013) (cf. 5.2). In Lwin’s village, many had taken to migration in response to Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and remittances were instrumental not only in building homes but also rebuilding livelihoods and identities. Unlike Nant’s shop, these ‘investments’ are not always economically productive; remittance-funded investments tend to provide auxiliary income rather than anything that can be wholly depended on:

‘My husband’s incomes are still the sources of our household and my small business is just for a recovery for our daily household’s expenses.’

(MM10, Nandar, WPO, wife, 84 months)

These outgoings are ‘productive’, if not always economically so, and are consistent with emic understandings of ‘development’ (Sen, 2004). Although remittances fulfil everyday expenditures, it is the attainment of household goals that are more meaningful; beyond alleviating hardship, building a home represents the realisation of an aspiration that households are more emotionally invested in. Such sentiments have not escaped the notice of developers that are keen to capitalise on the influx of migrant money. The sight of developers in Peninsula Plaza who
advertise new-build apartments in Myanmar are increasingly common (Figure 6.7) (see Zapata, 2013), as a new migration-commercial nexus works to provide workers with ‘investments’:

![Figure 6.7: Apartment showroom pop-up, Peninsula Plaza, Singapore (03/12/17)](image)

Finally, these investments are *processual*; renovations and land acquisition require continued efforts to strategically manage resources to realise these visions over time. Above all, investments in home are productive because they contribute to the emotional and physical wellbeing of the household. The methodological *choice* to designate outgoings as investments (or not) thus belie politicised understandings of what constitutes ‘productivity’ more than it denotes actuarial terminology.

Despite these successes, one should remain cognisant that these stories reflect the *minority*. For many, there are stubborn barriers to saving, tied to both stochastic shocks (see 6.2.2) and the structural precarities of migration (see 5.2); generally, Work Permit holders are unable to accrue meaningful amounts of savings for at least two years from arrival.124 The goalposts of ‘development’ are always shifting as the path towards ‘success’ meanders around more or less predictable potholes (Wee et al., 2018). There are agential factors to account for, such as migrant and household entrepreneurial capacity, monetary management skills, local economic conditions, and the household’s susceptibility to shock. It is precisely due to the diverse factors of development that that outcomes of migration are so difficult to predict (Carling, 2009). For some, savings are not always possible, even in the medium-term. They are, in this context, income that satisfies, but does not exceed, demand. Indeed, there are households for whom savings are not a priority, either because they enjoy exceptional financial security, or because of

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124 There is weak statistical correlation (.123) between the length of migration (as measured by number of months worked in Singapore) and average monthly savings amongst all workers.
lifestyle tastes. Regardless, savings are an integral, if elusive, part of the migratory imagination because of the material and emotional pursuits they enable.

6.3.5. Religiosity and Development

The original remit of this thesis was to understand the impact of remittances on households. As fieldwork progressed, however, donations became an increasingly salient theme in research and analysis. Not only are donations one of the most frequent migrant and household expenditures, they also form an integral part of the social field that forced me to revaluate how ‘development’ is ‘done’ in Burmese contexts. Donations are a currency with which workers negotiate identity and group membership (Bourdieu, 1986). Wages and remittances do not become donations upon placement in an alms bowl; economic capitals require validation in order to be converted to social capital. One does not simply purchase group membership, but conversions presuppose recognition (ibid.); donations are not so much purchases of membership, but a renewal of group subscription. Donations are neither economic, cultural, or social. Instead they are an amalgam of the three and, like filial piety, are underwritten by spiritual precepts rather than economic utility or rationality. Across worker groups, there is consensus in the rationale for donating:

‘The purposes of doing donations are to get merits. We believe that we get a lot of merits in our live time by doing donations. If we are gone from this world, the merits we have will take us to the heaven.’

(MM17, Hein, SP/EP, father, 120 months)

‘As a Buddhist, I believe if I’m doing good manners in present, the best of luck and things will return to me in the future.’

(MM10)

Donations span religion and ethnicity and are intimately tied to meanings of being Burmese (Houtman, 1999); giving is a staple of every festival, holiday, and celebration. In Singapore, migrants often attend temple or church where contributing money, regardless of the sum, has become muscle memory (Figure 6.8):
During major celebrations, large donations are given to accumulate good deeds and blessings. In Myanmar, the sight of monks and nuns with alms bowls is ubiquitous in the morning. Similarly, every street is punctuated by the sound of chants played on loudspeaker during public holidays. Where filial piety is premised on ideas around intergenerational reciprocity (Croll, 2010), donations are a form of socio-religious reciprocity: a *spiritual* contract (cf. Poirine, 1997). The accumulation of good deeds and merits is juxtaposed against Buddhist understandings of suffering in the present life and so offer believers redress through charity. Like filial piety, migrants and households derive pride and joy in their ability to donate:

‘I am proud because I can donate with the money my daughter gives me. It is for her to get good blessings.’

(MM09)

There are two layers to a Bourdieusian theory of habitus. First, the deeper, more fundamental layer is acquired through primary socialisation with family and friends (Bourdieu, 1977). These dispositions are enduring because they are rooted in the formative development of individual behaviours. In comparison, the secondary layer is acquired through education and life experiences (ibid.). Accordingly, secondary dispositions are more malleable. Donations are rooted firmly in the former because it is a learned practice obtained through observation and emulation; its centrality to the Burmese psyche cannot be overstated (Houtman, 1999). It is

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125 Thadingyut Festival is a holiday celebrated in Myanmar during the full-moon of the Burmese month of Thadingyut.
telling that, across worker groups, more donate on a regular basis than save money. Donation, in the Burmese context, is the archetype of social practice and many respondents, like Su, generally earmark 10% of remittances for charitable donations:

‘I save 10% of my salary for donations. My family is Christian, and we believe that all we are earning is from the Christ. That is why we want to give something back to the church.’

(SG13, Su, DW, female, 26, 60 months)

Donations not only rank amongst the most common remittance expenditure (Table 6.5) but, for some, are also one of the largest expenditures in absolute terms:

‘I don’t donate by myself, I pass to my mum. Maybe this month she wants to go to the monastery, but they want to donate something. We also have the weekly donation in the early morning, breakfast for the monk. Fundraisers and foundations, she donates every month! It depends, sometimes 2-3% only, sometimes 30-40%!’

(SG25, Linn, EP, female)

Unlike other outgoings, donation scale with income. Although everyday outgoings, such as food, do not increase significantly as incomes do, households do donate more. The prevalence of donations can be counterintuitive; given chronic financial stresses, which are sometimes critical, households would surely want to minimise outgoings. Indeed, up until 2011, 10% was the same amount the Myanmar government had levied on foreign income (see 5.2.2). Instead, ‘saving a way of life’ is often prioritised over ‘saving a life’ (Allen and Turton, 1996), although, as I explore below, the two are not always mutually exclusive. Critically, donations are not wholly abstract, but are also a means of risk pooling and social protection:

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126 64.1% of domestic workers, 64.9% of Work Permit, 79.5% of S Pass, and 88.9% of Employment Pass workers donate on a regular basis.

127 First half of recording was corrupted, age and migration duration information missing.
‘During his final year [in high school], we could not pay about 12,000 kyats. I was afraid of the interests if I borrowed money and that’s why I spend money as carefully as I could. Finally, we were able to pay because I got help from the church. I told the church that my son would not be able to continue his studies if we cannot pay and they helped me. My son worked hard, and he graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. When I was sick and had to get a throat surgery, I only had 20,000 to 30,000 kyats. The cost [of the surgery] was 50,000 kyats and they did not give me the operation. I was only allowed in the operation room when my son borrowed money from his friend and gave them. The church also helped me for about 10,000 to 20,000 kyats.’

(MM14)

Prior to the migration of her two sons, Sandar had endured extraordinary hardship. When her husband passed away when her eldest son was just six, Sandar struggled to make a living selling noodle soup by the roadside. Her income was barely enough to feed her family and fell drastically short of the amount she needed to put her two sons through school. She then worked in Thailand for five years and decided to return when she failed to earn enough. Often unable to eat anything but plain rice and water, Sandar was reluctant to borrow money, afraid she would be unable to repay debts. Word spread of her troubles, and when her son’s senior year school fees had run higher than expected, the local church congregation intervened by pooling and donating money to allow her son to take his matriculation exams. Shortly after, Sandar fell sick and nearly had to forgo surgery had the church not intervened again. Such stories are not uncommon, not reserved to the poorest of the poor, and interventions are not only during acute crises. In another example, Gyi explained how, prior to his brothers’ migration, his family was wholly reliant on his father’s income as a civil servant:

‘Just my father’s salary and no income at all. Sometimes we got support from Church. When we weren’t able to cover with my father’s salary, we got support sometimes 1 lakh and sometimes 50,000 Kyats but not monthly.’

(MM20, Gyi, SP/EP, brother, 156, 120 and 96 months)

Despite steady income, there were periods where his salary could not sustain his family of four. Occasionally, the church would step in to assist with the shortfall so the family could keep up with basic expenditures. In turn, Gyi feels obliged to reciprocate:

‘When we had difficult time, the Church supported us, so when our family financial situation is better than after, we also support back to the Church.’
Donations thus function as a sort of social security or commons to be drawn upon sporadically. For the better off, they mostly serve a performative, rather than protective, function and are means of religious identity-making and social affirmation. For those enduring hardship, donation-funded organisations provide an invaluable safety net in lieu of state support. According to community leaders, beyond providing religious services, monasteries and churches, especially in rural areas, also provide social services such as education and healthcare, and serve as a space where local resources and labour can be pooled. In some cases, places of worship also channel migration information between origin and destinations. Although the majority of survey respondents and interviewees donated money, it was amongst the Christian community that donations seemed more regimented and were allocated for specific uses, as Gyi and Sandar’s experiences show. In contrast, Buddhist donations seemed less structured, premised on everyday charity, as in almsgiving or miscellaneous temple contributions. Given this thesis’s small interview sample and regional focus on Yangon, it is difficult to ascertain whether this apparent solidarity amongst ethno-religious minority groups is significant or coincidental. Future research may therefore examine in greater detail the developmental impacts of donations amongst different ethnic and religious groups. This is especially interesting given Myanmar’s history of internal conflict in peripheral States (Aung, 2014), which have engendered cultures of self-reliance and ethno-religious solidarity (South, 2012; McConnachie, 2018; McCarthy, 2017; Griffiths, 2018a).

Perhaps more so than household remittances, donations ameliorate structural precarity by insuring collectives against shock and redistributing resources beyond the household (Griffiths, 2018a; 2018b). In Standing’s (2011: 12) work on the global ‘precariat’, he describes precarity not only in terms of ‘the level of money wages or income earned at any particular moment but the lack of community support in times of need, lack of assured enterprise or state benefits, and lack of private benefits to supplement money earnings’. Donations are the material manifestations of communal obligations and networks of reciprocity (Griffiths, 2018a), that not only mitigate against household precarity, but also supplants the role of the state as a provider of insurance, security, and protection (Grundy et al., 2014; van Rooijen et al., 2018; Griffiths, 2018a; 2018b). If donations indeed buy group membership, then ‘this notion of the conversion of one form of capital into another helps us to understand the “irrational” expenditure by migrants of remittances and other household resources on “wasteful” social outlays or functions that have so exasperated mainstream development economists and practitioners’ (van Hear, 2014: S112). In this case, donations are rational expenditures because they fund local networks of solidarity and co-insurance where the state is conspicuously absent.
In Myanmar, emerging research has looked at the role of community organisations in providing public services, often in lieu of state intervention. Griffiths and Soe (2017), for example, describe the role of parahita organisations in providing village-level manpower during social ceremonies, community building projects, and physical security. The authors describe a higher prevalence of parahita organisations in communities with high out-migration (Ito and Griffiths, 2016), likely as a result of greater remittance funding, which also bolsters local resilience to shock (see also Mangshang and Griffiths, 2018). Gyi and Sandar’s experiences are illustrative of this, albeit expressed in ethno-religious terms rather than the local networks of reciprocity that Griffiths and Soe (2017) describe.

In Singapore, I witnessed numerous ad-hoc fundraising activities – for natural disasters and health epidemics – as well as ethnic minority donation drives. Though it is difficult to determine the impacts such donations would have, the risk reduction and resilience-building function of local organisations will be of interest in future research and ties in with broader interests in religion and development (McCarthy, 2017). Given this research’s focus on Yangon, it is unclear whether access to, prevalence, or efficacy of community organisations are similar in other States and Regions (cf. Ito and Griffiths, 2016). Current research is hindered by various challenges: organisation can range from a permanent temple to temporary social networks that cohere around different criteria of membership. If donations are a collective insurance, then it is unclear whether coverage is comprehensive and universal or selective and partial. Nonetheless, what these discussions lay bare is the need to sensitise policy and research to understand how households’ needs are prioritised. The ‘productiveness’ of remittance expenditures like

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128 Parahita describes the Buddhist principle of altruism. In Griffith & Soe’s (2017) paper, parahita organisations refer to village-level organisations that provide ad-hoc social services, such as funeral processions and building communal facilities, oftentimes in lieu of state intervention or protection.
donations is often obscured by intersecting social relations. Where the previous sections have argued that remittances alone cannot bring about ‘development’ in the form of structural change and livelihood security, donations represent a powerful means in which risks are shared and mitigated. In sum, this section provides novel insights into Burmese social life and local solidarity and contribute towards a pushback against the expert gaze of nexus orthodoxy (Escobar, 1995), which discursively frames what migrants want (Ferguson, 1994), or should want (Bakewell, 2008b).

6.4. Conclusion: Remittance Impacts and Implications

This chapter has examined how remittances are sent, received, and managed by different households to particular ends. Remittances are a product of their social contexts; there is a strong path dependency between the contextual drivers of migration (Chapter 4), the type of migration workers undertake (Chapter 5), and the likely practices and outcomes that result. This marks the end of this thesis’s tracing of remittances from pre-, during-, and now post-migration perspectives. Although this chapter directedly answers the fourth and final research question – what are the impacts of remittances on households? – the spatial-temporal sequencing of narratives allows us to understand remittance impacts as produced through social history (Appadurai, 1986).

Quantitatively, remittances have a positive impact on both mundane and exceptional outgoings. The size and regularity of remittances mean they are able to lift the consumption power of households far beyond what pre-migration livelihoods could sustain, especially during shocks. Critically, these effects are mediated through the temporality of value returns across the migrant lifecourse (Chapter 5). Differences in pre-migration livelihoods mean that remittance impacts are further tempered by differing degrees of necessity and classed dispositions of consumption and remittance management. Qualitatively, remittances are tied to notions of success, which are autoreferential and appeal to feelings of material security or having fewer ‘worries’. Remittances enable migrants and households to fulfil practices of cultural and spiritual significance such as filial piety and donations: ‘development’, self-defined, operates at numerous spaces, scales, and to different ends.

Remittance practices are as much about social performativity as they are about material support. Amongst workers, there is a near-universal narrative around filial piety and the provision of care, especially to one’s parents. Remittances satisfy material necessity but also validate ideas around self-actualisation, civic engagement, and identity. Similarly, what is understood by ‘development’ is not a discrete condition, but an iterative relationship between households and their ‘worries’.

‘Outcomes’ are not discrete, but dynamic products of temporal, institutional, economic, and behavioural processes, some more predictable than others. At the household-level, I shed light on the subtle power geometries that determine how finite resources are allocated. Although
fulfilling filial piety confers respect and identity, migrants can also be disempowered by their youth, which may curtail individual liberties in the interests of the household. The possibility of household structural changes further complicates the politics of remittance distribution throughout the migrant lifecourse.

Theoretically, remittances are profoundly social: sending money relies on social relations of trust, remittances fulfil social obligations of care and respect, they are distributed across intra-household power geometries, expenditures are informed by social structures of class and taste, and they also pool risks in social collectives. The sociality of remittances allows us to critically dissect the migration-development nexus. In Mosse’s (2007) social critique of poverty, the author describes how poverty is best understood as the manifestation of social relations, rather than a static condition. This ‘relational’ approach is powerful (see Phillips and Mieres, 2014). As I have demonstrated, remittances allow households to renegotiate their relationship with precarity, but do not alter the structural conditions that underpin it. This is exemplified by households’ enduring battle with health-related expenditures, which is a chronic source of financial precarity. Although remittances alleviate some of the material bases of worry, the absence of social protection ensures that resilience is directly tied to remittance receipts rather than any durable state of ‘development’. Like brokered migration (see 5.2), this produces a sort of development- or resilience-by-subscription; remittances merely scaffold onto existing structures, but do not alter them. There is a fitting Chinese proverb that has filtered through to the Burmese lexicon. Translated, it means ‘hand stop, mouth stop’. In many ways, this describes the plight of migration; though remittances can lift households out of poverty, it also means households inherit the precarities encountered by migrants, on whom they depend. Shocks, either in Singapore or Myanmar, threaten to undo ‘development’ at a moment’s notice, and in the absence of savings buffers or diversified income (cf. Stark and Levhari, 1982) – which are unlikely to accrue due to those very precarities – remittances are largely an ephemeral, stopgap measure. It takes time for migrants to realise value returns, to satisfy household demands, and even more time to accumulate surplus. For many, surplus may never come and, if it does, it may not last. Conceptually, the sociality of remittances also forces us to reconsider the analytical usefulness of key binary assumptions: productive and unproductive remittances, formal and informal transfers.

In terms of productivity, this thesis’s findings suggest that the majority of remittances would, by orthodox definitions, be considered unproductive. However, relations of inter-generational and communal reciprocity, and the inherent convertibility of capitals require us to theorise more broadly what ‘productivity’ means exactly. On the surface, ‘unproductive’ remittances – spoiling one’s parents, donating to the temple – yield not only symbolic ‘profits of distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 245), manifest as pride, status and self-esteem, but also reciprocal support for the migrant and her family (Kusakabe and Pearson, 2016; Griffiths, 2018a; Harper and Zubida, 2018). A novel finding in this thesis’s spatial tracing of remittances is how resources bleed into meso-level sites of spirituality and communal risk-sharing. Donations, a ubiquitous outgoing amongst migrants
and households, fund local relations of social reciprocity that can aid in dampening shocks and precarities (Ito and Griffiths, 2016). If the value of remittances rests in its insurance functions (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Stark and Levhari, 1982; Taylor, 1999), and donations fund social co-insurance, then we must question by whose standards, and on what grounds, are we able to legitimately arbitrate on the productivity of others’ private capital (Kunz, 2011).

In terms of formality, the embeddedness of hundi in both migrant lives and commercial interests renders the formal-informal binary of transfers moot. Both migrants and businesses rely on a portfolio of services, which reflect ingrained, habitualised preferences informed by lived histories of state failure and distrust. Although there are benefits to formality, the discursive framing of remittances as investment capital is not shared by migrants or recipients. Remittances, as this chapter shows, are rarely sent based on pure economic rationality. Consequently, financialisation is unlikely to win support in the short- and medium-term, which is evidenced in poor banking penetration amongst migrants, as well as ‘shallow’ use of financial services amongst households. The value proposition of formality rests more on marketing rhetoric than its legitimacy as a self-evident good. Indeed, if formality is based on fostering market principles of competition and consumer choice, this seems incongruent with the narrowing of ‘informal’ services that migrants can access, rendering remittances themselves precarious (see 6.1). The overzealous commitment of promoting one particular vision of development (and how it should be achieved) risks structural violence at best, and a counterproductive reduction in migrant freedoms at worst (Raghuram, 2009).

More generally, this thesis calls for a greater recognition of temporality and structure in nexus debates. As these analytical chapters have demonstrated, ‘development’ is iterative because the processes by which migrants are able to generate returns are too. This means that for some households precarity may increase in the short term before gains are realised. These are not aberrations, but predictable outcomes of brokerage, labour marketisation, migration governance, and regulation. Policy should identify and address longitudinal vulnerabilities across the migration pathway to reduce precarity and maximise migrant value returns (Deshingkar, 2018). More fundamentally, migration studies should maintain its activist leaning towards advocating structural change. Migrants may effect development at certain scales, but it ought not to be their responsibility (Skeldon, 2008). The conflation of market economics with growth and various facets of development is a worrying trend and multi-sited, multi-scalar approaches are needed to rebuff an otherwise hegemonic development policy machine (Escobar, 1995, Ziai, 2013; Ferguson, 1994). Indeed, it would be unreasonable for policymakers to assume convergence between migrant and policy ambitions. This thesis has sought to highlight how the two may even be, at times, at odds with one another.

Despite these issues, there is cause for optimism. In 2012, a raft of reforms revolutionised the banking and microfinance sectors in Myanmar (Turnell, 2014; LIFT, 2016b). In addition, an influx of multilateral and non-government organisations has assisted in the piloting and implementation
of social protection schemes (ILO, 2015b). At the time of this thesis’s submission, the ban on
domestic worker migration from Myanmar has also been lifted (Straits Times, 2019). During my
time in Myanmar, ATMs were increasingly common and banking services were experiencing a
boom in demand, especially amongst younger customers. Mobile phone penetration has
skyrocketed in recent years and mobile money apps are increasingly popular as young people
send each other petty sums on a regular basis. Against this dynamic backdrop, I am excited to
see how remittances will be brought into the fold of not only household strategies, but the social-
financial landscape more generally, and the impacts this will yield.
7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to understand the relationship between migration and development by tracing people and money between Myanmar and Singapore. To achieve this, I combined survey (n=459) and interview (n=71) methods to reconstruct the migration chain across time and space to describe pre-migration, during-migration, and post-migration experiences. Grounded in Bourdieu’s theory of practice, this thesis analysed remittances and their impacts as a product of the dynamic relationship between social structures and human agency (Bourdieu, 1990; 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In doing so, it aimed to challenge the core assumptions of the ‘migration-development nexus’, a set of interdependent ideas, policies, interventions and institutions that tie together labour mobility with ‘development’. Nexus orthodoxy is principally informed by econometric methods and market-oriented ideologies of economic growth, financialisation, and formalisation. This is practiced through interventionist and managerial policies, primarily at the scale of the nation-state, which are implemented through a small cadre of multilateral organisations, principally the World Bank and, to a lesser extent, the IOM, ILO, and IMF. The same institutions are also responsible for the reproduction of orthodoxy through ‘expert’ knowledge networks that perpetuate and legitimise particular visions and understandings of development: what it means, and how it should be achieved (Asis et al., 2009; Naylor, 2011; Boswell, 2009).

This thesis contributes to the migration and development literature by providing an empirical counterweight to standard nexus thinking. Analyses have demonstrated how migrating from Myanmar to Singapore to ‘support’ one’s family or to pursue self-defined goals of social mobility are habitualised practices: migrants express an internalisation of the cultural and social expectations of ‘development’ at a variety of scales. Workers are caught between the voluntary acts of choosing to migrate, and non-negotiable structures, such as filial piety or livelihood precarity. Rather than abstracting remittances as standalone flows of capital, I re-embed remittances into the lived social contexts of their production in the Myanmar-Singapore migration corridor (Appadurai, 1986; Christophers, 2011). The objective was to shed light on why and how they are sent, and what effects they have. This was crystallised in four research questions:

1. What are the baseline characteristics of the Burmese population in Singapore?
2. How can the factors driving labour migration from Myanmar be understood as a practice between social structure and human agency?
3. How do variations in the migration process shape migration outcomes?
4. What are the impacts of remittances on recipient households?

The idea that migration – or more specifically, remittances – may be leveraged for development has become a normalised, taken-for-granted truth under nexus orthodoxy. In contrast, this thesis
has argued that the relationship between migration and development is not a self-evident, empirical fact but a discourse: an accumulation of knowledge that is embedded in unequal power relations and a particular world-view (Asis et al., 2009). Migrants’ testimonies evidence greater complexity in ‘development’ meanings, drivers, experiences, and outcomes than nexus thought has hitherto acknowledged, and challenges us to reconsider whether migrants’ money is truly the universal solution to poverty at home that was once thought. Not only do different social starting positions shape migration motivations but they also structure path-dependent outcomes for migrants at destination. Gendered and classed exposure to new risks and precarities in the migration process – many of which are omitted in the language of poverty-reduction or economic growth – means ‘development’ is all but guaranteed.

The central argument of this thesis is that remittance outcomes need to be understood and analysed as the product of social practices. They are not simply the dividends of mobility generated by abstract ‘workers’. Rather, workers are positioned between their own agency, their cultural obligations (such as religious observance and filial piety), and social structures (such as debt, precarity, gendered labour, and intermediaries). This concluding section will review some of the key findings from this thesis, discuss what this means for the state of the ‘migration-development nexus’, and whether it is still a useful theoretical construct. Finally, I end on a closing statement on the place of migration in Myanmar as the country moves into a new era of governance.

7.1 Statement of Findings

This thesis’s findings have complicated nexus thinking by highlighting the social-structural complexities of how development is ‘done’ pre-, during-, and post-migration. According to survey data, the average Burmese migrant worker earns eight times more in Singapore than in Myanmar. In aggregate terms, Burmese migrants in Singapore send home more than S$1bn per year. Though compelling, these statistics do not reflect, I argue, what ‘development’ really means to migrants and households in practice. Moreover, the discursive foundations of nexus theory are built on reductive assumptions about atomised profit maximisers whose incentives do not reflect how people actually think and behave.

First, there are fundamental differences that explain why different workers migrate. Although workers usually cite material challenges – insufficient and unstable income, a lack of savings – as key drivers to migration, findings demonstrate how hardship and constraints are narrated differently by different households. Not all who migrate are poor; for some, the ‘decision’ to migrate is borne of existential necessity, whereas for others it’s premised on relative wants: to achieve social mobility, career development, and experiences. What constitutes ‘development’ is relational and subjective, built on classed definitions of ‘progress’. Conspicuously missing across interviews was the language of economic rationality assumed by nexus orthodoxy.
Instead, interviewees couched their livelihoods and migration in vernaculars of ‘worry’. It is not just the prospect of earning more that drives migration, but different degrees of exposure to livelihood hostilities, such as inflation, a lack of social protections, and households’ susceptibility to shock also play a large role. Similarly, it is not just that households are poor, but it is how that poverty translates into visceral, lived experiences that provides the motivational backdrop to movement. For many, migration is the strategy of last resort and is seldom actioned in response to acute shock. Instead, migration occurs through a slow recalibration of the collective habitus. Put simply, workers are socialised into migrating.

Second, this diversity in migrant narratives is driven by structural-historical factors, which alerts us to the value of social typologies. Although much of the migration literature has examined low-wage, temporary migrants, other migrant types should not be ignored. Instead, this thesis answers van Hear’s (2014) call to reintegrate class into migration studies by examining how pre-migration access to resources and habitus shapes a disposition to migrate. ‘Migrants’ are not all alike, and survey respondents exhibit strong spatial and demographic patterns, such as urbanity, education, and gender. These patterns also produce path dependencies: poorer rural workers are less likely to be educated and thus more likely to migrate into low-value occupations. Where workers come from plays a large part in determining where they can go (ibid.). In turn, the spatial segmentation of migrants also drives patterns of remittance distributions at the national level. In the case of domestic work, which accounts for about a third of all Burmese in Singapore, migration-development processes and effects are also highly gendered. Categories thus illuminate migrant livelihoods in the past, present, and the probable future, and allow us to identify how individuals occupy and experience different social structures. Research and policy can thus benefit from disaggregation to better protect specific group interests at particular spaces and times.

Third, the path dependency of migrant typologies is best illustrated through the process of migration. Actions are dispositions given form. In a Bourdieusian equation, how one migrates is defined by the resources the migrant has at her disposal, her habitual orientations, and the rules of the field. Findings demonstrate strong patterns in how workers move: low-wage workers are disproportionately reliant on debt-financed migration and brokerage, whereas high-wage workers typically rely on social networks to secure jobs. The former tends to lack the monetary resources, technical know-how, and social networks to migrate to Singapore. Instead, agents facilitate migration and secure employment for a fee, which also generates debt obligations. In contrast, high-wage migrants’ reliance on social networks dramatically decreases the cost of migration, but also represents a type of latent economic risk if they are unable to secure a job quickly. Across all pathways, a common theme is that of precarity, which I used to describe the legal, employment, and financial risks faced by migrants. Domestic worker pathways – debt-bonded and monopolistically brokered – are idiosyncratic and illustrate how precarity disproportionately affects women. Even post-entry, there is a strong gender skew in the prevalence of employment shocks that inhibit women from capitalising on their labour.
Interruptions are monetarily and temporally costly and the effects ripple through dependant networks: women are more burdened than men. Finally, market precarities combine with legal ones, such as the Myanmar domestic worker ban, which reveals the feted ‘triple win’ – the idea that migration can bring benefit to migrant, host, and labour-sending country – as naively optimistic.

Fourth, remittances lift households’ ability to consume, allowing them to meet everyday expenditures with greater ease. However, this is tempered against the relative needs of the household, which is informed by demographic factors such as the age of members and household size, as well as subjective lifestyle tastes. Perhaps most relevant to nexus debates are how remittances assist in mitigating shocks. Reflecting initial precarities that necessitated migration, healthcare spending accounts for a disproportionately large amount of unexpected expenditures. Critically, although remittances are able to raise the spending capacity of households, they are fundamentally unable to alter the underlying structural deficiencies that engender those shocks in the first place. Households may be better able to pay for healthcare treatments, eldercare, and education, but state services and interventions remain conspicuously absent. For more vulnerable households, their dependence on remittances means that any shocks the migrant encounters are multiplied across space. Interruptions to employment threatens to undo the ‘progress’ households build over time. In this frame, ‘development’ is seldom achieved as a discrete status but is tied to the fate of the remitter.

Fifth, the meanings behind remittances are subjective and cannot be reduced to their monetary value alone. Contrary to nexus assumptions, workers do not think of remittances as investment capital. This also explains why remittances have not responded to attempts to formalise and financialise flows; remittances are couched in subjective preferences, not economic rationality. As a result, banking and use of financial services remain ‘shallow’. Moreover, migrant earnings are not seen as exceptional capital flows that can be simply ‘leveraged’ for investment. Instead, they are superimposed onto existing habits, structures of necessity and expenditure, and dispositions towards particular tastes. Beyond material necessity, filial piety, religious obligations and class are an important aspect of household distribution. On the one hand, parents are the primary benefactors of remittances, where ‘support’ denotes care and respect as much as it fulfils material need. Nonetheless, support is not unidirectional, and migrants also derive self-esteem, confidence, and identity from performing filial piety. A tacit household contract may also afford the migrant access to support should they encounter issues during migration. On the other hand, nexus classifications of ‘productive’ versus ‘unproductive’ expenditures do not translate into the migrant vocabulary. Interviewees demonstrate how expenditures on property, for example, satisfy deep emotional needs for security and identity, which are core pillars in the imagination of ‘progress’ that compelled migration in the first place. Policies that dismiss these ideas risk undermining stakeholder ‘buy in’, and the legitimacy of intervention more generally, especially at this juncture of politically sensitive transition in Myanmar. Finally, remittances also overlay near-ubiquitous dispositions towards religious
donation. The frequency and amount of donations are significant; households report donating 10% of monthly income, usually to monastic and ecclesiastical organisations. Importantly, such donations allow members to share risk in times of shock, although the prevalence and membership of these organisations are unclear.

7.2 The Usefulness of the Migration-Development Nexus

The findings from this thesis help to bring nuance to nexus debates, but they also bring to light important parallels between contemporary nexus rhetoric and interventionist development discourses of the 1980s and 1990s (see Thorbecke, 2006). The nexus orthodoxy is not just a neutral set of observations and knowledge claims. Rather it is part of a legitimisation of specific ideas and interventions (Ziai, 2013). This is validated by breaking the nexus into its component parts: migration and development, where the two objects of enquiry are not treated with equal weighting. The former is generally more interdisciplinary, and draws broadly from geographical, sociological, and anthropological traditions, whereas ‘development studies’ has long been a field dominated – at least in policy – by econometric methodologies (King, 2012). It does not make sense to conceptualise the nexus as a neat overlap of two independent strands of research. Instead, the nexus, and previous development ‘paradigms’ (Thorbecke, 2006; Park, 2017; Pieterse, 1998), is borne of the ‘discovery’ of migration as yet another resource to be leveraged by development ‘experts’ (de Haas, 2012; Sutherland, 2013; Kapur, 2004; Easterly, 2002). A more cynical reading might rebrand the nexus the ‘development conglomerate’, of which migration – and its attendant methodologies and perspectives – are merely a subsidiary of tangential consideration. Accordingly, much of this thesis’s critique of the nexus rests on the disconnect between the normative assumptions versus subjective realities of migration.

First, the very project of ‘development’ is one that is political and ideological. In nexus orthodoxy, this is expressed in economic market-based terms. To be clear, this thesis does not argue against economic conceptualisations of development; households face real material constraints and remittances can provide valuable relief from livelihood precarity. However, the key issue is the narrow understanding of development that prioritises particular visions of ‘progress’ above others (Raghuram, 2009). As findings demonstrate, there is no single understanding of what ‘development’ ought to entail (Ferguson, 1994; Cowen and Shenton, 1995; Escobar, 1995). Instead, of nexus stakeholders, the World Bank wields disproportionate power in framing the normative aims of migration which, as this thesis demonstrates, do not always resonate with migrant-defined goals and narratives (Easterly, 2002). This is evident in both theory and practice.

On the one hand, despite critique of the economic individualism implicit within earlier nexus theories, elements of neoclassical orthodoxy remain (Abreu, 2012). In one of the few World Bank publications on migration from Myanmar, Testaverde et al., (2017: 67-68) details the methodology used to estimate domestic and international mobility costs in ASEAN: ‘observed
wage gaps between jobs are a measure of the attractiveness of different jobs... An underlying assumption is that labor mobility is solely motivated by economic considerations’ (emphasis added). This thesis’s insistent critique of the nexus ‘orthodoxy’ is not a strawman argument that attacks obsolete policies. Instead, the inadequacies of policy and research, which have been repeatedly identified (Abreu, 2012; Ziai, 2013; Park; 2017), are stubborn, recurring, and dangerous, suffering from a convenient ‘amnesia’ of past failure (Easterly, 2002). Accordingly, push-pull economics and wage differentials remain the key conceptual referents assumed to drive migration (Lee, 1966; Harris and Todaro, 1970; van Hear et al., 2017).

On the other hand, this drives reductive policy that is unlikely to succeed. Despite major banking and monetary reforms in Myanmar, uptake of financial services in both the migrant and domestic population remains slim. Migrants, in particular, continue to shy away from ‘official’ channels and products, which partly reflects a habitus reliant on informality and social exchange, but also demonstrates the need to recognise diverse consumer preferences. If the normative ambition of formalisation is to enhance competition by increasing choice (cf. Sen, 1999), then the discursive and political narrowing of what the ‘right’ choices are seem counterintuitive and perhaps counterproductive (Kunz; 2011). This is evident in the Singapore-Myanmar remittance corridor, where the securitisation of remittances, codified in anti-money laundering rhetoric, coincides with broader ambitions to financialise remittances (Atia, 2016; Cross, 2015; Hudson, 2008). In the context of Myanmar, which has been shaken by banking collapses and regulatory failure, the suspicions that migrants harbour over ‘formality’ seem fair (Mangshang and Griffiths, 2018). Thus, assumptions of formality as a self-evident good not only undermine the freedoms of migrants, but also depoliticise the systems that have contributed to the precarity that households faced pre-migration (Mosse, 2007). Where the incumbent government is struggling to rebuild civic trust and legitimacy amongst parts of the population (Mangshang and Griffiths, 2018; South, 2012; Turnell, 2014), such interventions are unlikely to be favoured by migrants.

Second, the depoliticisation of migration further manifests as a wilful misrecognition or misrepresentation of interests (Cross, 2015; Wee et al., 2018; McKeown, 2012). As findings have demonstrated, the nexus is not a coherent ideology where all stakeholders are united in a common goal (Wickramasekara, 2011). Instead, both migration and ‘development’ are produced through a confluence of commercial and state interests (Goh et al., 2017; Piper, 2010; Yeoh, 2006). Between the labour-receiving state’s need to secure foreign labour to fuel economic growth and the profit incentives of brokers and intermediaries, migrants are exposed to exploitation across time and space (Deshingkar, 2018). If the nexus believes the nominal objective of migration is to generate income, then precarity is a systemic barrier to achieving this goal (Lewis et al., 2015). These distinctions matter. Ostensibly driven by the need to protect (female) workers (Chapkis, 2003), Myanmar’s sporadic bans on migration, have served to undermine protections as brokerage is driven underground. The effects of these bans are profoundly gendered; though female domestic workers encounter abuses, so do men, and yet the latter’s mobility remains largely unaffected (Kaufman and Crawford, 2011; Mahdavi, 2013a;
The state thus selectively protects certain bodies from certain forms of harm (Yea, 2015; Jacob, 2014), as part of the broader objective to protect the body-politic.

This further obscure the interests of facilitation processes that cannot be held accountable in case of exploitation or abuse, creating doubly precarious structures of migration governance (McKeown, 2012). The idea that migration straightforwardly leads to development is naive at best, and dangerous at worst. This also draws our attention to the need to account for the temporality of returns since debt-financed migrants are unable to achieve any meaningful income for the duration of repayment (Platt et al., 2016; Yeoh et al., 2017; Davidson, 2013). Moreover, debt serves to constrain the freedoms of workers, primarily as a means for brokers and employers to manage and delegate financial risks (Woolson and Likic-Brboric, 2008). If policy aims to leverage migration for ‘development’, then we must question whether these processes that produce new forms of precarity, and offloads risks to those least able to shoulder them, is consistent with overall nexus rhetoric. This is not to ignore migrant agency, but it does raise questions over whether sending and receiving states, hitherto regarded as partners in the feted ‘triple win’ of migration-led development (Wickramasekara, 2011), truly holds migrants’ interests at heart. In the context of Myanmar’s incoherent migration governance and Singapore’s emphasis on decentralised enforcement of temporary labour, this thesis has demonstrated how the competing interests of stakeholders may work to the detriment of migrants.

Third, both migration and development are not durable states, but ongoing practices (see Platt et al., 2016). As my findings demonstrate, migration is a manifestation of accumulated history: of successive exposure to precarity, livelihood insecurity, and constrained social mobility. On the one hand, the conceptualisation of migration and development as practice forces us to confront diversity (van Hear, 2014). The degree to which development can be practiced is dependent on migrant and household resources, dispositions, and the favourability of the field (Bourdieu, 1977). In this frame, development is produced relationally through structural-historical trajectories that render some households more likely to achieve ‘development’, by whatever definition, than others. On the other hand, this also forces an analysis of the temporalities of migration and development (Griffiths et al., 2013). Practices are a function of the migrant’s changing relationship with the field over time; motivations, meanings, and behaviours are not constant (Boccagni, 2017; Kalir, 2013; Ma, 2017b). In terms of migration, temporality manifests as the worker’s duration away, debt repayment periods, her changing relationship with her dependants, obligations to remit, changing motivations to stay, different definitions of ‘success’, imaginations of return, stochastic encounters with shock, exposure to precarity, and so on. In terms of development, temporality also determines how soon, if ever, households are able to break even, save, and ‘invest’, which are core ambitions within nexus thought (Bastia, 2013; Yang, 2008; de Haas, 2012). As with migration, an element of luck is involved: a household that is poor now may be richer later. Similarly, a well-off migrant household now may be made destitute, especially through migration or household expenditure shocks (Krishna, 2010). As currently theorised, the nexus harks back to an orthodox interventionist era of ‘Big D
Development’ (Hart, 2001). However, the complexity of what migration and development actually entails means that remittances are unlikely to be the magic bullet that policymakers are looking for.

Myanmar’s thawing international relations in recent years has led to a ‘race’ for intervention and approval of assistance programmes from overseas. Institutions such as the World Bank were amongst the ‘first to market’, which also granted them the ability to set the terms of the discourse and trajectory of reform. However, this thesis’s critique has illustrated how, despite empirical advances, development discourse remains conceptually stubborn. Where migration studies have increasingly shied away from ‘grand theories’ of phenomena and relationships (Castles, 2010), the migration-development nexus is one of the conspicuous few that remained committed to sweeping conceptualisations. Although theoretical advances in nexus thought has been iterative (de Haas, 2012), important lessons from critical development theorists in the 1990s have yet to be applied to the nexus at any great length. Perhaps more cynically, the migration-development nexus has largely escaped these debates precisely because they purportedly represent a ‘new’ field of enquiry that is somehow immune to past critique. Without due intervention, we risk ‘repeating past proposals, past mistakes, and past critiques without realizing it—a sort of institutional amnesia inhibiting the efficacy, legitimacy, and sustainability of the development endeavour’ (Park, 2017: 60).

This thesis remains optimistic about the role that a revised, more critical, counter-discursive migration-development nexus can serve for migrants and their households. As outmigration from Myanmar grows, researchers are presented with an opportunity and an obligation to understand the context-specific drivers and effects of these flows. The relationship between migration and development is not unilateral but mutually constituted: migration is both caused by, and impacts, ‘development’, variously defined. This thesis does not call for the abandonment of the nexus, but rather the augmentation of it. Interventions can be strengthened by prioritising context-specific analyses, where we combine emic and etic understandings of ‘development’ and draw on the rich repertoire of methodologies from across the social sciences. It is not that the nexus is inherently wrong, but that all perspectives are partial and inadequate and reflect the ideologies of those that generate them. The continued relevance, accuracy, and legitimacy of the nexus is contingent on its willingness to embrace this diversity.

7.3 Closing statement

Between the democratisation and peace-building process, ensuring economic growth, managing growing international relations and ASEAN integration, reforming and restructuring government, modernising the agrarian sector, funding social protection programmes, and planning for increasingly frequent ecological shocks, migration, at least in terms of labour-economic migration, is relatively low on the Myanmar government’s list of priorities. At the time
of this thesis’s submission, the maligned domestic worker ban had just been lifted (Straits Times, 2019), as was the embargo placed on migration to Malaysia a year earlier (Htwe, 2018b). Though it is too soon to derive any meaningful observation from these changes, they do evidence a slow, if reluctant, embrace of migration governance as a political priority. Nonetheless, there is still no labour attaché in the Myanmar Embassy in Singapore. Furthermore, having enjoyed a brief moment in the international spotlight as a beacon of human rights and democracy, the state-sanctioned violence that led to the shocking genocide and displacement of the Rohingya in Rakhine State has returned Myanmar to a pariah status. The diplomatic ties briefly extended to Myanmar are now quickly being withdrawn.

Nonetheless, there are signs of greater engagement in migration issues. Amongst key nexus actors, the World Bank has begun advising the government on fostering bilateral ties with labour-receiving countries to encourage worker protections (Testaverde et al., 2017). LIFT has also funded a flagship US$6.5m project – ‘Twe Let’ – which aims to look at assisting migrants through job-matching, training, education programmes, and financial capabilities. Similarly, the University of Sussex and the IOM have launched research programmes to examine the role of brokers in facilitating international migration from Myanmar, as well as further research into how labour migration patterns impact poverty alleviation and inclusive development. Tangentially, social protection reforms are high on the agenda and are relevant for households both pre- and post-migration (ILo, 2015b; Hook et al., 2015). HelpAge International, an NGO, has begun small trials to use mobile technology to dispense government pensions. At present, most public health is provided sporadically through donor-funded initiatives; there is a lack of an overarching health policy, but this is also beginning to change. Within urban centres, financial services and international remittance agencies are becoming more common. An insurance market – though still very much in its infancy – is starting to develop.

This thesis’s timing is doubly opportune. This thesis’s proposal in 2015 was motivated by the need to understand a transitioning and liberalising Myanmar. At the time of submission, we find ourselves on the cusp of another election. The 2020 election will be interesting not least because of the initial optimism has waned: though the NLD’s victory was lauded, lukewarm economic growth and growing international condemnation of the Rohingya Crisis has clearly marred Aung San Suu Kyi’s reputation as a posterchild for democracy, hope, and change, though more so abroad than at home. Though unlikely, there is fear that military generals – for whom 25% of parliamentary seats are reserved – are biding their time to slowly regain power. This marks another important juncture in Myanmar’s history, one which will determine what the political priorities are going to be for the next five years. Rhetorically, the NLD has urged overseas Burmese to return to contribute to economic development. In spite of these pleas, Myanmar’s greater connectivity with the outside world has achieved the opposite by spurring migration. What this thesis has shown is that migration is a complex and dynamic interplay between humans, structures, and history. As Myanmar works to find its feet amidst a maelstrom of change and uncertainty, a host of academics, policymakers, researchers, journalists, and commentators
are poring over how to make migration ‘work’ for development. It is critical that we present dissenting perspectives and opinions to ensure that the voices of migrants are heard in the halls of Naypyidaw.
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First, we want to ask you about your time in Singapore…

A1. How long have you been working in Singapore on your current job?

Note: You can include short periods of time away from Singapore (such as holidays or visits home), but please exclude longer periods of 3 months or more. If you are working the same job, but have changed employers, please include this in your total duration.

[ ] years and [ ] months

A2. What industry do you work in?:

(001) Domestic helper [ ] (002) Construction [ ] (003) Hospitality [ ] (004) Customer services [ ]
(005) Manufacturing [ ] (006) Industry [ ] (007) Food and beverage [ ] (008) IT/technical [ ]
(009) Financial services [ ] (010) Professional services [ ] (011) Other (please specify): __________________

A3. What visa do you currently hold?:

(001) Work Permit holder [ ] (002) Work Permit holder (domestic helper) [ ] (003) S Pass holder [ ] (004) Employment Pass [ ]
(005) Permanent resident [ ] (006) Other [ ] (007) Prefer not to say [ ]

A4. Have you ever worked in a country other than Myanmar and Singapore?

Yes [ ] No [ ] (go to question X)

A4a. If yes, where else have you worked?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>When were you working there? (Month/Year) to (Month/Year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Thailand</td>
<td>Example: office clerk</td>
<td>Example: June 2012 to May 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A5. Why did you come to work in Singapore? You can tick more than one.

(001) To save money for the future [ ] (002) To help my family by sending money home [ ]
(003) No jobs available in Myanmar □
(004) Jobs in Myanmar are poorly paid □
(005) To send my children to school □
(006) To experience a new country □
(007) I urgently needed money □
(008) I was referred to Singapore by a friend □
(009) I was referred to Singapore by a relative □
(010) Other (please write down): __________________________

A6. How did you get your current job in Singapore?
(001) Directly hired by employer □
(002) Secured through employment agency □
(003) Referred by friend or family □
(004) Relocation from overseas □
(005) Other (please specify): __________________________

^ A6a. Was a recruiter involved in hiring you for your current job? Examples of recruiters include employment agency representatives and partners in your village or township.
Yes □ No □ Don’t know/can’t remember □

Subsection: please only complete if you got secured your job through an employment agency.

AS1. Did you sign an employment contract prior to starting your current job?
Yes □ No □ (go to Q. X) Don’t know/can’t remember □

^ AS1a. If yes, were you offered a copy of this employment contract?
Yes □ No □ Don’t know/can’t remember □

^ AS1b. How well were you able to understand the different parts of the employment contract?

Note: responses are ranked along five levels of understanding: from no understanding to complete understanding. For each of the contract items – language, information about your job, and information about the agency – rank how well you feel as though you understood those items when you signed your contract. If you can’t remember whether or not you understood a particular item, or if the item was not in the contract in first place (such as information on your rights and responsibilities), please tick ‘can’t remember/not applicable’.

1 = no understanding, 2 = poor understanding, 3 = neither good or poor understanding, 4 = good understanding, 5 = complete understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Can’t remember/not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Was the contract provided in a language you can read? Were the words and phrases used clear and understandable? □□□□□
Information about your job
Was your job, duties and rights fully explained? This includes information on your employer, work tasks, salary, and off-days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Ticking</th>
<th>Can’t remember/not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information about the agency
Were the agency’s services fully explained? This includes information on how agency fees are calculated, salary deductions, and any support the agency provides if you have employment-related issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Ticking</th>
<th>Can’t remember/not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AS2. In your current job, are your working tasks different than the ones agreed upon with the employment agency before you started work?
Yes [ ] No [ ] Don’t know/can’t remember [ ]

AS3. Was your starting salary different than the amount agreed upon with the employment agency before you started work?
Yes [ ] No [ ] (go to Q. X) Don’t know/can’t remember [ ]

^AS3a. If yes, how much is your salary different by?
Example: If your salary was less by $200: More [ ] or Less [ ], by [ ] 200 SGD
More [ ] or Less [ ], by [ ] [ ] SGD

AS4. Did you have to pay an upfront fee to your employment agency to secure your current job?
Yes [ ] No [ ] (go to question X.) Don’t know/can’t remember [ ]

^AS4a. If yes, how much did you have to pay?
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] SGD Don’t know/can’t remember [ ]

AS5. In your current job, did you have to pay monthly salary deductions to the employment agency for your job placement?
Yes [ ] No [ ] (go to Q. X) Don’t know/can’t remember [ ]

^AS5a. If yes, did your salary deductions last the same amount of time as agreed with your employment agency before you started work?
Yes [ ] No [ ] Don’t know/can’t remember [ ]

End of subsection.

A7. How did you fund your move to Singapore? You can tick more than one.
(001) Borrowed money from family [ ]
(002) Borrowed money from friends [ ]
(003) Borrowed money from local [ ]
(004) Personal savings [ ]

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A8. Did you accrue debts as a result of moving to Singapore? Please do not include money owed to employment agencies. If no, skip to Question X.
Yes [ ] No [ ] (go to question X)

^A8a. If yes, how much money did you owe as a result of moving to Singapore? [ ] [ ] SGD/MMK (circle the currency you are using)

^A8b. How long did it take you to repay all of these debts?
Years, [ ] Months, Not yet repaid [ ]

A9. What was your gross (before tax) average monthly income before coming to Singapore?
[ ] [ ] SGD/MMK (circle the currency you are using), I did not have a paid job [ ]

A10. What is your current gross (before tax) monthly salary? Do not include any agency deductions.
[ ] SGD

Second, we want to find out more about your family and home back in Myanmar…

B1. Excluding yourself, how many people live in your household in Myanmar?: [ ]

B2. Do you have any children?
Yes [ ] No [ ] (go to question X) Prefer not to say [ ]

^B2a. If yes, how many children do you have?: [ ]

B3. How many people are financially dependant on you?: None [ ] (go to question X)

^ B3a. Who are the people who are financially dependant on you? You can tick more than one.
(001) Spouse [ ] (002) Children [ ] (003) Parents [ ] (004) Grandparents [ ]
(005) In-laws [ ] (006) Siblings [ ] (007) Nieces/nephews [ ]
(008) Others [ ]

B4. Are you the only breadwinner in the household?
Yes [ ] No [ ] (go to question X) Prefer not to say [ ]
B4a. If no, what are your household’s other sources of income? Please circle the currency you use for calculating each income category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of income</th>
<th>Income per month</th>
<th>Currency (circle the currency you are using)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local paid work</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>SGD/MMK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employment</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>SGD/MMK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remittances from other household members inside Myanmar</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>SGD/MMK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remittances from other household members working overseas</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>SGD/MMK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>SGD/MMK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About your home

B5. Do you own your current home in Myanmar? Yes ☐ No ☐

B6. What material is your home mainly made of?
(001) Brick ☐ (002) Cement ☐ (003) Timber ☐ (004) Bamboo ☐
(005) Other (please specify): ___________________________

Thirdly, we want to know more about how you support your household in Myanmar…

C1. Do you send money back to Myanmar? Yes ☐ No ☐

C2. How often do you send money back to Myanmar?
(001) Weekly ☐ (002) Once a month ☐
(003) Less than once a month ☐ (004) Annually ☐
(005) Other (please specify): ______________________

C3. Who do you normally send money to?
(001) Spouse ☐ (002) Parents ☐ (003) Children ☐
(004) Grandparents ☐
(005) Other ☐ (006) Yourself (e.g. bank account in Myanmar) ☐
(007) Other (please specify): ______________________

C4. How much money you normally send per transaction?: ☐ ☐ SGD

C5. What is your usual method of sending money?
Cash by courier/mail  Give to friend returning to Myanmar  Give to relative returning to Myanmar  Employer transfers for me

Money agent  Bank transfer  Western Union/MoneyGram

Other (please specify): ____________________________

C6. Per transaction, how much do you pay to send money to Myanmar?:

- SGD
- Nothing
- Don’t know

C7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Note: responses are ranked along five levels of agreement: from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Rank each statement by how well they describe you.

Example: if you are fully aware of the available options for sending money to Myanmar, tick ‘strongly agree’ to the statement ‘I have an excellent knowledge of the different methods available for sending money to Myanmar’. Correspondingly, tick ‘agree’ to indicate good general knowledge, ‘disagree’ for little knowledge, and ‘strongly disagree’ for no knowledge. If you are unsure of how well the statement describes you – in this case if you have neither good or bad knowledge of money sending methods – tick ‘neither agree nor disagree’.

a) I have an excellent knowledge of the different methods available for sending money to Myanmar
   - Strongly disagree,
   - disagree,
   - neither agree nor disagree,
   - agree,
   - strongly agree

b) I have an excellent knowledge of the different costs charged for sending money to Myanmar
   - Strongly disagree,
   - disagree,
   - neither agree nor disagree,
   - agree,
   - strongly agree

c) I have an excellent knowledge of the changing foreign exchange rates between the Singaporean Dollar and Myanmar Kyat
   - Strongly disagree,
   - disagree,
   - neither agree nor disagree,
   - agree,
   - strongly agree

d) I always use the cheapest method of sending money to Myanmar
   - Strongly disagree,
   - disagree,
   - neither agree nor disagree,
   - agree,
   - strongly agree

e) I always use the most convenient method of sending money to Myanmar
   - Strongly disagree,
   - disagree,
   - neither agree nor disagree,
   - agree,
   - strongly agree

C8. How is the money you send back to Myanmar usually spent? You can tick more than one.

- (001) Housing
- (002) Home improvements
- (003) Groceries
- (004) Utilities costs
- (005) Debt repayment
- (006) Household goods
C9. How often do you send gifts/presents back to Myanmar?
(001) Weekly ☐
(002) Once a month ☐
(003) Less than once a month ☐
(004) Annually ☐
(005) Never ☐
(006) Other (please specify):
__________________________

C10. Do you save money on a regular basis?
Yes ☐
No ☐ (go to question X)

^C10a. If yes, on average, how much money do you save per month?:
SGD

^C10b. Do you have a target savings amount?
Yes ☐
No ☐

^C10c. How much money do you plan to save?
SGD

^C10d. What are you saving money for? You can tick more than one.
(001) Children’s education ☐
(002) To buy a house ☐
(003) To buy land ☐
(004) To start a business ☐
(005) Marriage ☐
(006) No reason ☐
(007) Other (please specify):_________________________

C11. Are you a member of any social groups in Singapore? You can tick more than one.
(001) Religious groups (example: church or temple worship groups) ☐
(002) Educational groups (example: cooking classes) ☐
(003) Hometown associations (example: village community group) ☐
(004) Recreation groups (example: sports and leisure activities groups) ☐
(005) Other ☐ (please write down):_________________________
(006) I am not a member of any social group ☐ (go to the next section)

^C11a. Have you donated money to Myanmar through any of these groups in the last 12 months? Examples include money you send for community projects and disaster relief.
Yes ☐
No ☐
Don’t know/can’t remember ☐

^C11b. If yes, what was the total amount you donated in the last 12 months?
SGD/MMK
Finally, we want to find out more about yourself…

D1. How old are you (as stated in your passport)?: □□ years old

D2. What is your gender?
    - Male □
    - Female □
    - Other □
    - Prefer not to say □

D3. What is your marital status?
    - (001) Single □
    - (002) Married □
    - (003) Separated or Divorced □
    - (004) Widowed □
    - (005) Prefer not to say □

D4. What is your ethnicity?:
    - (001) Kachin □
    - (002) Kayah □
    - (003) Kayin □
    - (004) Chin □
    - (005) Mon □
    - (006) Bamar □
    - (007) Rakhine □
    - (008) Shan □
    - (009) Chinese □
    - (010) Indian □
    - (011) Other □

D5. Which state/region are you from in Myanmar?:
    - (001) Ayeyarwady □
    - (002) Bago □
    - (003) Chin □
    - (004) Kachin □
    - (005) Kayah □
    - (006) Kayin □
    - (007) Magway □
    - (008) Mandalay □
    - (009) Mon □
    - (010) Rakhine □
    - (011) Sagaing □
    - (012) Shan □
    - (013) Tanintharyi □
    - (014) Yangon □
    - (015) Naypyidaw □

D6. What is your highest level of education?:
    - (001) None □
    - (002) Primary school □
    - (003) Secondary/middle school □
    - (004) High school/10th standard □
    - (005) 10th Standard Passed/University level □
    - (006) University graduate □
    - (007) Vocational Training □

D7. What is your religion?
    - (001) Buddhist □
    - (002) Christian: Catholic □
    - (003) Christian: other □
    - (004) Islam □
    - (005) Hinduism □
    - (006) Other (please specify):
        ______________________

D8. How well can you read English?:
    - Poor □
    - Beginner □
    - Intermediate □
    - Advanced □
D9. How well can you speak English?:
- Poor
- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced
- Fluent

Fluent ☑
Annex 2: Migrant worker survey (Burmese)

A1. အမေရိကန်း စုစုပေါင်း ရဲတဲ့ အများအားဖြင့် အကြီးအကျယ် အဘိုးအများအစိုးရအား

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>မြို့တော်</th>
<th>အများအားဖြင့် လုပ်ငန်းခြင်းအမျိုးအစား</th>
<th>အဆင့်အမှတ် များစွာ လုပ်ငန်းခြင်း</th>
<th>အချိန်ကာလ မည်မီးကာပါၿပီလဲ။</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>စီးပီးချိုး</td>
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<tr>
<td>စီးပီးချိုးများ</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B2. မြောက်အမြောက်လေးပေါင်း အခြေခံအများအစိုးရအား

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>အမှတ် အမေးအစား</th>
<th>အများအားဖြင့် လုပ်ငန်းခြင်းအမျိုးအစား</th>
<th>အချိန်ကာလ မည်မီးကာပါၿပီလဲ။</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>စီးပီးချိုး</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>စီးပီးချိုးများ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A3. လူဦးရေအရေအတွက် လေးပေါင်း လေးပေါင်းအား

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Permit (အမေးအစား)</th>
<th>Work Permit (အမည်)</th>
<th>S Pass</th>
<th>Employment Pass</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>အချက်အလက်</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A4. အမေရိကန်း စုစုပေါင်း အကြီးအကျယ်အစိုးရအားလုံးစိုးစွဲ လေးပေါင်းအား

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>အမှတ်များအားလုံး</th>
<th>အဆင့်အမှတ် များစွာ လုပ်ငန်းခြင်း</th>
<th>အချိန်ကာလ မည်မီးကာပါၿပီလဲ။</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>အမေရိကန်း</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>အများအားဖြင့် လုပ်ငန်းခြင်း</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

စီးပီးချိုးတစ်ခုထက်ပို၍ေရြးခ်ယ္ႏိုင္ပါသည္။
**A5. သင်တန်းအတွက်ဗျင်းအားလုံးအရ လက်ရှိလုပ်နေသောအလုပ်ကို သင်ဘယ်လိုရရွိခဲ့ပါသနည်း။**

အလုပ်ရွင်းမွတ်ပြီးနောက် တိုက်ခန်းထားသည် အလုပ်အကိုင်ရွေဖြေရးအဖ်စီမွတဆင့် မိတ်ဆွေ (သို့) မိသားစုဝင်မွ ချွေးပေးသည် ဗျင်းအားလုံးမွ ပေးသည် ချင်းစိုက်၍ စီးပြားလာသည် အျခား (ရွင်းပါ) _________________________________________

**AS1. လက်ရှိအလုပ်ကို မစတင်မီက အလုပ်ခန်းအပြီး စာခိုင်န်ကိုလက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါသလား။**

ထိုးခဲ့ပါသည် မထိုးခဲ့ပါ (ဗျင်းအားလုံး AS2 သို့သြားပါ)

/ / / AS1a. အကယ်၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါက အလုပ်စာခိုင်န်မိတ့်ကို သင်ရရွိခဲ့ပါသလား။

/ / / AS1b. အကယ်၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါက အလုပ်စာခိုင်န်သရားမိုးကို သင်မည်မ်းနားလည်ပါသည်။

/ / / AS1c. အကယ်၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါက မိတ်ဆွေ အထိမောင်းအဆင့် ၅ သွားမွတ်ပါသည်။

/ / / AS1d. အကယ်၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါက စာခိုင်န်တို့က သင်လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့စဥ်က စာခိုင်န်တို့အောက်တွင် ပါရွိသော အခန်းကို တစ်ခုခုစီ (ဥပမာ စာခိုင်န်အေရးအသား၊ သင်လုပ်ရမည် အလုပ်အေၾကာင်၊ အလုပ်အေဂ်င္စီအေၾကာင်) ကို သင်မည်မ်းနားလည်ပါသည်။

/ / / AS1e. အကယ်၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါက အလုပ်စာခိုင်န်ပါဝင်သည် အခန်းကို (ဥပမာ ဝန်ထမ်းဧပြီ၊ ရပိုင်ခြင်းသစ္စာဝတ်ရာစသည်) သည် စာခိုင်န်တို့ မပါဝင်ခဲ့လ်ွင္ေသာ္လည္းေကာင္း "မမွတ္မိ / မပါဝင်" ဟူေသာ အကြက္ကို အမွတ္ျခစ္ပါ။

/ / / AS1f. အကယ်၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါက မိတ်ဆွေ အထိမောင်းအဆင့် စာခိုင်န်အရာ နားလည်မႈအဆင့် လူတစ်ဦး။

/ / / AS1g. အကယ်၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးခဲ့ပါက အလုပ်စာခိုင်န် မမွတ္မိ / မပါဝင် အရာတွဲလိုတ် (ဥပမာ ထိုဒ္ဒူး ကြှိသောကြီးကြီး လုပ်ကြည့်) သို့မဟုတ် ဆောင်ရွက်မှုကြီးကြီးတွား  "မမွတ္/မိုင်း" ကို သင်လက်မှတ်ထိုးသည်။
သင့်အလုပ်၊ တာဝန်နှင့်အခြင်းအရာများကုိ ပညာစိုစိုးပါသလား။ ဆုိလုိသည်မွာ အလုပ်ရွင်ႏွင့် သကားဆုံးပါသည်။ အခ်က္အလက်များ၊ လုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်များ၊ လစာနှင့်နားရကြောင်းဆုံးသည် အခ်က္အလက်များပါဝင်သည်။

LJ မမွတ္မိ / မပါဝင္ အဂ်င္ စီဆို၊ ဝန်ဆောင်မွျက်များကို ပညာစိုစိုးရွင်းျပထားပါသလား။ ဆုိလိုသည်မွာ အဂ်င္စီကုိ ပြပြီး ကြက်ခ်က္သနည်း၊ လစာမည်မ်ွဖတ့့်တာကမည်နည်း၊ သင့်တွင် အလုပ် ပတ္သက္ျပသာမ်ားစားလာပါက အဂ်င္စီမွ မည်သည်းကူညီေထာက္ပံမႈေပးမည္နည္း စသည္တုိ႔ပါဝင္သည္။

AS2. အလုပ်ရွင်းမီ အရှိန်စိန်အကြံပေးမှု တွေရေးသားလိုသော အလုပ်အကိုင်အဂ်င္စီ သေဘာတူထားသော လုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်များ တိုးမြောက်သော လုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်များ

AS3. အလုပ်ရွင်းမီ အရှိန်စိန်အကြံပေးမှု တွေရေးသားလိုသော အလုပ်အကိုင်အဂ်င္စီ သေဘာတူထားသော အေျခခံလစာ တိုးမြောက်သော အေျခခံလစာ

^ AS3a. အလုပ်ရွင်းမီ အရှိန်စိန်အကြံပေးမှု ဒီ သင်ကြားသော အေျခခံလစာကို အလုပ်ရွင်းမီ သင်ကြားသော အေျခခံလစာ (အေျခခံ) အလုပ်ရွင်းမီ ကြားမဟုတ် အေျခခံလစာကို (၃) သင်ကြားသော အေျခခံလစာကို

AS4. အလုပ်ရွင်းမီ အရှိန်စိန်အကြံပေးမှု တိုးမြောက်သော လုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်များ

^ AS4a. အလုပ်ရွင်းမီ အစိန်စိန်သော အထောက်အကူပြုပြီး

S$ မသိပါ မမွတ္မိပါ
AS5. လက်ရှိအလုပ်တိုင်း အလုပ်အကိုင်းစီကို ပြုလုပ်ရန်အတွက် လစာဖတ်ခင်း ရွိပါသည်။ ။

မရွိပါ (မှတ်ချက် A6 သို့သားပါ)

AS5a. အခြားသော လက်ရှိအလုပ်တိုင်း အလုပ်အကိုင်းစီများ ပြုလုပ်ရန်အတွက် လစာဖတ်ခင်း ရွိခဲ့ပါသည်။

AS5b. ရှေးဟောင်း အတွက်ရှားထားခြင်း (က) ရွိပြီး ။

**** End of subsection AS ****

A6. စိတ်ကူးကူးခြင်း၊ ကူးယူဆေးခြင်း၊ ကူးယူဆေးခြင်း တို့သို့ ပြုလုပ်ခြင်း

A6a. ရွိခဲ့ပါက အရာဝတ္ထုများြင်ရပါသည်။

A7. သင်အလုပ်တိုင်း အလုပ်အကိုင်းစီများ ပေးလိုသောကြောင့် လစာဖတ်ခင်း ရွိပါသည်။

A7a. ရှေးဟောင်း အတွက် အလုပ် ပေးလိုသောကြောင့်

A7b. အလုပ်အကိုင်းစီများ ပေးလိုသောကြောင့် အလုပ် ပေးလိုသောကြောင့်

A8. စင်ကာပူသိုင်မလာရေက, သင်အရွိပျမ်းမွေးမှုထိုင်မားသော (အခြေခံပေါင်) စိတ်ချရေကို

[ ] အချိန်စာရင်း (၅/၅) (အချိန်စာရင်း အထောက်အပ်ခြင်း)
[ ] စိတ်ချရေကိုကြည့်ရှုခြင်း
[ ] စိတ်ချရေကိုကြည့်ရှုလိုက်နာခြင်း (စိတ်ချရေကို အသေးစိတ်ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း)
[ ] စိတ်ချရေကို စီစဉ်ခြင်း
[ ] အချိန်စာရင်းပြောင်းသွားခြင်း

A9. စင်ကာပူသိုင်မလာရေက (အခြေခံပေါင်) စိတ်ချရေကို, အခြေခံပေါင်းထိုင်ထားသော စိတ်ချရေကို

[ ] စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း

A10. စိတ်ချရေကိုကြည့်ရှုလိုက်ခြင်း အခြေခံပေါင်းထိုင်သော (အခြေခံပေါင်းထိုင်သော) စိတ်ချရေကို အခြေခံပေါင်းထိုင်သော စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲပါကို နှင့် အကြောင်းကြောင်းတွင် အတွက်အတွက် စိတ်ချရေကို

[ ] ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း
[ ] ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း (အခြေခံပေါင်းထိုင်သော)

^ A10a. စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်းကိုရှာဖွေရန် အသိပေးပေးနေသော တစ်ခုခုချင်း စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း

[ ] အချိန်စာရင်းချုပ်ရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း
[ ] အချိန်စာရင်းချုပ်ရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း
[ ] အချိန်စာရင်းချုပ်ရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း
[ ] အချိန်စာရင်းချုပ်ရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်း

[ ] စိတ်ချရေကိုပြောင်းလဲခြင်း
[ ] စိတ်ချရေကိုပြောင်းလဲခြင်း

စိတ်ချရေကိုပြောင်းလဲခြင်းကို အကြောင်းကြောင်းကို ပြောင်းလဲပါကို:

________________________

စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်းကို အကြောင်းကြောင်းကို ပြောင်းလဲပါကို:

________________________

စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်းကို အကြောင်းကြောင်းကို ပြောင်းလဲပါကို:

________________________

စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်းကို အကြောင်းကြောင်းကို ပြောင်းလဲပါကို:

________________________

စိတ်ချရေကို ပြောင်းလဲခြင်းကို အကြောင်းကြောင်းကို ပြောင်းလဲပါကို:

________________________
B1. တရားဝင်စီမံခန့်ခွဲစိုက် သတင်းစာများ စီစဉ် ပေးချင်သည်။

B2. ပိုင်းအိမ်သားစုနှင့် အိမ်အလေး ပိုမိုသိရိွလိုပါသည်။

B3. ပိုင်းအိမ်သားစုနှင့် အခြေခံရမှုများ ပိုမိုသိရိွလိုပါသည်။

B4. အိမ်သားစုကို သုံးများစွာ ပိုမိုသိရိွပါသည်။

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>အုပ်စုများ</th>
<th>ပိုမိုသိရိွပါသည်</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>အခြေခံစိုက်</td>
<td>[S$/K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>အခြေခံချင်းစိုက်</td>
<td>[S$/K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>အခြေခံလျင်များစွာ</td>
<td>[S$/K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>အခြေခံလျင်များစွာ (လျင်များ)</td>
<td>[S$/K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>အခြေခံလျင်များစွာ (ပိုမို)</td>
<td>[S$/K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>အခြေခံလျင်များစွာ (အုပ်)</td>
<td>[S$/K]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B4a. အိမ်သားစုနှင့်အတူ ပိုမိုသိရိွပါသည်။
B5. လက်ရာနေသောသို့သင်(သင်ဦး) သတိရေးနေသောပြဿနာ


B6. ပိုင်းခြားအရေအတွက် ကျင်းစောင်း သို့သင်(ခေါင်းဆောင်) သတိရေးနေသောပြဿနာ

^ B6a. သင်(ခေါင်းဆောင်) သတိရေးနေသောပြဿနာကို 12 လ အတွင်း အေကြးယူခဲ့ရသည်မှ မိုးယူခဲ့ပါသလား။

^ B6b. အစိုးရအဖွဲ့အစည်းအရ လူမှု့အကြီးအကျယ် စီမံခန့်ခွဲခြေ လှူဒါန်းခဲ့သည်။

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>အစိုးရအဖွဲ့အစည်းအမည်</th>
<th>သို့သင်(ခေါင်းဆောင်)အမည်</th>
<th>ကုဒ်ကျသောကြီးကိုသိရှိမရှိ</th>
<th>ကုဒ်ကျသောကြီးကိုသိရှိ (စိတ်ကျသောကြီး)</th>
<th>ကုဒ်ကျသောကြီးကိုသိရှိ (စိတ်ကျသောကြီး)</th>
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<tr>
<td>ကျင်းစောင်းခွင့်များ</td>
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<td>ကျင်းစောင်းခွင့်များ</td>
<td>ကျင်းစောင်းခွင့်များ</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

ကုဒ်ကျသောကြီးကိုသိရှိသောကြီးကို မိုးယူသည်။

ကျင်းစောင်းခွင့်များကို မိုးယူသည်။

ကျင်းစောင်းခွင့်များကို မိုးယူသည်။
တတိယအေနျဖင့္ ျမန္မာႏိုင္ငံရိွသင္၏မိသားစုကိုသင္မည္သို႔ေထာက္ပ့ံသနည္းကိုကြၽႏ္ုပ္တို႔အေနျဖင့္သိရိွလိုပါသည္။

C1. သင္ျမန္မာျပည္ျပန္ေသာမိသားစုထံေငြပို႔ေလ့ရိွသည္။
C2. ပို႔သည္မပို႔ပါ
C3. ပံုမွန္အားျဖင့္မည္သူထံေငြပို႕သနည္း။
C4. တစ္ခါပို႕လွ်င္ပ်မ္ေငြမည္မွ်ေပးရသနည္း။
C5. ပံုမွန္အားျဖင့္သင္မည္သို႕သနည္း။

S$
C8. သင်ပံုများကို ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါသည်။ သင်ပံုဆောင်ရွက်ရာ စာရင်းအားလုံးအား စီစဉ်မည်။

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>စာလုံး</th>
<th>အမှုစိတ်</th>
<th>အချက်အလက်</th>
<th>သင်ပံုအများအား</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>သင်ပံု</td>
<td>ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါ</td>
<td>မည်</td>
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<tr>
<td>အမှုစိဦး</td>
<td>ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါ</td>
<td>မည်</td>
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<td>မည်</td>
<td>မည်</td>
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C9. သင်ပံုများကို ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါသလား။

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>စီစဉ်မှုအား</th>
<th>ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါ</th>
<th>မည်</th>
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^C9a. ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါသော အစီအစဉ်များ

^C9b. ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါသော အစီအစဉ်များ

^C9c. ဆက်စပ်ပြော်ပါသော အစီအစဉ်များ

^C9d. သင်ဗော်မှုများ၊ သင်ပံုဆောင်ရွက်ရာ စာရင်းအား စီစဉ်မည်။

<table>
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<tr>
<th>စာရင်းအား</th>
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</table>
C10. စင်ကာပူတွင်လူမိုးအဖြဲ့တစ်ခုခုတွင်တရားဝင်အသင်းသားအဖြစ်အသင်းဝင်ထားပါသလား။
C10a. ထိုအသင်းအဖြစ်များမှားနေဆင့်မြန်မာႏိုင္ငံရိွဲျပန္လည္ထူေထာင္ေရးလုပ္ငန္းမ်ား၊သဘာဝေဘးျပန္လည္ထူေထာင္ေရးလုပ္ငန္းမ်ားသို႕ေငြလွဴဒါန္းဖူးပါသလား။
C10b. လွဴဖူးလွ်င္လြန္ခဲ့ေသာ၁၂လအတြင္စုစုေပါင္းမည္မွ်လွဴခဲ့ပါသနည္း။

$S/K
ဗုဒ္ဓဟူးများ ၏အလေ့အလျောက် သင့်ကြည့်ရှုထားပါသည်။

D1. ယူလစ်သတ်စုစုပေါင်း (ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံမြို့တွင် ဖျင်စင်ပါသည်)

D2. သိုက် / မသိုက် သိုက် မသိုက် သိုက် မသိုက်

D3. မင်္ဂလာပါ အဖွဲ့

D4. အောင် အောင် အောင် မှု မှု

D5. ရှေးယူရာ မှာ ထက်ကြီးများ ဖျင်စင်ပါသည်

D6. သင်အသက်မှာ ဖျင်စင်ပါသည်

D7. ကျွန်မတ်များ
Annex 3: Information and consent sheet (English)

Note: Statement of consent was modelled after an existing HOME study. Signatures were not sought in practice.

Purpose of this Study
This project is being conducted by a researcher from University College London, in collaboration with HOME, to understand the population of Burmese workers in Singapore. We want to find out about your experiences of coming to work in Singapore and if working here has helped you and your household's finances. Your responses will be used to identify any issues Burmese workers might have in terms of employment and money management. This will allow non-governmental organisations, such as HOME, and authorities to address issues relevant to Burmese workers.

You have been invited to participate in this survey because you are currently an overseas Burmese worker in Singapore. Your responses can contribute to our understanding of the impacts of working overseas on Burmese household finances and welfare. If you decide to participate, we will ask you to fill in a survey that will take about 45 minutes to complete.

Benefits and Risks
Your responses will help to improve policymakers understanding of Burmese labour in Singapore and its effects on household welfare to better represent your interests. Some of the questions in the survey will ask you about your recruitment experiences as well as your personal and household finances. There is a risk that you might find some of the questions to be sensitive.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You make any decisions you choose to participate in this study. If you are not able to participate in the study or do not wish to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason; in such a case, responses collected from you will be destroyed. There will be no repercussions for withdrawing from the study.

Confidentiality and Data Protection
This study will not ask for your name or contact details. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Surveys will be analysed anonymously. You will not be identified in any reports that this study may produce. Names will only be written on the certificate of consent so we know you have agreed to participate in this study. Consent forms will be kept safe and will not be shared with anyone.

Contact
If you have a query about this project, or would like more information, please contact Mr. Alex Ma:
Email: alex.ma.14@ucl.ac.uk
WhatsApp: (+65) 8148 3310

Statement of Consent
The researcher has explained the purpose of the study to me. All my questions have been answered. I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary.
- I can leave the study at any time.
- My name will not appear on the survey.
- Consent forms will be kept safe and will not be shared with anyone.
- The answers in the questionnaires will be analysed for research reports and all published data will be completely anonymized.

I have read the above and agree to participate in this study. Signing this form does not waive any of my legal rights.

I have been given a copy of the information sheet.

Participant signature
Date
Researcher signature
Date
Annex 4: Information and consent sheet (Burmese)

Note: Burmese version included an option for future contact should they wish to participate in interviews.
1. Origins and Background
- Age, duration in Singapore, current job, education details?

2. Training Migration Across Time and Space
- I’d like to find out more about why you came to work in Singapore.

3. Migration Process
- I would like to learn more about how you came to work in Singapore. First, did you use an employment agency? If no, go to 3a. If yes, go to 3b.

3a. No employment agency
- How did you come to Singapore?
  - Process, documents, difficulty?
  - Timeframe and risks?
- How did you fund your migration?
  - Costs involved; debt; repayments.
  - Did you have issues with leaving Myanmar? Bribes…?
- Did you consider using an agent? Issues of trust?
- Were you trained or educated in this field previously?
  - How did you adjust to life in Singapore?
  - Any changes in employment status, position, job?
  - How is your relationship with your employer like?

3b. Employment agency
- Why did you use an employment agency?
  - Were any third parties involved?
- Can you describe the process of migrating to Singapore?
  - Did you feel adequately prepared for your job?
  - Was there any deception or misrepresentation?
  - Did you have issues with leaving Myanmar? Bribes…?
  - How did you adjust to life in Singapore?
  - Process, documents, difficulties?
- Fees and deductions:
  - Amount, deduction period, impact on QOL?
  - Why did you use an employment agency? Just small tasks, e.g. employer change?

4. No employment agency
- What is your relationship with your employer like?
  - Any changes in employment status, position, job?
  - How is your relationship with your employer like?

5. Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I’d like to start by asking you a few questions about your background to help me understand your experiences better.

**Annex 5: Work Permit, Other and Domestic, Interview guides**
### Household Background

What were your household finances like before you migrated?

- **Who do you live with in Myanmar?**
- **What did your family do for a living?**
  - Any other migrant dependents, e.g. siblings?
  - Who were your household dependents before you migrated?
  - Did you work elsewhere both in Myanmar and overseas, e.g. migrate for work in Yangon, Thailand, Malaysia...
- **Did you have any debt?**
- **Was your family’s income stable and able to meet daily expenses?**
- **Would you say your family was able to cope with income shocks?**
- **Quality of life: would you say you were happy or satisfied with your life back in Myanmar?**
  - Yes/No: how does this relate to your decision to work overseas? E.g. "If happy, why leave?"
  - Other angles to ask the question: what sort of worries did you have? What are your thoughts on working away from family?

### How did your migration to Singapore impact your income?

- **What was your income before coming to Singapore?**
- **How has your income changed since coming to Singapore?**
- **Did you work elsewhere both in Myanmar and overseas?**
  - Did you work in Yangon, Thailand, Malaysia...
- **How did your migration to Singapore impact your income?**
  - Employment benefits/rights: bonuses, off-days, visits home...
  - Any other migrant benefits?
- **What are your main expenditures in Singapore?**
  - Employment benefits/rights: bonuses, off-days, visits home...
- **What are your main expenditures in Myanmar?**
- **Do you send remittances to your household in Myanmar?**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Background</th>
<th>(75 mins)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finances</td>
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Remittance behaviours (15 mins)

Sends Remittances (at least once per annum)

Why do you send this amount?
• Amount constant, or have you sent more/less over time?

Recipient and main remittance expenditures
• How much power do you have in deciding expenses?
• Are you happy with how your remittances are spent by the recipient(s)?

Why do you send remittances?***
• How reliant is your household on your remittances?***
• What are the expectations on your to support your family?
• Do you intend to continue sending remittances as long as you are in Singapore?***

How do you send remittances?
• How do you use that method?
• Why do you not consider alternatives? E.g. bank.
• How do you send remittances?
• Why do you send remittances?
• Do you have a bank account in Singapore?

Donations***
• Do you donate money in Singapore/Myanmar, and why?

Has your household been able to access more financial services as a result of your remittances? E.g. loans
• Why do you use these hardship?

Do you donate money in Singapore/Myanmar?
• Do you have a bank account in Singapore?

SGD:MMK exchange rate fluctuated 11% in 2016
• Have you been affected by exchange rate fluctuations?

How do you send remittances?
• Why do you use that method?
• Why do you send remittances?
• How reliant is your household on your remittances?***

If respondent used an Employment Agency and experienced salary deductions:

What were the social expectations for you to donate?
• Do you donate money in Singapore/Myanmar, and why?

If respondent used an Employment Agency and experienced salary deductions:

Have you been affected by exchange rate fluctuations?
• Why do you use that method?
• Why do you send remittances?
Now I would like to find out how working in Singapore has affected your household's finances.

**Migration and Remittance Impacts**

- Are your household economic activities the same as before? New investments etc.?
- Debts, daily expenditures, income stability and resilience to income shocks?
- Quality of life: has your household's quality of life bettered/worsened/remained the same?
- How happy/satisfied/confident would you say you and your household are after you migrated for work in Singapore?
- Have there been any differences in the cost of living in your home area?

Finally, I would like to know about your future plans.

**Futures and Planning**

- Do you save money on a regular basis (at least once per three months)?
- Frequency and amount saved on average per month?
- Do you save as much as you would like to? If no, why and what can be done?
- Are you saving for any purpose or goal?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What are your reasons for leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- Would you like to save money regularly?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
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- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
- What are your reasons for staying or leaving?
- What do you hope to achieve before you leave?
- What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?
- What are the main barriers to you saving regularly?
- How long do you plan to stay in Singapore for?
### Interview Guide

#### 1. Migrant Origins and History

- **Age**: How old were you when you first came to Singapore?
- **Current Job/Industry**: What is your current job or industry in Singapore?

#### 2. Migration Drivers

- **Motivations**
  - **What did you do before coming to Singapore?**
  - **What were your goals for working in Singapore?**
  - **Who decided you should migrate for work?**

#### 3. Migration Process

**3a. No Employment Agency**

- **How did you come to Singapore?**
  - **Can you describe the process?**
  - **How long did it take to reach Singapore?**
- **How did you fund your migration?**
  - **What costs were involved?**
  - **Did you incur any debts?**
- **Why did you use that method of migration?**
  - **Why not employment agency, e.g. for example.**

**3b. Employment Agency**

- **Why did you use an employment agency?**
  - **Were any third parties involved? E.g. referral by friends, village-level recruiters.**
- **Can you describe the process of migrating to Singapore?**
  - **How long did the entire process take?**
  - **Did you pay any upfront fees or salary deductions?**
  - **Have you ever paid any further fees or deductions?**
  - **Why did you have to pay? E.g. contract termination, leave and re-enter Singapore.**

#### I would like to know more about your family back in Myanmar.

- **Did your family accompany you to Singapore or stay in Myanmar?**
- **What did your family think of the decision to work in Singapore?**
- **Did your family accompany you to Singapore or stay in Myanmar?**
- **What was a shared decision between you and your household? Did you decide to come alone?**

---

**Annex 6: S Pass and Employment Pass Interview guides**
**Household Background**

I would like to know more about your family back in Myanmar.

- Tell me a little about where and who you live with in Myanmar: rural/urban area, main economic activity, state of origin

**Finances**

What were your household finances like before you migrated?

- What was your household's main source of income?
- Debt: had your household incurred any debt?
  - What was the amount and cause of the debt?
- Expenditures: was your household able to meet the costs of daily expenditures?
  - E.g. groceries, utilities, healthcare.
- Income stability: did your household have a stable source of income throughout the year?
  - E.g. household members have salaried jobs vs. seasonal income.
  - (Note: some households may have irregular income due to agricultural cycles).
- Income security: was your household able to cope with income/livelihood shocks?
  - E.g. household members have access to social security or savings.
  - (Note: some households may be more vulnerable to shocks such as crop loss or natural disasters).
- Quality of life: how satisfied or happy were you with your life with your family back in Myanmar?

How has your migration to Singapore impacted your income?

- What was your income before coming to Singapore?
  - (Note: respondent may have no paid job due to agricultural/self-employment)
- How has your income changed since coming to Singapore?
  - Any salary changes during your time here?
  - How has your income changed since coming to Singapore?
  - Why do you send remittances to your household in Myanmar?

Now I would like to ask you about whether or not you send remittances to your household in Myanmar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sends Remittances (at least once per annum)</th>
<th>Does not send remittances (at least once per annum)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much, and how often, do you send?</td>
<td>How much do you send, and how often?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you send this amount?</td>
<td>Why do you send this amount?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.g. is this the exact amount required?</td>
<td>E.g. do you send the same amount each time?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Remittance behaviours**

- Why do you send remittances to your household in Myanmar?
  - Any salary changes during your time here?
  - How has your income changed since coming to Singapore?
  - Why do you send this amount?
    - E.g. is this the exact amount required? Specific amount demanded?
  - What are the main expenditures for your remittances?
    - E.g. groceries, utilities, healthcare.
  - Who is the main recipient of your remittances?
    - How much power do you have in deciding expenses?
  - Does not send remittances (at least once per annum)
    - Household doesn't need/other reasons
    - How does your household generate income?
      - How important is your job in Singapore to your household's finances?
      - What sort of role do you see yourself as occupying in your household?
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How happy are you with how your remittances are spent by the recipient?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why do you send remittances?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How reliant is your household on your remittances?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any remittances from elsewhere?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is financially dependent on you?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is your ability to send remittances to your stay in SG?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are your household economic activities the same as before? <strong>E.g. new asset/property/business ventures</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is your ability to send remittances to your stay in SG?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you intend to continue sending remittances as long as you stay in SG?</td>
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<td>How does your household cope financially during your stay in SG?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do salary deductions impact your household's finances?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>... salary deductions?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration, salary deduction or any other income shock?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does your household cope financially during your stay in SG?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>How important is your ability to send remittances to your stay in SG?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is financially dependent on you?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you send remittances?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't send remittances due to salary deductions/EA fees?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of life: how your household's quality of life improved/free from remittances?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would you say your household is more/less/more able to cope with unexpected financial shocks?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would you say your household's income is more/less/stay the same through the year?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are your household economic activities the same as before? <strong>E.g. new asset/property/business ventures</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much you spend on food, clothing, shelter, and transportation in the last 12 months?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important are remittances to your household?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you send remittances?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you use that method? E.g. hundi agents or banks?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been affected by exchange rate fluctuations?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SGD:MMK exchange rate fluctuated 11% in 2016</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Futures and Planning

**Plans and Aspirations**

- **Do you save money on a regular basis (at least once per three months)?**
  - Yes
  - **Frequency and amount saved on average per month?**
  - **Do you save as much as you would like to? If no, why not?**
  - **Are you saving for any purpose or goal?**
  - **How long do you plan to stay in Singapore?**
  - **What are your reasons for staying or leaving?**
  - **When is the right time for you to leave Singapore?**
  - **What do you plan to do when you return to Myanmar?**

**Closing Remarks**

This is the end of the interview and we don't have any more questions. Thank you for your time and responses. They will help us understand the migration and remittance experiences of Myanmar workers to better understand the needs of workers. Do you have any questions for us?
Annex 7: Yangon household interview guides

**Interview Guide**

- Head of Household interviews in Yangon, Myanmar.

### Background Contextual Information

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about your household's background to better understand your circumstances.

1. **HH structure and characteristics**
   - Number of household members, including children: age, gender

2. **Background Before [family member] left:**
   - Who was the key breadwinner in your household?
   - What were the household’s sources of income?
     - Business, wages and salaries, pensions, government support
   - How would you describe your household’s financial situation?
     - Income stability, regularity, savings, home ownership, debts
   - How did you feel about your household’s financial situation?
   - Did you experience any income or expenditure shocks?
     - E.g. health costs, unemployment, agricultural shocks.
   - Why did [family member] decide to work in Singapore?

3. **Remittance impacts**
   - After [family member] started working in Singapore, have your household’s economic activities remained the same?
   - Did household members quit jobs or take on new jobs?
   - Are the other sources of income the same as before?
   - Did household members shift jobs or take on new jobs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did household members shift jobs or take on new jobs?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would like to learn how [family member] working in Singapore has affected your household.

---

**Background household characteristics**

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about your household’s background to better understand your circumstances.

1. **HH structure and characteristics**
   - Number of household members, including children: age, gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of household members, including children: age, gender</td>
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</table>
**Remittances**

- Was family member able to send money home right away after arriving in Singapore?
- How much did they initially send?
- Has this amount changed over time?
- How much and how often do you currently receive money from family member?
- How dependent is your household on family member’s remittances?
- How does family member send remittances to you?
- What do you think of this method?
- Do you personally have a bank account?
- What do you use your bank account for?
- What do you think of banking services in Myanmar?
- Does family member also send money to other people?
- Who decides how the money is spent?
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- Is the money for specific expenditures or just used for general household purposes?
- Would your household be able to cope if family member stopped sending money home?
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- Is there enough money to cover general household expenses or just used for general household purposes?
- Are you happy with how the money is currently spent?
- How does family member save the money that is sent?
- Is there a target amount or purpose you are saving for?
- How do you save money?
- How much of the money that family member sends is saved?
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- How much do you save money home each year after coming in Singapore? E.g. some workers have to repay debts

**Expenditures**

- What are the general expenses you use family member’s remittances for?
- Try to get percentages spent on categories: food, accommodation, healthcare, education, debt repayment, etc.
- How much do you think of this method of saving: cost, exchange rate, reliability, speed, trust, service quality
- Would you prefer to use a different service?
- What do you think of savings services that are currently available? E.g. bank or community savings schemes
- Why do you choose the savings service that are currently available? E.g. bank or community savings schemes
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- How much of the money that family member sends is saved?
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- How does family member save the money that is sent?
- Is there a target amount or purpose you are saving for?
- How do you save money?
- How much of the money that family member sends is saved?
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- How much do you save money home each year after coming in Singapore? E.g. some workers have to repay debts

**Financial Management**

- Where are the general expenses you use family member’s remittances for?
- Try to get percentages spent on categories: food, accommodation, healthcare, education, debt repayment, etc.
- How does family member save the money that is sent?
- Is there a target amount or purpose you are saving for?
- How do you save money?
- How much of the money that family member sends is saved?
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- How much do you think of this method of saving: cost, exchange rate, reliability, speed, trust, service quality
- Would you prefer to use a different service?
- What do you think of savings services that are currently available? E.g. bank or community savings schemes
- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
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- Are there any disagreements on how the money is managed?
- How does family member save the money that is sent?
- Is there a target amount or purpose you are saving for?
- How do you save money?
**Why do you donate money?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for donation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Where or what is the purpose of these donations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>o How much do you donate?</td>
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**Where or what is the purpose of these donations?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of donations</th>
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**How much do you donate?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount donated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o How much do you donate?</td>
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**Closing remarks**

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**Aspirations**

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**Intangible**

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**Inflation**

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**Tangible**

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**Quality of life**

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<th>Questions</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**Examples:**

- Consumption patterns, money spent on leisure and social events.
- Housing: consumption habits, how the family member's lifestyle has changed since they started working in Singapore.
- How would you say your household's current financial status compared to before the family member left?
- How do you feel your household's current quality of life compared to before the family member left?
- How has the household been impacted by inflation? Example: cost of food, accommodation, and healthcare.
- How would you feel more confident about meeting your household's expenses after the family member left?
- How would you feel about the family member being away from home for longer?
- How do you feel your household's current quality of life compared to before the family member left in Singapore?
## Singapore Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Interview ID</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Migrant Visa</th>
<th>Interviewee Age</th>
<th>Region or State of Origin</th>
<th>Interview Language</th>
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Annex 8: Summary of Singapore and Myanmar Interviews
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Annex 9: Singapore migrant visa categories, eligibility requirements, and benefits

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<td>Work Permit (Domestic)</td>
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<td>• Must be female and aged between 23-50 years old.</td>
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<td>• Must come from pre-approved source countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Macau, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Must possess at least 8 years of formal education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>• No dependant pass available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cannot claim permanent residence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Requires employer to pay monthly levy and ‘security bond’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>• Pass valid for 24 months.</td>
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<td>Work Permit (Other)</td>
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<td>• Must be aged between 18-50 years old.</td>
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<td>• Sector-specific source countries, applicable for construction, manufacturing, marine, process, and service sectors.</td>
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<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>• No dependant pass available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>• Cannot claim permanent residence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Requires employer to pay monthly levy and ‘security bond’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>• Maximum period of employment permissible is 10 years for ‘basic-skilled’ workers and 22 years for ‘higher-skilled’</td>
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<td>S Pass</td>
<td>Eligibility:</td>
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<td>• Minimum fixed monthly salary of S$2,200.</td>
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<td>• A degree or diploma with ‘years’ of relevant work experience.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• All nationalities may apply.</td>
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<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>• Holders may, on assessment, apply for dependant passes for family members.</td>
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<td>• Permanent residence application possible but with greater time requirements.</td>
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<td>Employment Pass</td>
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<td>• Minimum fixed monthly salary of S$3,600.</td>
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<td>• Must have requisite qualifications and have secured a formal job offer.</td>
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<td>• All nationalities may apply.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefits:</td>
<td>• No levy or quota applied to employers.</td>
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<td>• Earners of over S$5,000 may bring dependants into Singapore.</td>
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<td>• Holders have highest chance of obtaining permanent residence.</td>
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¹²⁹ Information adapted from Singapore Ministry of Manpower (n.d.(b)). Requirements often change on an annual basis. These eligibility requirements were acquired at the time of fieldwork to resonate with the data collected.