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From bargaining to alliance with patriarchy: The role of Taiwanese husbands in marriage migrants' civic organisations in Taiwan

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Abstract: *This paper, by looking at the role of Taiwanese citizens in civic organisations for marriage migrants, explores how women's agency and negotiation occur not only against masculine dominance within patriarchal family arrangements, but also in alliance with it, when oppression is located somewhere beyond the family. In contrast to literature that depicts marriage migration as a women's and migrants' issue, this paper explores the role of Taiwanese citizens (often husbands in cross-border marriages) in shaping the evolution of the phenomenon in both the private and public spheres. The aim of this paper is to fill a gap in empirical literature on marriage migration in Taiwan and East Asia, as well as contribute to feminist debates on women's agency in the context of masculine dominance. Building on ethnographic data collected through fieldwork in Taiwan, including in-depth interviews and participant observation within civil society organisations for marriage migrants, this paper reveals how Taiwanese male citizens and Chinese female migrants responded to the challenges brought by their decision to engage in cross-border unions by creating a new narrative that could explain their condition of shared oppression and by developing joint actions to address the structural discrimination they faced as cross-border couples in Taiwan.*

Keywords: *bargaining with patriarchy, cross-Strait migration, marriage migration, men in marriage migration, Taiwan, women agency*

Introduction

The 20th century has been defined by Castles *et al.* (2014) as the age of migration, suggesting a dramatic increase in cross-border movements at a global level, and the 21st century has followed suit. Interestingly, not only is it possible to see a general increase in migration globally, but there is also a wider presence of women amongst those who are one the move. Between 1960 and 2000, women's presence in international migration doubled, reaching 48.6% of the world's migrant population (UN, 2004, cited in Oishi, 2005: 2). Furthermore, there are areas of the world in which the female migration rate has surpassed that of men, such as East Asia, where women's presence in cross-border migration reached 53.2% of overall regional migration in 2017 (UN, 2017). One of the reasons for Asian women to migrate is marriage. In a region where family formation is still defined by the patriarchal logics of patrilineality, patrilocality and hypergamy, traditional marriages that would once have been arranged locally, for instance by matching men and women from neighbouring villages, are now occurring across borders. In such cases, women from poorer countries or areas can move up through the spatial hierarchy and access new opportunities by marrying a man from a wealthier area (Tseng, 2010: 33–34).

Taiwan is an important example for the study of marriage migration in the East Asian region, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In 2003, marriage migration to Taiwan reached its peak, with 31.38% of the marriages that year involving a non-Taiwanese citizen. Although this

phenomenon has been in a gradual decay since then (Ministry of Interior, 2018), foreign spouses constitute an important group on the island, adding up to a total population of 559 638 individuals at the end of February 2020 (Ministry of Interior, 2020). Often referred to, in public and political discourse, as the fifth ethnic group, the marriage migrant population is mainly composed of women from mainland China, Vietnam and Indonesia.

The literature on marriage migration in Taiwan is rich and has evolved throughout the years. Earlier accounts were mainly descriptive and focused on identifying the reasons behind the boom in cross-border marriages in Taiwan and looking at the actors involved (Chai, 2004; Jian, 2004; Wang, 2004; Lu, 2008). More recently, interest has turned to other features, including: the media's and the public's construction of foreign spouses as a social and political problem (Shih 1998; Hsia, 2007); the discriminatory legal treatment that certain groups of migrants have been subjected to (Friedman, 2010; Friedman, 2012; Sheu, 2013); the consequences produced by legal discrimination and social stigmatisation on migrants' lives (Momesso, 2016); the collective actions that marriage migrants have developed to challenge the unfair treatment they receive in Taiwan (Chang, 2004; Hsia, 2005; Chao, 2006; Hsia, 2006; King, 2007; Hsia, 2008; Momesso and Cheng, 2017); and, more recently, their transnational social and political practices (Cheng *et al.*, 2018; Zani, 2018).

Most probably due to the fact that a majority of these migrants are women, this scholarship treats this phenomenon as a female issue. Little attention is given to men in the literature, both with regard to the small minority of male marriage migrants (in this regard one of the few exceptions is Friedman, 2017) and Taiwanese men who married a foreign spouse. As Friedman (2017: 1250) argues, marriage migrants' identity in Taiwan suggests an image that is 'both female and feminised'. This comment serves as a departure point, allowing us to reflect on the fact that male marriage migrants, as a minor group in this phenomenon, are invisible in public discourse and in academic literature. In this paper, I extend this idea to the fact that neither the literature nor the public discourse has made great efforts to investigate the

roles, identities and experiences of Taiwanese men who marry a foreign spouse.

This paper is informed by recent critical theoretical strands within post-colonial studies and transnational feminism, couching the problematic division of the world in fixed and constructed categories, such as men/women, migrants/citizens. Placing attention on the inherent asymmetries and inequalities existing within and across these constructed categories, as a consequence of the intersection between a mix of factors such as nationality, race, ethnicity and gender, this methodology aims to problematise our understanding of the oppression and resistance of women in light of their social positioning (King, 1988: 43; Higginbotham, 1992: 271; Mohanty, 2003; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009: 6; Hussein, 2009: 147). These considerations are important to better understand the phenomenon of marriage migration in Taiwan, not only in light of the different biographies and positionalities of marriage migrants, but also in light of those who do not move, namely Taiwanese spouses who marry a foreign citizen.

Building on these reflections, this paper will explore the following questions: What is the role of Taiwanese male spouses in the development of Chinese marriage migrants' civic organisations in Taiwan? How do Taiwanese male spouses understand their role and experiences as part of cross-Strait families? How do migrant women understand their husbands' contributions to their collective actions? What kind of relations can be observed between Taiwanese husbands and Chinese wives in the context of civic organisations?

In order to answer these questions, this paper will build on ethnographic data collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation in the context of civic organisations for mainland spouses in Taiwan. Although my data has been collected in the context of various civic organisations throughout the island, the organisation I will refer to in this paper will be the Marriage Association of the Two Sides of China (中華兩岸婚姻協調促進會; MATSC). The decision to choose this civic organisation is related to the significance of this group in advancing rights for cross-Strait families in Taiwan. I spent an extensive amount of time with this organisation during my PhD fieldwork

(2010–2011) and have maintained contact with its members throughout the following years.

During my PhD fieldwork, I spent ten months in Taipei and visited MATSC on a weekly basis. While there, I carried out in-depth interviews with the organisation's leaders, practitioners and members. I took part in public and closed-door activities, sometimes as a silent and distant observer, other times as an active participant. My observations were documented through written notes, pictures and videos which, later on, were edited into formal field notes which I used as data for analysis (Emerson *et al.*, 2011). In-depth interviews were carried out in different forms, including semi-structured interviews, life-stories and group interviews. Out of the total of 86 interviews I carried out during my PhD project, 20 were related to leaders, practitioners and members of MATSC. More precisely, 16 interviews were carried out with female marriage migrants and 4 with Taiwanese men who were active in the organisation or regularly visited. With the exception of three individuals who came from mainland Chinese cities (Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan), all the other female interviewees were from towns and rural areas in various Chinese provinces. All these individuals lived in Taipei. Along with these formal interviews, it is important to emphasise that, during activities and visits to the organisation and other interactions with my informants, I had informal chats with husbands and male participants. Hence, the data collected from these informal encounters and observations were crucial in the analysis proposed by this paper.

Most of the fieldwork notes were taken in the period 2010–2011. In the following years, however, I have maintained contact with MATSC members and leaders via online communications and personal visits any time I have revisited Taiwan. This has kept me up-to-date with recent developments in this civic group. Although the type of individuals engaging in cross-Strait marriages has changed extensively throughout the years (Momesso, 2015; Momesso, 2016), the kind of migrants visiting MATSC does not fully reflect these changes. With a few exceptions, those who regularly visit MATSC are middle-aged women, from rural areas of China, and who are married to veterans of the Nationalist Army or to lower class Taiwanese men. Although this paper is focused on the case of MATSC, the notes I collected, through participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of similar organisations in Taiwan, has proved crucial in helping me to make comparisons and to understand alternative paths.

Cross-Strait marriage migration and civic activism

When looking at the civil society groups that have emerged as a consequence of an increasing presence of marriage migrants in Taiwan, it clearly emerges that there has been a heterogeneity of actions and narratives of resistance. Language, ethnicity and culture have played an important role in shaping informal networks of support for migrants of the same nationality or ethnic group. When looking at the civil society arena, a clear divide seems to exist between international marriage migrants and marriage migrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

On a macro-level, the different processes of integration for international marriage migrants and migrants from the PRC have been identified as crucial in shaping dissimilar civic actions.

In this regard, marriage migrants from the PRC occupy a unique position in the public and political discourse of Taiwan, due to the special relations between Beijing and Taipei and the claims that Beijing has made over the territory of Taiwan. Hence, these migrants have been constructed differently from other marriage migrants, as a threat to national security and sovereignty. It has been broadly argued that this group has suffered discrimination, disqualification and stigmatisation in Taiwan as a consequence of Taiwan nationalism (King, 2007; Yang and Lee, 2009; Friedman, 2010; King, 2011). The main concern has been that, as spouses of Taiwanese citizens, they would be entitled to apply for Taiwanese citizenship and, eventually, they could play a role on shaping the destiny of Taiwan's de facto independence vis-à-vis China (Lu, 2008: 171; Yang and Lee, 2009: 75). These concerns have legitimised the more restrictive immigration and citizenship requirements this category of migrants has been subjected to. Until 2009, they were not entitled to engage in any formal occupation if they did

not have permanent residency, a process that could take around six years from the time they arrive on the island. They were also subjected to a longer process to acquire Taiwanese citizenship (eight years instead of the four years usually taken for an international marriage migrant, then reduced to the current six years). Nowadays, they still have to hold Taiwanese citizenship for at least ten years in order to be allowed to serve in a public office (Friedman, 2010; Sheu, 2013). This condition eventually translates into dissimilar negotiation with state authorities and the receiving society. For instance, when looking at the civil society organisations related to immigrants in Taiwan, it clearly emerges that spouses from the PRC and international spouses have followed different paths for making their voices heard and have reacted dissimilarly to existing political opportunities. PRC marriage migrants' organisations clearly benefitted from the presence of a KMT government in the period 2008–2016, which had a greater interest in safeguarding the votes of PRC spouses, and therefore showed a more constructive attitude towards their civic organisations (Momesso and Cheng, 2017).

The substantial presence of Taiwanese husbands in this group reveals the necessity to consider their roles in, and contributions to, the PRC marriage migrants' civic movement. In light of this unique feature, specific to civic organisations for cross-Strait marriage migrants,[1] this paper will shed light on the role and identities of Taiwanese male spouses in shaping their immigrant wives' negotiation with the receiving state and society.

The literature gives only a marginal space to Taiwanese spouses. Earlier accounts are focused on identifying their social and economic backgrounds: working-class men, farmers and labourers, disadvantaged in the local marriage market (Hsia, 2008: 190–191; Chen, 2006a), traditional, often poor and uneducated (Napiere, 2007). A PhD thesis defended in 2006 seems to align with this narrative. In an account based on in-depth interviews with seven Taiwanese husbands, the author concludes that these men tended to adopt traditional gender attitudes and expected their wives to be obedient and subservient (Chen, 2006b). Sometimes the literature goes as far as to argue that, due to the conservative mentality and poor condition

of these men, cross-border unions are problematic (Chai, 2004; Jian, 2004). A different picture is offered by Momesso (2015), who acknowledges patterns of reciprocity between husbands and wives in the context of marriage migration between China and Taiwan. As the author argues, 'interestingly, creating what Wolf (1972: 69) called the "uterine family" by having children, a way to ensure continuity and a degree of authority within the marital family in past times, did not seem to be the final aim of my respondents in the context of contemporary family formation across the Taiwan Strait. Instead, my informants [Chinese wives] also wanted and fought for the option of creating a relationship of trust, communication and mutual support with them [Taiwanese husbands].' This was a first attempt to problematise the identities of, and the role played by, Taiwanese husbands within cross-border marriages. This paper aims to expand on that earlier work, by investigating Taiwanese husbands and their migrant wives in the context of civic organisations focused on advancing the rights of cross-Strait families in Taiwan.

Considering these reflections, in the next sections, I will explore the role of Taiwanese husbands in civic organisations, their interaction with migrant women and the narratives of both men and women in identifying and understanding each other's contribution to the organisation. The next sections will be organised along three main themes: how politics led to cooperation between husbands and wives; how gender operated within civic organisations to shape a division of roles and responsibilities between men and women and how these principles could be broken at any time and generate alternative forms of actions amongst migrant women.

Legal restrictions and politics

In Taiwan's vibrant civil society, cross-Strait marriage migrants have managed to carve a space through which to voice their frustrations and dissatisfaction with regard to the discriminatory treatment they have received. In the second half of the 1990s, when the Taiwanese government tightened the restrictions related to access to citizenship rights for this group, mainland spouses reacted, firstly, by establishing an

online forum, to share opinions, experiences and ideas. They then organised the first protests and rallies to oppose government's decisions. These early actions led to the establishment of MATSC, one of the first formal civic organisations focusing on the specific needs and interests of mainland spouses (Chang, 2004; Chao, 2006). Without any doubt, MATSC is regarded by cross-Strait marriage migrants as the main channel to voice their claims and push for social and legal change (Chang, 2004; Chao, 2006; King, 2007; Momesso and Cheng, 2017). Yet it is not the only one: several other more or less successful organisations and groups followed in the years to come (Momesso, 2017). Despite their different approaches and aims, many of these organisations became possible thanks to the contribution of Taiwanese citizens, often Taiwanese spouses of marriage migrants.

The first time I became aware of this peculiarity of mainland spouses' civic organisations was in 2010 when I attended the International Migrant Day (国际移民日嘉年華)[2] in Taipei. That year 103 stalls were on display. Of these, 29 were related to centres and groups funded by the Guidance and Care Fund for Foreign Spouses and to other independent organisations focusing on marriage migrants. While walking through the stalls of marriage migrants' groups, I saw a clear majority of women, but something unexpected occurred when I reached the space reserved to MATSC: behind the stall there was a group men. Later on, I discovered that they were the Taiwanese husbands of mainland women. In the following months, I would regularly come across Taiwanese husbands, not only in the homes of my informants, but also in the context of the civil society organisations I visited throughout the island.

The cooperation between Taiwanese husbands and migrant wives from mainland China can be interpreted in many ways. This is first of all a consequence of legal restrictions. According to the Civil Association Act, non-Taiwanese citizens are not entitled to establish civil society organisations.[3] This may be a first explanation why marriage migrants, regardless of where they came from, have needed to ally with someone from Taiwan in order to establish formal organisations.

The literature argues that the immigrant movement in Taiwan has benefited from the contribution of Taiwanese professionals and experts. As King (2011: 186) puts it, 'the entry of experienced, well-connected, and knowledgeable Taiwanese activists/movements, such as the woman's movement, has proven valuable for challenging the validity of state policy decisions.' Indeed, in 1995, a group of Taiwanese women and academics created a Chinese language literacy group for Southeast Asian marriage migrants in order to facilitate their integration and empowerment (Hsia, 2004; Hsia, 2005; Hsia, 2006; Hsia, 2008). This eventually led to the formation of a nationwide organisation in 2003, the TransAsia Sisters Association in Taiwan (TASAT), and of a broader network, the Alliance for Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants (AHRLIM) (Hsia, 2008; Momesso and Cheng, 2017).

It has been argued that these initiatives were of little interest to marriage migrants from mainland China (Momesso and Cheng, 2017). Fluent in the Mandarin language and sharing a relatively similar culture to that of their Taiwanese spouses, they already had a certain degree of control over their lives, especially within their families. PRC marriage migrants did not need to learn a language in order to be able to express their needs and interests in the context of their families. Hence, marriage migrants from China did not see a solution in the activities organised by TASAT and the Chinese literacy group, and benefited only intermittently from the coordinated activities of AHRLIM (Momesso and Cheng, 2017). Instead, they established their own organisations and, to do so, they decided to look within their own families.

It would be incomplete to understand this cooperation only in light of practical interests. Indeed, politics may also have played an important role. In this regard, it is necessary to look at MATSC membership, involving individuals with a close personal or political connection with mainland China. This includes, on one hand, mainland spouses and, on the other hand, veterans of the Nationalist army who arrived in Taiwan from different Chinese provinces after losing the civil war against the Communists. Not only did these groups suffer the consequences of being labelled as 'outsiders' in

Taiwanese imagination (Fan, 2011), but they also shared similar political stances with each other. Indeed, because of their connection to mainland China, both veterans and mainland spouses tended to lean towards Pan-Blue and pro-unification parties, as they pushed for more friendly policies with Beijing.

Mainland spouses' civic organisations carried this political identity, and this was blatant in the case of MATSC whose male membership was mainly composed of veterans, who clearly had a Pan-Blue and pro-unification political stance (Chang, 2004: 110). King (2011: 191; 2007: 159) holds that, in order to maximise its efforts, MATSC has placed political considerations after the right-claim for cross-Strait families. This means that MATSC has not explicitly promoted Pan-Blue and pro-unification parties; instead, it has worked at establishing alliances and links with other migrant civic groups in Taiwanese civil society arena. Momesso and Cheng (2017), however, note that the politicisation of this group from the outside has turned these alliances into short-term endeavours, based on specific requests or claims, and it has contributed to a degree of isolation for MATSC in Taiwanese politicised civil society arena (Momesso and Cheng, 2017).

Legal restrictions and political considerations are important features in shaping this unique cooperation between Taiwanese husbands and immigrant wives. It is also important, however, to reflect on how the assignment of roles and responsibilities was managed within the organisation and how men and women justified these choices.

Gender at work: The assignment of roles and responsibilities

My informants hardly ever stated that politics motivated the cooperation between Taiwanese husbands and immigrant wives. For most of them, practical factors, such as legal restrictions and power, in the form of economic, social, intellectual and experiential capital, were at the core of a need to join together against a stronger enemy, identified as Taiwanese government.

Cooperation, on many occasions, was seen as a necessary. The social capital of Taiwanese citizens was as important as the first-hand experience of immigrant women. On one hand,

Taiwanese husbands could use their networks and knowledge to properly and effectively develop negotiations with governmental institutions; on the other hand, migrant wives could offer first-hand experiences, based on the problems they faced, and which would become the basis on which to build up arguments against the government. This was clearly explained by MATSC's Chair of the Board:

> Because we are familiar with the legal system of this government, we Taiwanese husbands can deal with this legal system more easily by opposing it, for example. Obviously, mainland spouses can support us, and they can gradually begin to understand matters by following us. A person new to a country needs time to understand how a legal system works. But if they come here, we can help them to understand. (Interviewed on 2 March 2011)

Yet, on closer inspection, hierarchies of power were apparent within the organisation. Husbands saw their wives as dependent on them and in need of their support. And this perspective was also shared by women, who seemed to agree that, as foreigners, they lacked connections, resources and knowledge. In response to my question about why mainland spouses needed the support of their husbands, Liwei, a middle-aged, highly educated woman from Beijing, also agreed that it was necessary to rely on someone powerful and well connected, who could only be a local:

> [...] you need time, you need knowledge and a network. How do we find the money? Do you think that our husbands will give us the money to create an organisation? It is much better if local people create this organisation. We need people who are very powerful to support us! Do you think that there are any women amongst us with this kind of power? If so, we would not really need to create our own organisation! Anyway, it wouldn't change much if we had our own organisation! And actually I believe that it is much better to have locals who support us! (Interviewed on 1 July 2011)

Definitely, the gaps in social and material capital between husbands/wives and citizens/immigrants, eventually shape the assignment of responsibilities and roles within the

organisation. It was common, in most of the organisations I visited, that leadership positions were allocated to Taiwanese men. Women, in the meantime, worked as supporters. Furthermore, women visited the organisation if they had a problem or a request, or if an activity was taking place.

Taiwanese husbands encouraged women's participation in the organisation. Yet, mirroring society's and government's assumptions about marriage migrants' contribution in Taiwan, mainly as mothers, wives and daughters-in-law, they also held the idea that a migrant's primary role should be within the family. As the MATSC Chair of the Board once explained:

> Women are not likely to come here very often. They are busy with their families. If they have problems, they come here [...]; they have to take care of their children, their husbands and sometimes their in-laws. We, males, are more into organisational matters. So, if there are problems, we are the ones who try to solve them. (Interviewed on 31 May 2011)

Interestingly, this idea was also confirmed by migrant women. Some respondents pointed out that their priorities were their families: 'Although I think that organisations are helping us, you have to remember that we are here for our families, not for the organisations!' (Xinlan, interviewed on 13 July 2011). Expected, and willing, to take up family responsibilities, such as looking after children and elders, and sometimes also engaging in paid work to contribute to the family finances, my informants did not have much time left to be involved in organisational matters. In this regard, older wives, freed from the burden of family responsibilities, as their veteran husbands often did not have their parents with them, were most likely to dedicate their time to the organisation. They were involved in different supportive roles such as volunteering and promoting the organisation. Conversely, as younger women were hampered by a series of family responsibilities, such as household chores and caring for younger and older generations, their presence in the organisation was less regular.

Gender was not only important in determining access to leadership and participation patterns, but also in shaping the division of work within the organisations. Following a traditional gender division of responsibilities between domestic and public spheres, the former pertaining to women and the latter to men, women and men engaged in different activities and tasks in the organisation. This principle was embraced by migrant women, no matter their background. For instance, Jiaqing, a woman in her late sixties from Shanghai, who liked to describe herself as an independent free woman, also embraced these beliefs. According to her, 'sisters' were suited to performing duties inside the organisation, such as keeping the site clean and preparing it for events, whereas Taiwanese husbands were more suited to managerial activities and communication with the public and governmental agencies, especially when the matter was related to specific legislation and rights (Interviewed on 14 September 2011). In this regard, Stanton (1999: 6) sees patriarchal conditioning as a 'carbon monoxide poisoning' that debilitates women, making them have to constantly look up for approval. She argues that, in certain contexts, assumptions that women are inferior to men contribute to women's acceptance of their condition of dependency and passivity, to the extent that they may even embrace and sustain the hierarchical system they are part of, one that positions them as inferior to men (Stanton, 1999: 7). Yet, my respondents' narratives and practices revealed more than the mere subjection of migrant women to Taiwanese husbands and the reproduction of patriarchal beliefs.

Patriarchy: Bargaining, allying and resisting

From the narratives of my respondents, it is clear that understanding the organisation only in light of women's subjection to, and acceptance of, patriarchal arrangements does not lead to significant conclusions. It may be more important to reflect on the significance of these arrangements for both men and women.

For most of the marriage migrants I interviewed, civic organisations were perceived, firstly, as homes and spaces where they could build up a sense of community, extend their personal networks, get to know Taiwanese society and culture, find an alternative to their family life and, eventually, have an authoritative channel to voice their claims before the government. In this context, many women regarded the consent of their husbands, in particular, and the contributions of Taiwanese men, in general,

as crucial factors motivating their participation in civic organisations. As one of my informants explained: 'I think that it is important for our husbands to support these activities. If they oppose them, we do not have the chance to go out and protest. So it is important to have their support' (Interviewed on 22 June 2011). Rather than seeking solutions that challenged the patriarchal arrangements shaping their everyday lives, marriage migrants decided to negotiate with them as their aim was to enact change at a broader level. Kandiyoti (1988) coined the expression 'bargaining with patriarchy' to refer to women's negotiation, or 'bargaining', with male domination, in order to maximise security and optimise life options. Shedding light on a previously neglected feature of women's negotiation with patriarchy, namely adjustment, acceptance and active or passive resistance to male oppression, this framework aims to document how women may decide not only to resist patriarchy but also to accommodate it in certain circumstances. Since its first publication, this concept has been broadly applied by feminist and other scholars with the purpose of problematising the way women negotiate with patriarchal arrangements (Lan, 2000; Shankar and Northcott, 2009).

Immigrant women have gained significant benefits from this bargain. Separate spaces intended only for women/spouses/mainlanders were developed. Within these spaces, marriage migrants informally carried out several activities without needing to involve or inform the male leadership. These activities included exchanging information, offering mutual support, holding counselling sessions, organising child-care and running various activities including dancing, cooking and singing. Most importantly, joining organisations was seen as a form of insurance for migrant women against exploitative husband/wife relationships, especially before the acquisition of Taiwanese citizenship, a period of time that could last several years and during which migrants enjoyed only limited rights in Taiwan. Aware that their allies in the civil society sphere could also be their oppressors at home, they felt vulnerable to injustice and abuse, because they did not enjoy full citizenship rights. Hence, for migrant women, the organisation was not only a place to enact

social change but also to receive protection in case anything went wrong, especially within their family.

The narratives of my male informants provided additional food for thought, offering reasons for this cooperation and highlighting the related benefits this could bring not only to migrant women but also to Taiwanese spouses. As the MATSC Chair of the Board once told me, 'If your wife is discriminated against, you also are discriminated against' (Interviewed on 28 July 2011). By moving the focus of attention beyond the unequal power relations between husband and wife, MATSC members managed to identify the source of the unfair treatment of their wives in state policies. These policies targeted marriage migrants yet influenced all the members of the family. The literature shows how, in certain circumstances, men may support or sympathise with women's causes and feminist causes. As Humphrey (2000) points out, inspiration, and a channel for women to voice their rights, can be found not only in other women but also in men. For instance, when a commonality in terms of interests and identity is acknowledged, this may push the two genders to cooperate with one another. This may be even more obvious with social groups where both genders experience communality in terms of oppression, needs and interests. For instance, Cranford (2007: 413) suggests that migrant women who are unionising may try to build 'critical solidarity' with migrant men, rather than organising actions separately from them, because of a convergence of experiences. The case of mainland spouses and their Taiwanese husbands, though, expands on these accounts by shedding light on the fact that cooperation between two genders can also occur between migrants and citizens, when there is a recognition that migration (marriage migration in this case) is not only a migrant's matter, but also affects members of society who are not migrants.

This unusual cooperation between Taiwanese husbands and Chinese wives, eventually, led to important twists in the whole narrative of oppression for marriage migrants in Taiwan. Organisations for foreign spouses led by Taiwanese women, on one hand, traced the source of foreign spouses' oppression to the dominant relationship of husbands over wives within the

family. Hence, they first pushed for migrant women's empowerment so they could gain control within their families. Only later did they develop a narrative against the broader discrimination enacted by the Taiwanese state against this social group. On the other hand, cross-Strait marriage migrants did not trace the source of their problems to the family, but beyond it, in state discrimination, which affected all the members of the family, not only migrant women. By stressing shared experiences between husbands and wives, MATSC introduced a new understanding of marriage migrants' issues as a family problem, rather than only a migrant women's issue.

Along this line, the source of oppression was not seen to be in the material and cultural foundations that allow men to dominate migrant women in a family setting. Instead, the emphasis was on immigration legislation and policies, developed by the Taiwanese government, which contributed to unequal power relations between Taiwanese husbands and foreign wives within the family.

Spousal cooperation, however, could be challenged at any time, revealing the delicate balance that existed between the two genders and migrant/non-migrants. Acquisition of new skills and experiences on the part of migrant women, and clashes between wives and husbands, as well as between Taiwanese members and Chinese members of the organisation, could generate unexpected changes and could push migrant women to embrace new paths. During my fieldwork, I visited several groups created by 'sisters' for 'sisters'. They were often service-oriented organisations and did not engage in advocacy activity. As marriage migrants acquired Taiwanese ID, they also increased their negotiating power, both in their family and in wider society. As Taiwanese citizens, they were no longer subject to the legal restrictions of immigrants. Newly formed civic organisations could be the outcome of a desire to develop something independent from Taiwanese husbands/citizens. At other times they are formed due to the realisation that relations are exploitative between Taiwanese husbands and Mainland Chinese wives in the organisation. For instance, Yuqin, a mainland spouse from Yunnan, decided to leave one organisation after she divorced her husband. In this case, the Chair of the organisation was her

mother-in-law. Yuqin explained that originally she had been the one who asked her in-laws to set up the organisation in order to help other 'sisters' in Kaohsiung. Her husband and mother-in-law supported her and got involved in the project. However, as her marital situation worsened and she divorced, power relations between Yuqin, her husband and her in-laws changed, and Yuqin was forbidden from being a member of the organisation by her husband and her mother-in-law, who were the founders of the association and therefore had the power to decide. This did not discourage Yuqin though, who, having acquired Taiwanese ID, decided to create her own association with other 'sisters' who remained loyal to her. After a few years, she recognised that this idea had been successful because it was an independent project started by 'sisters', and which did not depend on Taiwanese citizens (Interviewed on 25 July 2011).

As these cases show, when the tacit compliance between Taiwanese husbands and Chinese wives breaks down, the model developed by MATSC could easily degenerate. Change is often implemented by migrant women. Once given certain inputs and resources, or deprived of certain rights or autonomy, marriage migrants can also decide to act differently, break up with patriarchy, search for independent solutions and develop new narratives to frame their collective actions.

Conclusions

In this paper, by building on the case of marriage migrant civic organisations in Taiwan, I have explored how migrant women's agency occurs not only in the form of resistance to their potential oppressors, often identified as their husbands, but also through alliances with them, when oppression is identified somewhere beyond the couple, affecting all the members of the family. In light of a literature that depicts marriage migration as a female and feminised phenomenon, in this paper, I shed light on the husbands' identities and on their roles in shaping the collective resistances of their wives.

Most of the literature on marriage migrants' civic organisations in Taiwan focuses on the experiences and perspectives of the immigrant spouses, leaving in the shadow the reactions

and contributions of their Taiwanese spouses. Although the presence of Taiwanese spouses in these organisations is acknowledged by the literature (Chang, 2004; Chao, 2006; King, 2007; Momesso and Cheng, 2017), in this paper, I hold that it is important to delve deeper into their contributions, actions and narratives, and to critically assess their role in shaping the collective actions of their immigrant wives. The accounts shared throughout these pages show a complex picture, much closer to reality than the simplistic idea of oppressive partners from whom marriage migrants should seek emancipation. As these accounts illustrate, cross-Strait marriage migrants did not simply surrender to their experience of inequality and injustice. Rather, they made use of any source of power that was available to them to wield influence and implement change. Confirming Kandiyoti's (1988) model of bargaining with patriarchy, female marriage migrants relied on their Taiwanese husbands to develop their collective actions.

As Kandiyoti (1987: 334) predicted about twenty years ago, 'there will be changes in the parameters that currently shape women's experiences'. Yet, she was not sure in which direction. The battles started by cross-Strait families in Taiwan may offer important insights in this regard. Indeed, the experience of Chinese marriage migrants and their Taiwanese husbands shows how migrant women decided to cooperate with their husbands not only to maximise security and optimise life options, but also because there was the realisation of shared oppression. Hence, these cases, also, revealed how groups that are often seen in separation and in hierarchical relations (i.e. men and women, husbands and wives, citizens and migrants) may also strengthen new alliances. Beyond politics and legal restrictions, a crucial factor in shaping alliances was the recognition of a shared oppression in Taiwan that affected all the members of cross-Strait families, including migrant and non-migrant members.

Finally, the case of Taiwanese husbands' and migrant wives' negotiation in the context of civic organisations in Taiwan is useful not only to generate further discussion about agency when oppression operates in interlocking ways, but also to offer a more nuanced image of husbands' identities and roles in the context of

contemporary marriage migration in Taiwan. Above all, in this paper, the role of Taiwanese partners in marriage migrants' lives emerges clearly, not only as part of the problem, as potential oppressors in a system that favours men/citizens over women/migrants, but also as victims of a discriminatory legislative system that targets foreign citizens, yet that eventually affects all the members of cross-border families. In this picture, Taiwanese husbands also emerge as agents who contribute to improving their wives' negotiating power with Taiwanese government and society.

Notes

1 A rich terminology has developed to refer to PRC marriage migrants in Taiwan, including mainland spouses, cross-Strait marriage migrants, Chinese spouses. In this paper, I will make use of all these terms.
2 The goal of this event is to increase visibility of migrant communities and their organisations in Taiwan. During this event non-governmental organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations (NPOs) and governmental agencies from all over the island are invited to display their programmes, sell arts and crafts made by their members, organise performances and share ethnic food with visitors.
3 There are divergent opinions on this point. As Chang (2004: 59) argues, the Civil Association Act does not require founders and members of a social association to be Taiwanese citizens. However, individuals are required to show a Taiwanese ID in order to be registered as members of organisations. This has made it difficult for non-Taiwanese citizens to join civil society organisations until they acquire Taiwanese citizenship.

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