



Social structure, relationships and reproduction in quasi-family networks: brokering circular migration of Vietnamese sex workers to Singapore

Nicolas Lainez

To cite this article: Nicolas Lainez (2019) Social structure, relationships and reproduction in quasi-family networks: brokering circular migration of Vietnamese sex workers to Singapore, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45:9, 1631-1649, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2017.1417028](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1417028)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1417028>



Published online: 19 Dec 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 152



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)



Social structure, relationships and reproduction in quasi-family networks: brokering circular migration of Vietnamese sex workers to Singapore

Nicolas Lainez

Institut de Recherche Inerdisciplinaire sur les Enjeux Sociaux, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France

ABSTRACT

This article proposes an ethnographic examination of the inner workings of unsanctioned informal networks that facilitate the circular migration and labour of Vietnamese sex workers to Singapore. These operations are coordinated by brokers who sell migration services to their clients. I conceptualise them as ‘quasi-family networks’ because kinship bonds, the fact that brokers (‘mothers’) and sex workers (‘daughters’) operate under the framework of a family ethos which allows them to establish intimate and unequal relationships, and socialising and reproductive processes inscribed in the family form, are defining structural features. The study of these organisational and operational traits allows us to consider a new network model in the field of transnational unsanctioned migration for sex work, and to discuss issues of network structure, adaptability and reproduction in repressive market environments in relation to the family form.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 September 2017
Accepted 8 December 2017

KEYWORDS

Quasi-family network;
transnational migration for
sex work; brokerage;
Singapore; Vietnam

The sex trade in Southeast Asia has received much attention in the past few decades. While a number of works have examined the national and transnational migration of sex workers (see e.g. Aoyama 2009; Chin and Finckenauer 2012), little is known about the networks that facilitate this mobility and the brokerage processes this involves. This article addresses this gap with an ethnographic examination of the inner workings of unsanctioned migration networks that facilitate the transportation, accommodation and employment of Vietnamese sex workers in Singapore. Despite operating in a highly regulated and hostile environment, these networks have proliferated over the past 15 years, as shown by the pervasive presence of Vietnamese women in the Singapore sex industry (Lainez 2011; Shaw and Rahil 2006). These small, informal and family-oriented structures facilitate the circular migration of Vietnamese sex workers who work for 30-day stints, often several times a year. They are led by a broker – meaning a ‘human actor who gains something from the mediation of valued resources that he or she does not directly control’ (Lindquist 2015, 870) – who sells logistic, financial and administrative services to sex workers. I argue that these networks are shaped by the family form and structured around kinship ties. In addition, they develop

and sustain a family ethos and a matrix of social relationships that combines violence and intimacy, all the while facilitating socialisation and reproduction processes. I will thus use the expression 'quasi-family networks' in this article to refer to these structures. By focusing on network structure, power relationships and brokerage processes, I propose a new network model involved in the facilitation of migration for sex work in Asia.

These operations typically fall into the categories of decentralised, dyadic and corporate networks. Decentralised networks are horizontal and flexible structures with no visible core and an even distribution of roles among its members. In China, a country where the demand for transnational migration to wealthy countries with restrictive immigration policies has exploded in the past few decades, Sheldon Zhang (2008; see also Zhang, Chin, and Miller 2007) describes how Fujianese 'snakeheads' organise themselves in 'dyadic cart-wheel networks' comprising of a few individuals connected to one other through 'one-on-one' or dyadic relationships. These members conduct specific tasks and serial transactions including recruitment, logistical coordination, preparation of documents, bribing of officials, escorting clients across borders, and payment collection in the United States.

This decentralised model applies to the migration of Thai sex workers to Japan in the late 1990s, a time when female workers migrated to this country mainly through irregular means (Sobieszcyk 2002, 3). Here, a recruiter enlists a prospective sex worker from his/her social network and introduces her to an agent. The agent places her with a broker in Japan, arranges logistical details and delivers her to an escort. The escort accompanies her during the trip often via a third country, and delivers her to a broker in Japan. Lastly, the broker delivers the migrant to a Japanese or Thai procurer for employment (Caouette and Saito 1999; Human Rights Watch 2000). This process has been framed as involving trafficking because deception, coercion, debt bondage and passport confiscation are used along the way, a conclusion disputed by Teresa Sobieszcyk (2002). The transportation and employment of Nigerian sex workers to Europe through decentralised networks is also framed as trafficking (Mancuso 2014). According to Paolo Campana (2016, 82, 76), these networks are 'a collection of largely independent actors' who externalise activities and assume different roles: 'management' for those who coordinate activities without centralising finances, 'resource acquisition' refers to those who arrange paperwork and logistics, 'trolleys' accompany migrants during their trip, and 'madams' are often former sex workers who employ the migrants in the receiving country. Sine Plambech (2017, 145) stresses that recruiters can be deported migrants or businessmen who use their personal and family connections with madams and other facilitators in Europe to arrange migration through licit and illicit means.

With the intensification of the fight against human trafficking and the on-going shift from undocumented to documented labour migration across Asia, decentralised networks are being sanctioned by countries like Japan as part of their effort to regulate the inflow of foreign hostesses under an 'entertainment visa' scheme. Rachel Parreñas (2011) describes a model in which unlicensed talent managers train prospective Filipino hostesses, licensed promotion agencies organise their auditions and promoters recruit and supply them to Japanese bar owners. As opposed to those operating in Thailand in the late nineties, these Filipino-Japanese networks operate under a paternalistic legal framework that sanctions their activity in both the sending and receiving countries. Parreñas (2011) shows that although originally designed to decrease the risk of trafficking and labour exploitation, this framework magnifies migrants' vulnerability and brokers' impunity.

The literature stresses the existence of even smaller networks resulting in dyadic connections involving a pair of actors whose ‘operations depend on interpersonal connections and luck rather than systematic planning’ (Chin 2013, 131). In Kuala Lumpur, ‘anchovy’ operators recruit migrant women who are already working in Malaysia to become sex workers, as well as sex workers from other networks. In China, the migration of Chinese sex workers to Asia is managed by small players. They may act as ‘chickenheads’ who either facilitate the migration and labour of the women to Hong Kong, Macau and Singapore, or merely as procurers in the destination countries. In Taiwan, they are called ‘agents’ who assume ownership over the migrants because they advance their travel expenses from China, whereas in Indonesia, ‘agents’ simply assist sex workers by organising their transportation and acting as middlemen to find jobs (Chin and Finckelner 2012, 147–155). This dyadic model applies to ‘dilettante recruiters’ commissioned by owners of the entertainment outlets where they work to recruit acquaintances in their communities in Laos (Molland 2012a).

The loose structure of decentralised and dyadic networks stands in contrast with that of crime syndicates, which have long served as a reference in the study of human smuggling and trafficking (Salt and Stein 1997). In criminology, the corporate model describes traditional syndicates like the Italian mafia (Ianni 1972) as hierarchical, centralised, ritualised and bureaucratic corporations that exert tight control over their members, run their operations efficiently and monopolise markets. Christine Chin (2013) provides a rare account of a well-established crime organisation. Syndicate X, which facilitates the migration and employment of non-trafficked Chinese sex workers to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. Syndicate X is vertically integrated and structured around a gendered division of labour that comprises four male principals with a tier of middle management in charge of operations and ancillary activities. While the corporate model is relevant in some cases, it seems to be rather exceptional in the fields of human smuggling and trafficking.

In sum, these works describe network models that facilitate transnational migration for sex and labour. They stress the need to examine the conditions under which networks emerge and thrive, their features including the distribution of roles, tasks and liabilities, and issues surrounding exploitation, which have informed the dominant trafficking framework used for their study. The case of Vietnamese quasi-family networks in Singapore showing how central the family form is to the emergence and sustenance of similar operations, and that popular views that correlate the facilitation of migration sex work and trafficking do not always stand up to scrutiny.

I substantiate this argument with ethnographic data. In 2010, I conducted in-depth interviews in Ho Chi Minh City with six sex workers and one broker operating in Singapore. Moreover, I conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews in Singapore with 10 sex workers and informal discussions with 10 other women in the apartment of a Vietnamese broker – I will refer to by the pseudonym of Oanh – where I lived for five months (see Figures 1 and 2). During the first two months, I embedded myself in the community by following Oanh and her clients in their daily endeavours. I had coffee and dinner with them, followed them to pagodas, churches and casinos, help them to remit money to Vietnam and top up their telephone cards, translated their communications with their patrons, and taught them English. On the third and fourth months of my fieldwork, I conducted open interviews with them with. Meanwhile, I continued to participate in their daily lives. I also had discussions with another broker living next door, two Vietnamese



Figure 1. The living, eating and clothes-drying area at Oanh's apartment (all photos taken by the author in 2010).

permanent residents, a visa sponsor, an odd-job man and a recruiter for karaoke outlets, and four customers of the sex workers. Between 2011 and 2014, I tracked Oanh's whereabouts in Singapore and in Vietnam and kept in contact with two of her clients. My analysis pays particular attention to her network. Brokers operate at the margins of legality in a competitive market, and therefore are secretive about their operation. This makes it difficult for an



Figure 2. The rooms in Oanh's apartment, two women to each single mattress.

ethnographer to embed himself in various networks simultaneously. I compensate for this sampling limitation by triangulating the data from Oanh's network with that from other brokers and sex workers from other networks seven lawsuits against brokers and procurers retrieved from the Singapore Academy of Law, 140 newspaper clippings on sex work in Singapore covering 2 decades, and statistics.

In Singapore, I conducted most of my investigation in the residential area of Joo Chiat. It became the main Vietnamese red light district in town in the early 2000s, following a drop in the property market and a rapid expansion of entertainment outlets. Most of the prostitution activities in this area take place in the notorious 'Blue Zone' stretch (see [Figure 3](#)). In the mid-2000s, the proliferation of streetwalkers, pubs, karaoke bars and massage outlets sparked anxiety among residents who perceived foreign sex workers as 'threatening Others' (Hubbard 2004, 1699 on Paris and London). This led to the formation of two government-backed neighbourhood associations aimed at eradicating 'vice' (Chua 13/02/2005; see Shaw and Rahil 2006). After an aggressive campaign that led to the imposition of various measures including a moratorium on the approval of new licenses for entertainment outlets, a reduction of opening hours for pubs, the ban on transit hotel rates and a tough raid policy, the scale of the entertainment industry in Joo Chiat decreased and the number of pubs and massage parlours fell. Between 2010 and 2017, an average of 15 pubs and karaoke outlets have remained active.

The following sections examine the context in which quasi-family networks emerged in Singapore, the role of kinship in structuring them, and the implications of the family form for creating and sustaining family-informed relationships and efficient modes of sex worker socialisation, client recruitment and network reproduction.

1. Repressive containment: the environment in which quasi-family networks thrive

Vietnamese quasi-family networks proliferate in Singapore under particular conditions which provide fertile ground for growth. The geo-cultural (Chin and Finckenauer 2012,



Figure 3. The Blue Zone stretch on Joo Chiat Road. The popular Blue Lagoon pub closed its doors in late 2010.

464) and market (Zhang 2008, 136) environment in which informal migration networks operate inform their organisational and operational features, and their defining ‘relations, processes, practices and subjectivities’ (Hoang 2015, 694). In Singapore, market, political and legal conditions favour circular migration brokered by small and discreet networks. This country has a thriving sex industry segmented by race, class and gender, which employs women with various origins and backgrounds. The majority come from South-east Asian countries like Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, as well as China and Bangladesh. The expectation of high earnings in a valued currency is the chief pull factor. Vietnamese women perceive the city-state as an Eldorado where they may earn at least S\$1000 per month, an amount that is difficult to earn back home under the same conditions. My Vietnamese informants often stated that, ‘it is easy to earn big money by going to Singapore’. In this idyll, they felt that risks related to immigration and repression were worth taking.

These risks are paramount, as foreign sex workers are subject to legal barriers aimed at preventing them from entering and working in Singapore, and to the disciplinary technologies ‘imposed by the state to gaze over, control, or surveil sexual practices among the transient foreign population’ (Kitiarsa 2008, 598). Various laws apply to them. The Immigration Act bans the entry to ‘prohibited immigrants’, a category that includes sex workers, procurers and brokers. Officials from the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) routinely refuse entry to suspected sex workers at the borders. Their decision depends on profiling criteria such as age, sex, appearance, the availability of a return ticket, the number

of previous visits to Singapore and ‘show money’ (*tiền xách tay* for ‘pocket money’) that visitors might be requested to show to prove their financial solvency (see Lainez 2011). The ICA does not provide official figures for rejections at the borders. However, their frequency has created discontent in Vietnam (Vietnam News Agency 26/07/2015). Recently, following a complaint from the Vietnamese Embassy in Singapore, an ICA official stated that 98% of Vietnamese visitors are allowed to enter the country (Cheong 28/07/2015), which would mean that 1423 out of the 71,158¹ who visited Singapore were rejected in 2016. This unofficial estimate is low in my opinion. I travelled between Ho Chi Minh City and Singapore six times in 2011. Each time I landed at Changi Airport, I observed ICA officials taking at least one female Vietnamese visitors aside for an interview at the immigration counter. When I returned to Vietnam, I saw on five occasions Singaporean policemen escorting groups of two to six Vietnamese women who had been refused entry the previous day – including some sex workers I knew from Joo Chiat – onto the departure area for an early morning budget carrier flight to Ho Chi Minh City.

Foreign sex workers are also subject to legislation on prostitution. The Miscellaneous Offences Act criminalises public soliciting, the penal code the prostitution of women under 18, and the Women’s Charter harbouring, procuring, deception and trafficking; charges that are filed against brokers. However, the government also believes that restricting the supply of sex workers without meeting the demand for paid sex may provoke social unrest. It operates under the assumption that prostitution cannot be eradicated, and that attempts to do so may fuel criminality, women’s exploitation and the spread of sexually infectious diseases. Thus, prostitution is perceived as a necessary evil that must be contained (Joel 1996; Ong 1993) in line with the ‘politics of spatial planning’ that segregates foreign labour migrants from Singaporeans (Kitiarsa 2008, 599). These beliefs inform an unwritten policy which allows some licensed brothels to recruit foreign women under the Working Performing Artist Pass scheme in four Designated Red-light Areas. Outside of these areas including in Joo Chiat, sex workers engaging in outdoor and indoor soliciting may be arrested (see Khoo 04/07/2011). Raids are a frequent occurrence. During my stay at Oanh’s place, various women vanished abruptly after being arrested in raids in two popular pubs on Joo Chiat Road (see Figure 4).² Official figures are again unavailable. However, former Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng stated that 5400 foreign sex workers were arrested in 950 vice-related operations in 2007 (AFP 22/01/2008). This figure rose to 7614 in 2009 and dropped to 5213 in 2013 according to estimates from Project X, a grassroots organisation supporting sex workers in Singapore. It dropped again from 4886 in 2014 to 2947 in 2016, according to a media report citing police sources (Ong 09/01/2017). Although unofficial, these statistics highlight the intensity of repression conducted under the containment policy. In addition, the authorities actively fight crime syndicates to make sure they do not control the sex trade (Tan and Gill 2014, 2).

Overall, the strict enforcement of immigration and prostitution regulation in Singapore forces Vietnamese sex workers to undertake 30-day stints with social visit passes for up to three or four times a year, and to rely on small and discreet networks run by brokers to arrange their transportation, accommodation and employment in Singapore. These brokers engage in ‘transfer brokerage’ as they conduct ‘information or other resources from one alter to another who cannot be directly reached’ (Spiro, Acton, and Butts 2013, 131). They coordinate a one-stop shop that provides all the necessary services to



Figure 4. ICA and the police conduct a raid in the Blue Zone stretch. Consequently, two sex workers from Oanh's network were arrested and expelled from Singapore.

their clients, including assistance in obtaining passports in Vietnam,³ return air tickets with low-cost carriers, the advance of S\$800 for 'show money', the provision of an address for the disembarkation card preferably located outside the red-light areas, taxi pick up to/from the departure and arrival airports, board and lodging in a safe house, and assistance for extending short-term passes or renewing them through visa runs to Johor Bahru in Malaysia. Brokers sell these services *à la carte*, or as a package (Law 18/03/2015). Some brokers operating outside Joo Chiat also act as procurers, a point to which I will return later. By facilitating the connection between sex workers and patrons, they engage in 'matchmaking brokerage, in which ego introduces or otherwise makes possible a tie from one alter to another' (Spiro, Acton, and Butts 2013, 131). In both scenarios, brokers supervise and assume full responsibility for their operations.

2. Kinship bonds and fluid structure: the defining features of quasi-family networks

Quasi-family networks are dynamic and informal structures erected around kinship bonds. In Singapore, most brokers are Vietnamese women married to Chinese Singaporean men. They reside in the city-state as permanent residents or holders of long-term social visit passes. Marriage allows them to use their husband's housing and/or legitimate businesses including Vietnamese eateries – as was the case of Oanh's next-door neighbour in Joo Chiat – as a cover to host sex workers and conduct brokerage operations. This

familial organisation also prevailed in the network of the female broker I met in Ho Chi Minh City who worked with her husband. It also informed Oanh's network: she worked with her ex-husband who facilitated financial and logistics services to the sex workers, her daughter who booked air tickets from the travel agency she worked at in Ho Chi Minh City, her cousin who provided domestic services, and her former Singaporean son-in-law who carried out works in the apartment in Joo Chiat. This was also the case for Seng Swee Meng, a Chinese Singaporean broker whose network was dismantled by the police. This man worked with his Vietnamese wife who was in charge of recruiting sex workers in Vietnam, his sister-in-law married to a Singaporean civil servant, and his brother-in-law who provided miscellaneous services in Singapore (Alkhatib 14–15/04/2012a, 2012b see also Cheong 28/07/2015; b; Law 18/03/2015). Hence, spouses and first and second-degree relatives form the core of quasi-family networks. As pointed out by the broker I met in Ho Chi Minh City, marrying a local man is one of the main objectives of many sex workers who 'after working there, try to catch a husband, anyone as long as they have someone there' to reside in Singapore and work steadily as a sex worker, and accessorially as a recruiter or broker.

However, some brokers are unable to secure a marriage, and as a consequence, operate in precarious conditions. They rely on kin and social relations to work in Singapore. Oanh, had not divorced her former Vietnamese husband and thus could not marry a Singaporean man to settle in Singapore. She had to resort to 30-day social visit passes that she renewed and extended regularly, and on long-term passes that she obtained on two occasions by accompanying her daughter for study purposes. Moreover, she could not rent property as a social visit pass holder. Hence, she sublet a three-room apartment from a Singaporean friend in 2008 and 2009, a five-room unit from a Vietnamese businesswoman in 2010, and a two-room flat from a Singaporean man who was fond of her in 2011 and 2013, all in the environs of Joo Chiat. In her network, the relationships with her acquaintances and suitors played the same bonding role as marriage to sustain her operation in Singapore.

In addition to relatives and close allies, brokers also rely on an evolving number of trusted sex workers and professional service providers who provide flexible labour, social capital and specialised skills. Trusted sex workers are returnees who join the broker's inner circle and work as dilettante recruiters for 'coffee money' (*tiền café*). Service providers offer services on demand. Oanh, for instance, relied on Vietnamese permanent residents to collect addresses, recruiters for karaoke outlets, and Singaporean men who arranged visa runs to Malaysia and sponsored the renewal of short-term passes.⁴ Since most relatives, close allies, trusted clients and service providers have transient commitments to the brokerage business, the brokers rely on them opportunistically based on their availability.

This explains why the structure of quasi-family networks is not cast in stone, but changes organically in line with the high turn-over of associates who orbit around the brokers' world. Hence fleeting relationships and passing opportunities define quasi-family networks structured around brokers acting as fixed points in a dynamic social environment. These brokers bridge 'structural holes' that 'separate non-redundant sources of information' (Burt 2005 [1992], 16). By brokering connections between unconnected kin, clients and service providers to gain some advantage, they act as '*tertius gaudens*' – literally the 'third who benefits' in Simmelian terms – or 'network

entrepreneurs' (Burt 2005 [1992], 17–18). From an organisational perspective, quasi-family networks combine features from dyadic networks such as the one-person band, and from decentralised networks such as task differentiation and diffused liability. The need for a safe house, addresses away from red light districts and the financial and operational capacity to provide services to numerous women requires a structure that goes beyond rudimentary dyadic networks. However, this structure does not require the complexity of decentralised networks as the facilitation of circular migration to Singapore involves simple, inexpensive and partly legal operations.⁵ The organisational and operational features of quasi-family networks are thus constrained by purpose, environment and operational requisites.

3. When brokers become mothers: family ethos and ambivalent relationships

Besides shaping the structure of quasi-family networks, the family form provides the substance for undertaking socialising processes in the protected social space of the safe house, and for establishing relationships blending intimacy and violence. Brokers enhance a sense of family by clustering and accommodating sex workers in their flats. They recruit women with the same ethnic (Vietnamese or *kinh*), socioeconomic (modest) and cultural (familistic mind-set) backgrounds. These ethnic and social bonds facilitate the creation of a protective world from within (*ở trong*) akin to a family home, in contrast to a hostile world from without (*ở ngoài*) patrolled by vigilant police officers and angry neighbours (see Lainez 2011; Shaw and Rahil 2006, 195–196). Brokers encourage their clients to live reclusively in their apartments. Many sex workers are frightened of leaving their place of residence for fear of being arrested. Where confinement often equates to abuse in the trafficking paradigm (Asia Watch 1993), in the brokerage operations of our case study, it mostly provides security.

Most importantly, reclusion in safe houses allows brokers and sex workers to operate under a family ethos, a practice observed in communities of sex workers in Laos (Lytleton 2014, 64; Molland 2012b, 168) and Cambodia (Hoefinger 2013, 126). The Vietnamese system of person reference uses kinship terms in place of personal pronouns to address kin and non-kin (Van Luong 1984). In both cases, a speaker considers the gender, age, lineage and social status of his/her interlocutor to select an appropriate term and behave in a certain way. In Singapore, the brokers push the boundaries of this system by operating under a family ethos. Oanh and her clients addressed each other with the terms *con* (child) and *mẹ* (mother) without consanguinity or affinity ties, instead of the more usual pairs *cháu/cô* (nephew-niece-paternal aunt) or *chị/em* (old sister-younger brother-sister). In addition, Oanh presented her clients to third parties as her 'daughters' (*con gái*), occasionally as her 'girls' (*đào*), an old word for 'artist' or 'mistress'. This family ethos locates brokers and sex workers in a strong but reassuring hierarchical position, which includes limited obligations and rights. It also enhances the culturally prescribed role of trustworthy caretaker in the family assigned to women (Schuler et al. 2006), which brokers embrace to establish gendered and motherly relationships with their clients.

Brokers become surrogate mothers who socialise and teach their 'daughters' the know-how to succeed in Singapore. They provide 'apprenticeships in prostitution' (Bryan 1965) that include advice on how to dress, behave, respond and introduce themselves to ICA

officials in order to pass immigration controls at Changi Airport. They also teach techniques to scan and secure a stable pool of customers, to negotiate good deals, and to find safe working locations. When the frequency of crackdowns increases in certain red-light areas, sex workers change their place of work or become more discreet, for example by hiding in entertainment outlets and reducing their outdoor visibility. Part of the training takes place when brokers take their new recruits to the cafés, eateries and bars of Joo Chiat where colleagues, friends, former sex workers married to Singaporean men, lovers and regular clients congregate to pass the time and often pay for beer and food. These gatherings allow the newcomers to eat and drink for free while familiarising themselves with their new working environment. Life in the safe houses also involves intense emotional exchanges. ‘Mother’ Oanh and her ‘daughters’ spent most of the day chatting, playing cards, commenting on text messages from love-struck clients, visiting temples and churches to pray for protection and good luck, and dressing up and applying makeup in the late afternoons. Hence the family ethos manifests itself as a vibrant economy of material and symbolic exchanges (see Cheng 2010, 108–113 for Korea).

The enactment of a motherly bond goes hand in hand with the promotion of an altruistic narrative that conceals the positional and informational asymmetries and blends market and gift economies, as Oanh explained during a discussion about her responsibilities regarding her ‘daughters’:

A ‘madam’ [*má mi*] is the one who takes care of boys and girls, and in exchange, the girls have to give her money. I am doing this but I don’t like to be called ‘madam’. They call me ‘mother’ [*mẹ*] because I help them, I take care of them when they are sick. They are like my children so they call me ‘mother’. I do that because Jesus teaches that we have to help people around us. I think I am doing charity.

The normalisation of this caring narrative informs the positive views that sex workers propagate about brokers. They perceive their services as ‘help’ (*giúp*) rather than as clear-cut market transactions, acknowledging that ‘altruistic and profit-oriented social networks cannot be disentangled from one other’ in the brokerage industry (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012, 17; see also Missbach 2015, 444; Molland 2012b, 172; Plambech 2017, 145, 147). Brokers are thus ‘good people’ (*người tốt*) willing to help, as one of Oanh’s clients described:

If I have some problem, I can call mother Oanh. I am one of her close officers. She has obligations towards me. She must stand for me. When I work, if someone asks me, I tell them I am her officer, so they know who I am. If a daughter of someone else troubles me, mother can interfere for me.

This narrative sustains and reinforces asymmetry between ‘mothers’ and ‘daughters’. However, this hierarchy is called into question when sex workers provide assistance to their brokers. I often saw Oanh struggling to pay bills on time and make ends meet. She always managed to overcome adversity by keeping low expectations and living on the edge of bankruptcy, but also by borrowing money from relatives and trusted clients. She approached these loans as a gift-based economy of services encapsulated in the expression ‘I help you once, you help me back’ (*giúp qua giúp lại*), which resonates with the resource-sharing (Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso 2014) and collaborative (Marcus et al. 2014) relational frameworks between procurers and sex workers that highlight varied and nuanced exchanges without precluding power disparity. This finding

challenges the numerous studies that portray brokers and pimps as coercive traffickers and exploiters (see Brady, Biradavolu, and Blankenship 2015).

The point of contention lies in the power of the broker over the sexual labour of her clients. In Joo Chiat, brokers do not act as procurers, meaning they provide services to women who pay them through sexual labour, but without controlling their activities. This flexible arrangement reduces brokers' risk of being reported by unhappy clients to the police for abuse and trafficking. It also allows them to establish a good reputation in the small but competitive local brokerage market where numerous networks vie for a limited pool of clients, and where having a good reputation is critical to staying in business; a finding consistent with previous studies on human smuggling (Bilger, Hofmann, and Jandl 2006; Zhang 2008, 151). This labour arrangement, however, does not imply that brokers and clients are equals, even if the former do not act as procurers. Like in the unequal parental relationship, junior sex workers depend on their senior brokers in many respects due to information asymmetry and a lack of experience and social and material capital, at least in the early stages of their circular migration to Singapore.

However, the power differential is even higher when their brokers act as procurers, which is the case in some areas of Geylang (see Cheong 28/07/2015). I had discussions with Vietnamese sex workers operating in dark alleys in Geylang under the strict supervision of procurers who managed their sexual labour. In addition to covering their travel and living expenses as their peers did in Joo Chiat, these women shared 50% of their earnings with their broker acting as madams. The cases reported in the media and in legal archives often refer to abusive scenarios in which brokers compelled new recruits to provide sex services to pay off travel and living expenses (see Alkhatib 14-15/04/2012a, 2012b; Thuc 30/06/2009), sometimes after having lured them with false promises of work. This is the case of Nguyễn Thị Bích Liễu, a Vietnamese broker and procurer married to a Singaporean man who was jailed for coercing and procuring a woman who was recruited under false pretences by her associate in Vietnam, with Nguyễn not having known about this until the woman arrived in Geylang (Public Prosecutor v Nguyen Thi Bich Lieu 2012). While these abusive cases nurture anxieties around trafficking (see Yea 2014), they are not representative of the situation in various Vietnamese enclaves including Joo Chiat, Orchard Towers and some *lorong* in Geylang, where brokers do not act as procurers. However, this does not prevent brokers from creating stratification and establishing domination, two conditions that sustain brokerage operations, and more generally speaking, the institution of the family.

4. When daughters become mothers: recruitment and reproduction of quasi-family networks

The broker–sex worker relationship is central to ensuring the social reproduction of quasi-family networks. The brokers must secure the loyalty of their clients who engage in circular migration and are at risk of being rejected, arrested and expelled from Singapore. The high turn-over and the unpredictability associated with repression compel the brokers to develop efficient modes of recruitment and network reproduction. The choice of like-minded individuals and the creation of symbiotic yet unequal bonds with sex workers provide an assurance of loyalty, trust, conformity and a sense of obligation towards

them and fellow network members. This relationship lays the ground for further cooperation in terms of recruitment of new clients. As shown by the pervasive presence of Vietnamese sex workers in Singapore, quasi-family networks are able to maintain a sustainable level of operations despite rejections and raids.

In fact, brokers rely on redundant and non-redundant connections to keep and expand their client base. Mark Granovetter (1973) posits that strong ties or redundant networks of kin and close friends are less helpful than weak ties or non-redundant networks of acquaintances in finding jobs, as the former bring boundless information and resources from distant hubs. Vietnamese brokers use strategically weak as well as strong ties. They recruit new clients through occasional clients or 'daughters', but also through strong ties or trusted clients whom Oanh referred to as 'officers' (*linh*). During my stay at her apartment, two resident sex workers had been introduced by occasional clients, and various others had been presented by other brokers who could not host them. In addition, two other women were recruited by one of Oanh's 'officer' who was establishing herself as a broker. Oanh also enlisted clients in Ho Chi Minh City. In 2011, I attended a dinner in which two trusted clients I had met in Joo Chiat introduced her to new recruits. Another sex worker I met in Ho Chi Minh City explained how she was recruited, trained and taken to Geylang:

When I worked for a nail shop, there was a client who asked me if I wanted to sell sex in Singapore. She used to come to my shop to take care of her nails. I agreed. Before I got on the plane, she taught me for free 100 English sentences in one week. She also took me to the office to get my passport. I paid VND200,000 for it. She bought me the ticket, but I had to find VND 3,5 million to pay for it. She also lent me S\$1,000 for 'show money'. When I arrived at the airport, she gave me the ticket. She, another girl, and I went to Singapore together. She ordered us not to talk to each other, so that the police would not know that we knew each other. Otherwise, we were told, they could ask us a lot of questions and it would be more difficult to get through immigration. Actually, the police questioned me and I replied that I came just for holiday. And they let me pass without even checking my money. When I arrived in Singapore, I paid her S\$1,100. She also introduced me to her relative in Singapore, the person in charge of the house where I would stay. She was paid S\$100 for introducing me to them, so she earned S\$200 all together, 100 from the show money and 100 for introducing me to that person.

Weak and strong ties are therefore a flexible, cheap and efficient resource allowing brokers to keep their networks potentially infinite and to withstand rejections, raids and risk. The social process by which 'daughters' are integrated into a protective quasi-family network, socialised and briefed on critical matters arouses their sympathy and allegiance towards their 'mothers', and their possible commitment to engaging in dilettante recruitment.

This process sheds light on the issue of network reproduction and especially redundancy, which is the process by which strong ties or close members take the place of removed members in a network (Duijn, Kashirin, and Sloot 2014, 3). In Singapore, the arrest of a broker often leads to the dismantling of her operation. In the above-mentioned case of Seng Swee Meng, the police raided their apartment in Geylang and arrested 30 sex workers operating in Joo Chiat and Geylang, of whom 14 had been recruited by Seng's wife. A few days later, the police arrested another 24 Vietnamese women at another apartment, including four recruited by Seng's associates. In the end, their operation was dismantled and Seng (his wife was in Vietnam at the time of the raids) and his sister-in-law were sentenced to jail (Alkhatib 14-15/04/2012a, 2012b). These brokers are not

replaceable because they hold unique influence and social capital acquired over the years, and for some an administrative status gained through marriage. The difficulty in transferring these features to a potential successor explains why even a trusted client endowed with similar competencies cannot replace a missing or vulnerable broker.

However, quasi-family networks produce dilettante recruiters who might eventually launch their own operation. Sheldon Zhang, Ko-Lin Chin, and Jody Miller (2007) propose the ‘gendered market perspective’ to explain the impact of gender in the industry, in particular why women join human smuggling operations in China, a business traditionally managed by men. To become a snakehead, men and women must have ample social connections including access to resources and opportunities, and a strong entrepreneurial spirit. A third prerequisite for women is that their ‘participation and roles must be viewed as an extension – rather than as a contradiction – to women’s cultural expectations as caregivers in the family and community’ (Ko, Zhang, and Miller 2007, 718). Similarly, in his elaboration of brokerage as a career model, Jeremy Boissevain (1974, 154–165) posits that a person becomes a broker by cultivating relations, controlling first-hand resources and acquiring a central position in a network. The Vietnamese sex workers who become dilettante recruiters and accessorially brokers met all these conditions. Over time, sex workers acquire experience and social and financial capital through circular migration, and hence reduce their dependency towards their brokers. The most entrepreneurial women may build their own network in which they take on the caring role of ‘elder sister’ (*chi*) and become dilettante recruiters, and eventually brokers. These steps are easily taken because brokerage as practiced in quasi-family networks is a simple logistical activity that requires little investment, basic skills, improvisation, bricolage and an opportunistic mind-set. Prior to that, however, aspiring broker candidates must ideally secure permanent residency or a long-term pass and a safe house in Singapore, two conditions that are difficult to fulfil in a country where legislation is strictly enforced and property prices are very high. While these conditions are not insurmountable obstacles for audacious brokers like Oanh, they are for many young women who consider the brokerage path if they are unable to secure a marriage with a Singaporean client. However, the few who decide to do so take advantage of fortuitous circumstances to fill the vacuum left by the few brokers who leave the business due to personal circumstances or forced removal. Hence, quasi-family networks reproduce themselves not because of redundancy, but as a result of a process in which dilettante recruiters become brokers, or in Oanh’s terms, when ‘daughters’ become ‘mothers’.

4. Conclusion

The family form function as a normative framework that signifies relations and generates protection, belonging, hierarchy, obligation and extended commitment. It permeates sex work communities across varied social and cultural settings. In the community of Cambodian ‘professional girlfriends’, “the family” becomes resignified, as the women group together to share money and material goods, as well as care for and nurture each other while living far away from their biological families’ (Hoefinger 2013, 126). In settings serving as both workplace and residence, Lao bar owners become surrogate parents who ‘provide food and board, they eat together with staff and more importantly they play the role of family caretaker, looking out for the young woman’s

wellbeing' (Lyttleton 2014, 64). The frontier between actual and fictive kinship, and between family and brothel life, becomes even more blurred in colonial Bombay (Tambe 2006). There brothel-owners use the family idiom to discipline sex workers and secure their loyalty. In addition, they adopt inducted girls and recruit widows, women fleeing oppressive family life, daughters sold by their destitute parents, and wives placed by their husbands. The sex workers are allowed visits by their relatives and raise their children in the brothels. In the United States, too, the family metaphor informs the protective yet unequal bonds that street sex workers establish with their pimps: the former form a community of 'folks' and call their pimps 'daddy', and the latter call their protégés 'wiley' for 'wife-in-law' and refer to their colleagues as 'pimping brothers' (Read 2014). And in New York, the family form shapes the Italian mafia in New York organised around family bonds of allegiance tied to lineage, seniority and kinship position (Ianni 1972). Hence, the family form takes different iterations and serves varied purposes in specific contexts.

The case of Vietnamese quasi-family networks in Singapore supports this conclusion. Their inner core is formed by kinship ties and managed by brokers who blur evolving asymmetries and merge market and care economies. These networks operate under a family ethos that transforms brokerage into a charitable business, the broker into a surrogate parent and the clients into 'daughters', and borrow social processes instilled in the family form to ensure their reproduction. Like in colonial Bombay, the frontier between quasi-family networks and actual families of the sex workers can blur even more. Vietnamese sex workers shared a substantial part of their gains with their parents, particularly their mothers who handled family finances. While some mothers encouraged their daughters to engage in sex work for economic reasons, a few paid visits to them during their short stints in Singapore, as I could observe while living in Oanh's flat. In some occasions, elder sex workers convinced their junior siblings to follow their path, and introduced them to recruiters of a network, as I also noticed. Overall, the family form, through its power to inform social structure, generate cohesion and ensure its continuity, provides a practical reference that renders quasi-family networks meaningful and structurally and operationally viable.

This model is compatible with dyadic networks where central brokers live with their clients for certain periods of time in protected environments. In other words, physical contact is necessary to shape social bonds in a familial way. Yet, the family form is inappropriate for decentralised networks where migrants establish more depersonalised and market-oriented relations with multiple actors from the brokerage chain. The literature on Chinese snakeheads highlights the importance of social and familial relations for organisational and operational purposes, in particular for recruitment. However, these relationships do not generate fictive kinship (Zhang 2008). The same can be argued for decentralised networks of recruiters, trainers, brokers and placement agents that facilitate sanctioned labour migration to countries like Singapore. In this case, labour migrants establish bureaucratic relationships with actors from the migration industry, which rarely extend beyond contractual dealings. In the realm of labour, however, it is not unusual for domestic workers to become integrated into the households of their employers as fictive kin. The relevance of the family form in corporate crime networks facilitating migration for sex work is more difficult to assess due to the lack of data. Christine Chin (2013) pays more attention to the organisational and operational features of

Syndicate X than to the nature of the relationships that Chinese sex workers establish with their recruiters and managers. If the family form were to apply to this model of facilitation and employment, it would most likely be in the residences and workplaces controlled by managerial staff including madams. In short, the family form requires a specific social configuration to emerge and become consolidated, in particular physical proximity and regular contact amongst network members.

In addition to the family form, another central feature of quasi-family networks is their fluidity and adaptability. Decentralised, dyadic and corporate networks involved in the facilitation of migration for sex work are often described as static structures with fixed features (Caouette and Saito 1999; Chin 2013; Parreñas 2011). However, the operations of quasi-family networks in Singapore vary from one broker to another and emerge from situated and changing contexts; all elements that shape their structure in particular ways and at particular moments. Moreover, as this article has shown, brokerage systems are influenced by structural dynamics that cannot be understood with a static framework. The career model of brokerage detailed in the previous sections describes the process that leads to the acquisition of experience, social and financial capital, and broker status and position in a network. Overall, the study of quasi-family networks brings a dynamic perspective to the understanding of their formation, evolution and reproduction. It shows that they derive from individual initiatives and fortuitous circumstances consisting of expanding social and financial capital, micro-brokerage operations and exchange networks. Hence, they naturally grow bigger than basic dyadic networks of ‘chickenheads’ and ‘agents’ (Chin and Finckenauer 2012) to meet their specific needs but remain under certain limitations. They also borrow traits from decentralised networks such as division of labour and externalisation, but without having to turn into the more complex ‘dyadic cartwheel networks’ of snakeheads (Zhang 2008) or Nigerian brokers (Campana 2015). Quasi-family networks are thus organic and loosely organised economic and social structures whose core, size and scope are in perpetual motion. These features call into question popular views of rigid and bureaucratic crime syndicates that traffic women, and corroborate the thesis that the facilitation of migration for sex work is more suited to small, flexible and dynamic networks.

Acknowledgement

Research for this article was supported by Alliance Anti-Traffic in Vietnam. I am grateful to the director Georges Blanchard and to my research assistant, Ta My Ngan. This research would not have been possible without the help of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore, which welcomed me as a visiting affiliate researcher during the field investigation period. I am also grateful to Su-Ann Oh, Sverre Molland, Hoang Lan Anh and Johan Lindquist for their comments of the early versions of the paper. I would also like to thank the editors and two anonymous peer reviewers from the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies who provided supportive, yet always incisive feedback.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. This figure is provided by the Singapore Tourism Board (<https://www.stb.gov.sg>).
2. Some blacklisted sex workers use new passports to slip through the nets of the ICA, but they run the risk of being caught (see Public Prosecutor v Tran Thi Phuong Trang 2006).
3. The broker I met in Ho Chi Minh City provided this service. She charged US\$30 for making a passport if an ID was provided, and US\$600 if no papers were provided.
4. Some try to bribe ICA official to obtain extensions of short-term passes to Vietnamese nationals (see Public Prosecutor v Dong Ching Jit 2010).
5. Vietnamese sex workers travel to Singapore under the 2006 ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption that grants 30-day social visit passes, usually with low-cost carriers such as Tiger or Lion Airways that sell return tickets for less than S\$200.

References

- AFP. 22/01/2008. "More than 5,000 Foreign Sex Workers Caught in S'pore." *Asia One News*.
- Alkhatib, Shaffiq. 14/04/2012a. "He Ran Prostitution Ring with Wife and Her Siblings." *Asia One News*.
- Alkhatib, Shaffiq. 15/04/2012b. "Pimp's Sister-in-law Jailed Too." *Asia One News*.
- Aoyama, Kaoru. 2009. *Thai Migrant Sex Workers: From Modernization to Globalization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Asia Watch. 1993. *A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls into Brothels in Thailand*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Bilger, Veronika, Martin Hofmann, and Michael Jandl. 2006. "Human Smuggling as a Transnational Service Industry: Evidence from Austria." *International Migration* 44 (4): 59–93. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2006.00380.x.
- Boissevain, Jeremy. 1974. *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Brady, David, Monica Biradavolu, and Kim M. Blankenship. 2015. "Brokers and the Earnings of Female Sex Workers in India." *American Sociological Review* 80 (6): 1123–1149. doi:10.1177/0003122415609051.
- Bryan, James. 1965. "Apprenticeships in Prostitution." *Social Problems* 12 (3): 287–297.
- Burt, Ronald S. 2005 [1992]. *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Campana, Paolo. 2016. "The Structure of Human Trafficking: Lifting the Bonnet on a Nigerian Transnational Network." *The British Journal of Criminology* 56 (1): 68–86. doi:10.1093/bjcr/azv027.
- Caouette, Therese, and Yuriko Saito. 1999. *To Japan and Back. Thai Women Recount Their Experiences*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration.
- Cheng, Sealing. 2010. *On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Cheong, Danson. 28/07/2015. "ICA Explains Why Some Viet Women Turned Away at Airport." *The Straits Times*.
- Chin, Christine. 2013. *Cosmopolitan Sex Workers: Women and Migration in a Global City*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chin, Ko-lin, and James O. Finckenauer. 2012. *Selling Sex Overseas Chinese Women and the Realities of Prostitution and Global Sex Trafficking*. New York: New York University Press.
- Chua, Kong Ho. 13/02/2005. "No More New Pubs, Massage Joints in Joo Chiat. Freeze on Licences After Complaints; Streetwalkers Vanish After Many Raids." *The Straits Times*.
- Duijn, Paul A. C., Victor Kashirin, and Peter M. A. Sloot. 2014. "The Relative Ineffectiveness of Criminal Network Disruption." *Scientific Reports* 4. doi:10.1038/srep04238.
- Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (6): 1360–1380. doi:10.1086/225469.

- Hoang, Lan Anh. 2015. "Vietnamese Migrant Networks in Taiwan: The Curse and Boon of Social Capital." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39 (4): 690–707. doi:10.1080/01419870.2015.1080381.
- Hoefinger, Heidi. 2013. *Sex, Love and Money in Cambodia. Professional Girlfriends and Transactional Relationships*. London: Routledge.
- Hubbard, Phil. 2004. "Cleansing the Metropolis: Sex Work and the Politics of Zero Tolerance." *Urban Studies* 41 (9): 1687–1702. doi:10.1080/0042098042000243101.
- Human Rights Watch. 2000. *Owed Justice: Thai Women Trafficked into Debt Bondage in Japan*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Ianni, Francis (with Reuss-Ianni, Elisabeth). 1972. *A Family Business: Kinship and Social Control in Organized Crime*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Joel, Wong Yang. 1996. "Brothels, Pimps and Prostitutes: The Administration of Criminal Justice vis-a-vis Prostitution." *Singapore Law Review* 17: 154–184.
- Khoo, Hedy. 26/06/2011. "Vietnamese Women Busted in the Buff." *The New Paper*.
- Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2008. "Thai Migrants in Singapore: State, Intimacy and Desire." *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 15 (6): 595–610. doi:10.1080/09663690802518495.
- Lainez, Nicolas. 2011. *A Foot in and a Foot Out. Sex Migration of Vietnamese Women to Singapore*. Ho Chi Minh City: Alliance Anti-Trafic.
- Law, Elizabeth. 18/013/2015. "Study Mama Jailed 12 Months for Running Vice Ring." *Asia One News*.
- Lindquist, Johan. 2015. "The Anthropology of Brokers and Brokerage." In *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Science*, edited by James Wright, 2nd ed., 870–874. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Lindquist, Johan, Biao Xiang, and Brenda S. A. Yeoh. 2012. "Opening the Black Box of Migration: Brokers, the Organization of Transnational Mobility and the Changing Political Economy in Asia." *Pacific Affairs* 85 (1): 1–7.
- Lyttleton, Chris. 2014. *Intimate Economies of Development: Mobility, Sexuality and Health in Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Mancuso, Marina. 2014. "Not all Madams Have a Central Role: Analysis of a Nigerian Sex Trafficking Network." *Trends in Organized Crime* 17 (1–2): 66–88. doi:10.1007/s12117-013-9199-z.
- Marcus, Anthony, Amber Horning, Ric Curtis, Jo Sanson, and Efram Thompson. 2014. "Conflict and Agency among Sex Workers and Pimps: A Closer Look at Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 653 (1): 225–246. doi:10.1177/0002716214521993.
- Missbach, Antje. 2015. "Making a 'Career' in People-Smuggling in Indonesia: Protracted Transit, Restricted Mobility and the Lack of Legal Work Rights." *Sojourn* 30 (2): 423–454. doi:10.1355/sj30-2d.
- Molland, Sverre. 2012a. "Safe Migration, Dilettante Brokers and the Appropriation of Legality: Lao-Thai 'Trafficking' in the Context of Regulating Labour Migration." *Pacific Affairs* 85 (1): 117–136.
- Molland, Sverre. 2012b. *The Perfect Business? Anti-Trafficking and the Sex Trade along the Mekong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Morselli, Carlo, and Isa Savoie-Gargiso. 2014. "Coercion, Control, and Cooperation in a Prostitution Ring." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 653 (1): 247–265. doi:10.1177/0002716214521995.
- Ong, Justin. 09/01/2017. "The 'Demand and Supply' Fuelling Singapore's Premium Foreign Sex Industry." *Channel News Asia*.
- Ong, Jin Hui. 1993. "Singapore." In *Prostitution: An International Handbook on Trends, Problems, and Policies*, edited by Nanette J. Davis, 243–272. Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press.
- Parreñas, Rachel S. 2011. *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Plambeck, Sine. 2017. "Sex, Deportation and Rescue: Economies of Migration among Nigerian Sex Workers." *Feminist Economics* 23 (3): 134–159. doi:10.1080/13545701.2016.1181272.

- Read, Kate. 2014. "Sex Work: Constructing 'Families' with Community of Practice Theory." *Community, Work & Family* 17 (1): 60–78. doi:10.1080/13668803.2013.855625.
- Salt, John, and Jeremy Stein. 1997. "Migration as a Business: The Case of Trafficking." *International Migration* 35 (4): 467–494. doi:10.1111/1468-2435.00023.
- Schuler, Sidney R., Hoang Tu Anh, Vu Song Ha, Tran Hung Minh, Bui Thi Thanh Mai, and Pham Vu Thien. 2006. "Constructions of Gender in Vietnam: In Pursuit of the 'Three Criteria.'" *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 8 (5): 383–394.
- Shaw, Brian J., and Ismail Rahil. 2006. "Ethnoscapes, Entertainment and 'Eritage in the Global City: Segmented Spaces in Singapore's Joo Chiat.'" *GeoJournal* 66 (3): 187–198.
- Sobieszczyk, Teresa. 2002. "Risky Business: Debt Bondage International Labour Migration from Northern Thailand." Paper present at the IUSSP Regional Population Conference on Southeast Asia's Population in a Changing Asian Context, Bangkok, Thailand, 10–12 June.
- Spiro, Emma, Ryan M. Acton, and Carter T. Butts. 2013. "Extended Structures of Mediation: Re-examining Brokerage in Dynamic Networks." *Social Networks* 35 (1): 130–143.
- Tambe, Ashwini. 2006. "Brothels as Families: Reflections on the History of Bombay's Kothas." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8 (2): 219–242. doi:10.1080/14616740600612855.
- Tan, Shin Binn, and Alisa Gill. 2014. *Containing Commercial Sex to Designated Red Light Areas: An Idea Past its Prime? Case Studies, Cities and Urban Policy*. Singapore: LKY School of Public Policy, NUS.
- Thuc, Minh. 30/06/2009. "Vietnamese Sex Workers Trapped in Extortion Racket." *Thanh Niên News*.
- Van Luong, Hy. 1984. "'Brother' and 'Uncle': An Analysis of Rules, Structural Contradictions, and Meaning in Vietnamese Kinship." *American Anthropologist* 86 (2): 290–315. doi:10.1525/aa.1984.86.2.02a00050.
- Vietnam News Agency. 26/07/2015. "ICA Urged to Facilitate Vietnamese Nationals to Enter Singapore." *VietNamNet Bridge*.
- Yea, Sallie. 2014. *Social Visits and Special Passes: Migrant Women Exploited in Singapore's Sex and Nightlife Entertainment Industry*. Singapore: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.
- Zhang, Sheldon X. 2008. *Chinese Human Smuggling Organizations: Families, Social Networks, and Cultural Imperatives*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Zhang, Sheldon X., Ko-lin Chin, and Jody Miller. 2007. "Women's Participation in Chinese Transnational Human Smuggling: A Gendered Market Perspective." *Criminology; An interdisciplinary Journal* 45 (3): 699–733. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.2007.00085.x.