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Title	Can the subaltern feel? An ethnography of migration, subalternity, and emotion
Type	Article
URL	https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/37425/
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2021.100786
Date	2021
Citation	Zani, Beatrice and Momesso, Lara (2021) Can the subaltern feel? An ethnography of migration, subalternity, and emotion. <i>Emotion Space and Society</i> , 39 (100786). ISSN 1755-4586
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It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2021.100786>

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Can the subaltern feel?

An Ethnography of Migration, Subalternity, and Emotion

Abstract

Drawing on biographical and migratory experiences collected from Chinese marriage-migrants in Taiwan, this paper investigates the link between migration, subalternity and emotion. We examine how emotions are socially, temporarily and situationally constructed by migrant women, positioned in a condition of vulnerability during migration. Conceptually, we advance that emotions can be turned into resources, practices and competences that sustain migrants' social, economic and cultural repositioning in the society of arrival. Through the identification of three empirically-rooted *states of emotions* – imaginative, implosive and mutual – we claim that, in a context of social contempt, familial exclusion and economic marginalization, the individual and collective performance of emotions by migrants contributes to 'undo' a condition of subalternity. *Such states* are purposely experimental and incomplete. They are as liable, temporary and mutable as migrant women's emotional experiences and practices. Yet, this paper proposes that they could serve as an empirical, methodological and analytical tool for future research on migration and emotion.

Keywords: Marriage-migration, *states* of emotion, subalternity, ethnography, China and Taiwan

Introduction

I was almost falling asleep on a little mattress near her two children, when Haizheng, a young Chinese migrant spouse living in Zhudong (Taiwan), shook my feet, suddenly asking, 'should I get divorced?'. On the same day, we'd had a conversation about her vulnerableness as a marriage migrant in Taiwan. 'I cannot sleep, come, come, let's have a drink in the kitchen so that we do not wake the children up', she said. Feeling sleepy, I stood up and followed her, ready to listen to her doubts, concerns and anxieties, knowing that this was going to be very emotional. Haizheng's experiences, her suffering and vulnerability as a Chinese migrant in Taiwan, were narrated through a dense kaleidoscope of emotions including unfulfillment, disillusionment, depression and misrecognition [Fieldwork notes, Hsinchu, 14 December 2016].

The title of this paper – 'Can the subaltern feel?' – may sound provocative. The verb 'to feel' perhaps seems more suited to a setting involving medical or psychological analysis. *Furthermore, we may be more familiar with narratives on the voice of the subaltern, as she speaks but she is not heard.* Indeed,

when Spivak (2010) questioned if the 'subaltern can speak' (2010), she focused on the ways their voices are silenced within hegemonic epistemic spaces.

Strangely, subaltern actors' feelings and emotional states, produced in the context of a colonisation of their regions, languages, religions, cultures, memories, all the way down to their epistemic spaces, have remained relatively uncovered in the social sciences. This is striking, considering the fact that pain, suffering, grief, passion are inherent features of a condition of subalternity. Subaltern studies scholars, so much focused in securing "a better future for subaltern peoples, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalise them, documenting their past" (Ludden 2002: 20), against the suffering produced by hegemonic patterns of colonial modernity, seem to have been too concentrated interpreting suffering and pain through the subaltern's words, much less through her emotional and affective states.

When asking if the subaltern 'can feel', we integrate the 'affective turn' (Ticinato Clough and Halley 2007) in the analysis. We recognise the 'capacity for sentiments' in human beings' humanity (Barreto 2013: 112) and the role of non-rational, discrete, inchoate, interior states in shaping the experiences of marginalised groups in society. With the aim to go beyond a mere appreciation of the emotional and affective states related to subalternity, in this paper we suggest that those considered as vulnerable can performatively transform feelings and emotions into resources which help them transcend a condition of subalternity that characterises inherent to their experiences of migration.

In this article, we intend to analyse the production and the agential performance of emotions (Tappolet 2016) by Chinese migrant women who are positioned in a condition of social, economic and cultural subalternity in Taiwan. Clearly, this choice of topic is not anodyne. Not only is the process of migration a powerful catalyser of change in a person's emotional life (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015), but it also offers opportunities to observe how the social inequality and the economic hierarchies are entangled with emotions and feelings of suffering, anxiety, distress, and feelings of suffering, of anxiety, of distress which affect the lived experiences of migrants (Christou 2011). Chinese migrant women's feelings are produced in the frame of Within unequalitarian social, economic and familiar regimes in Taiwan, Chinese migrant women where these experience social contempt, cultural exclusion and economic marginalisation in Taiwan. The subaltern passions and emotions produced by this condition have the potential to become resource to challenge the status quo. However, as stated by Didier Fassin (2005) migrants are not often themselves the narrators of such experiences, which are highly emotional, hence inchoate and indefinite (Zembylas 2016).

Consequently, contributing to the emerging field of emotions and migration in social sciences, the study of emotions may offer an important corrective to the vision of the migrant as a 'vulnerable' actor. We focus on how when feelings are turned into experienced and expressed emotions during migration, they can also become resources to transgress and the transform a condition of vulnerability. The 'weak' are often entrenched in a condition of subalternity during the migratory process (Scott 1987).

Therefore, in putting together the notions of subalternity and emotion, this paper aims to investigate how the production and performance of sentiments, feelings and affections contribute to contest and 'undo' (Butler, 2004) this condition of subalternity experienced during migration. Our case study suggests that migrants do not have the privilege to speak in the hegemonic spaces (Gajjala 2013) they are positioned in, represented by the Taiwanese society, family, or labour market. Nonetheless, they can however produce feelings and emotions to contest such inequalities and hierarchies. This point foregrounds the necessity to eradicate emotions from the private sphere of individual experiences or intimacy, and to project them into the arena of interactions and socializations. Importantly, emotions emerge throughout situations. Individually and collectively constructed, they co-constitute social relations (Smith et al. 2016).

To investigate the link between emotion, migration and subalternity, we build on the biographical and migratory experiences of Chinese migrant women in Taiwan and sketch a typology draw a 'cartography of emotions and affections in the context of subalternity. The analysis of the emotional states 'frames and settings' (Goffman 1958) emerging from Chinese migrant women's experiences and practices can be categorized in specific figures of emotions emotional states. Empirically rooted in the situations we observed on field sites, the typology figures we identify sketch has a cognitive, heuristic, and practical aim (Martuccelli 2004: 473). Yet, they are far from being complete. Given the fact that emotional states identified emerge in situ and are situated in the social worlds where they are produced, exhaustiveness cannot be our objective. On the contrary, our understanding of emotional situations, practices and experiences aims to shed new light on both the constructed, agential and performative role of emotions (Illouz 2006; Tappolet 2016) and affections, especially when individuals are in a position of subalternity. Through individuals' biographies, marriage-migration paths, social and familial experiences of subalternity and of resistance, we will show how emotions and affections can simultaneously be resources, practices and competences for Chinese migrant women who face social exclusion and disqualification in Taiwan.

In light of these reflections, in this paper, we explore the biographical experiences of those women who produce and perform emotions simultaneously as cognitive and practical resources. Cognitive resources refer to when emotions are turned into a means of establishing a connection, and a lens to understand the worlds inhabited by the actors, whereas practical resources refer to the daily emotional practices produced by women to cope with, or even 'undo' (Butler 2004) a condition of subalternity. Thereby, the research question orienting our rationale is the following: How do emotions, affections and feelings interplay within women's biographical and migratory experiences? How do they contribute to coping with a condition of political, social, economic, and familial subalternity?

Before approaching the core of our argument, it is important to situate and contextualize our case study. Exploring the co-constitutive connection between emotion, migration and subalternity, we will first elucidate how Chinese migrant women's biographical and mobility paths are constructed by coping with a condition of social and familial exclusion as well as economic marginalization in Taiwan. This will

Commented [Lara Mome1]: Non sono convinta.... ce l'hanno il privilegio di parlare (proteste nel public space; conversation nel private space), e questo e' connesso a tante cose (periodo storico in cui siamo = migrants sono un positive asset in Taiwan; fatto che possono parlare in cinese percio' fanno sentire la loro voce)....ma rimangono subaltern in Taiwanese society because of their gender and national identity and the reason they entered in taiwan

Dimmi cosa pensi di questo:
Our study suggests that Chinese migrant women, despite their subaltern position within Taiwanese society, labour market, political discourse, have managed to make their voice heard in Taiwan. However this has not occurred without a significant emotional endeavor on their side. By disclosing this emotional endeavor, our aim is to shed light on how emotions are entangled with historical, cultural, social and political norms and convention (Athanasίου, Hantzaroula and Yannakopoulos, 2008).

Athanasίου, A., P. Hantzaroula & K. Yannakopoulos. 2008. „Towards a new epistemology: The “affective turn””, *Historein*, 8: 5-16.

then help us to examine how such experiences of mobility are constructed from and, in turn, how they sustain the production of heterogeneous repertoires of emotions.

Can the subaltern feel?

Marriage migration is a global phenomenon that refers to combinations of marriage and mobility at a transnational level. Especially in East Asia, this mobility has mainly involved women who move from economically less developed countries to wealthier countries (Constable 2005: 4). China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia have become the main sending countries of females who decide to marry abroad. Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea have been the main receivers of these migrants (Jones 2012; Jones and Shen 2008; Tseng 2008). The undeniable gender disparity has been explained mainly as a consequence of the permanence of patriarchal patterns, which see marriage as a way to perpetuate the ancestral line of the family, and which push women both into moving into the marital home and into marrying 'up'—(Constable 2005: 20; Lu 2008). In East Asian cross-border marriages, very often, the hypergamic principle is met by the husband's nationality, rather than his economic and social status. This means that many marriage migrants, regardless their social and economic level in their country of origin, end up marrying with lower class, uneducated men, yet whose citizenship to a wealthier country operates as a major desirable factor in shaping marriage choices. Such weight on material considerations, along with the fact that many cross-border marriages are mediated by agents, feed into a negative perception of the presence of marriage migrants in many Asian societies. Taiwan is not an exception: Broader factors such as shrinking marriage rates, increasing divorce rates, and fewer women making the decision to marry in developed Asian societies, have also contributed to the development of this phenomenon, especially amongst certain groups. These groups, in wealthier countries, include lower-class men who found themselves in a disadvantaged position when it was time to search for a wife. In poorer countries, they include women who were willing to marry men from abroad as a means of escaping poverty and moving up through spatial hierarchies to richer areas (Tseng 2010: 33–34).

Legal restrictions have been particularly tight for Chinese marriage migrants. In this case, the massive arrival of migrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan's main antagonist and political enemy, has raised concerns about national sovereignty and security. Due to the assumption that this group of migrants can have an impact on the future of Taiwan as a sovereign nation, their access to citizenship rights has been hampered in many ways in order to prolong the time needed to acquire the ultimate right to cast their vote (Friedman 2010; Hsia 2008).

The literature acknowledges the subaltern position of marriage migrants from the PRC in Taiwanese differential biopolitical treatment of migrant population (Friedman 2010a; Friedman 2010b; Friedman 2012): not only it denounces the unfairness of this differential treatment, but it also explores the actions that cross-Strait marriage migrants have put forward in response to such treatment (Hsia 2008; Momesso and Cheng 2017; Momesso 2020). Throughout these accounts we receive a picture of a group that managed to carve their space in Taiwanese public debate and, through individual and collective

actions, more or less successfully negotiated with oppressive and discriminative social and political structures. Yet, the literature has not engaged with the emotional endeavour that this condition has generated amongst migrants.

How do such social hierarchies, gender disqualifications and economic and political inequalities impact on women's production of feelings and emotions? To what extent do feelings and emotions contribute to the definition, or lack thereof, of contesting strategies to cope with increased vulnerability? Curiously, the literature does not explore feelings and emotions in the context of marriage migration in general, and very little has been said with regard to the specificity of marriage migration in Taiwan (a few exceptions are Momesso 2016 ; Zani 2018). Yet, this is a mobility constructed through and, in turn, producing multiple practices of location, dislocation and relocation, alongside intimacies and marital experiences, imbued with multiple repertoires of emotions and affections. This paper aims to fill this gap in the literature. Rather than adopting an institutional, socio-political approach, this paper will guide us through 'powerful and powerless' moments (Marcus 1986: 79) when emotions become an important element to understand the construction of experiences and practices by migrant women. As Grossberg (2010) argues, everyday life, 'is not simply the material relationship; it is a structure of feelings' (2010: 313). By introducing emotions into the analysis of Chinese women's mobilities, we put forward further empirical research on marriage migration studies in Taiwan. In the meantime, this paper also contributes to theoretical debates on emotion and migration, by looking at the mutual relationship between emotions and subalternity during migratory processes.

Theoretical framework and some epistemological considerations

Despite a long-term paucity of studies on emotions in social sciences, and specifically in migration studies, a growing body research is attempting to fill in this gap by looking at the links between emotion and migration (Svasek 2014; Boccagni and Baldassar 2015; Alinejad and Ponzanesi 2020; Zani 2020). Emotions cross, inform and produce the substance of individuals' social and lived lives (Lutz and Abu-lughod 1990; Illouz 2007), which include migratory and mobility processes (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015). However, the connection between migration and emotion is not clear-cut and is subject to an ongoing debate. This concurrently derives from the heterogeneity of the empirically based research on the topic but also from the fluid and rather contingent dimensions of emotions themselves. In this respect, a conceptualization of the spatiality and temporality of emotions (Bondi 2005 ~~et al. 2007~~) may be helpful to help us examine how these are socially (Illouz 2006) and culturally (Appadurai 1986) produced within specific situations, and why they are subjected to such variability (Madianou and Miller 2011). There is no doubt that migrant women's biographies and experiences are sustained by and, in turn, generate emotions. Yet, emotions are not universal. As suggested by Liz Bondi (2005), they are generated from the very experiences of the social, economic and familiar spaces women are poisoned in during the different temporalities of their migration and migratory practices. Emotions are fluid and vary according the situations, the moments and the intersubjective frames and relationships they are constructed in (Cronin 2014).

Commented [Lara Mome2]: Positioned?

Yet, they also reflect collective conditions when we look at them in the complexities, reconfigurations and rearticulations of power, history and politics (Athanasίου, Hantzaroula and Yannakopoulos, 2008).

Feelings, sentiments and affections cannot be omitted from the analysis, but mapping emotions is a delicate task. We adopted a pragmatist approach (Quéré 1997) when scrutinizing the emotional experiences engendered by Chinese women's migratory and marital paths in Taiwan. This means to simultaneously situate emotions within the women's social, familial and gender regimes, and to produce an analysis of their migratory and marital experiences through their narration. Along these lines, we consider that individual agency, *i.e.* a capacity for action, interplays with the structural constraints represented by these normative regimes.

Concurrently, such capacity for action is sustained by, and in turn, supports the production of heterogeneous repertoires of positive and negative emotions. Feelings such as love, hate, disgust, joy or sadness do not, however, only represent what an individual feels within a precise spatial and temporal situation. These also reflect patterns of inclusion and exclusion, subalternity and oppression, and how the actors react to these. In Ahmed's (2004) words, emotions are a form of cultural politics that shape the world and the individual's position within society. Therefore, this paper's goal is twofold. Firstly, we want to demonstrate how emotions are generated from and, in turn, sustain the making of women's biographical and mobility paths, as well as their interactions and social experiences in Taiwan. At the same time we aim to illustrate how emotions, for their producers, can be a resource for transforming subaltern social, familial and economic positionings.

In this scenario, feelings and emotions can become an object of study: they can be observed and narrated through ethnography. This methodological and epistemological stance necessitates precaution. Aware of the risk of 'methodological nationalism' (Glick Schiller et al. 1994) and of essentialism, we have tried to avoid, or, at least, limit arbitrary taxonomies and essentialist representations, through a pragmatist approach anchored in the situations observed (Boltanski 2004). Therefore, ~~drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice (1976)~~, our ethnography has focused on the situated and situational ways through and by which emotions are re-modelled, and re-performed by the actors in situ. Notwithstanding, this brings about a problem of translatability, considered here as the shift from the language of emotions spoken in the field to a written ethnographic reflection. If this cannot be reduced to a 'cold' written narration (Lutz and Abu-lughod 1990), how do we translate and give evidence of emotional discourses and of discourses on emotions (Abu-Lughod 1990)?

By narrating women's everyday life experiences of marriage and migration, involving the related emotions that these narratives included and elicited, we adopted what Abu-Lughod (1990) has called a 'tactical humanism' in our writing. This means that the ethnographer who writes cannot do anything other than 'leave traces of herself in the writing, without being too intrusive' (1990: 23). We were affected (Favret-saada 2009) by the experiences of the women we draw on in this paper, sustained by different repertoires of positive and negative emotions. Their sadness and enthusiasm, their suffering and joy, their frustration, anger, ambition and attachment were often verbally expressed and physically

experienced in our field sites. For this reason, we need to stress here that we did not preclude a subjective positioning within the situations we studied. To some extent, we were part of the emotional performances we were witnessing. Our co-presence with women produced biases we are aware of: we cannot pretend that certain dialogues, sentences, discussions and actions were not directed specifically at us. We were part of the **emotional states** 'settings and frames' (Goffman 1958) of the emotional situation produced and performed in the field.

Methodology and field sites

Drawing from ~~two separate projects with marriage migrants in Taiwan~~ migration (-one carried out between 2008 and 2015 and ~~the other second~~ between 2016 and 2018), data was collected during various fieldwork ~~campaigns~~ in different places in Taiwan, including major cities such as Taipei, Kaohsiung and Taichung, and rural areas such as Hualien, Hsinchu, Zhudong and Hukou, ~~during the period 2008-2018~~. Exploring emotions requires to access qualitative data useful to provide an in-depth and thick picture of social phenomena. Hence, our main methods included in-depth interviews and life stories (Ossman 2013) and immersion in our respondents' social setting through participant observation (Maddison 2007: 398; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Through multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), we followed migrant women during their collective activities and, observing them in their daily life tasks and work experiences, social gatherings, and reunions with family and friends. The main spheres of interaction included their homes, work places (restaurants, markets, beauty centers, street shops, offices), civil society organizations established by and for marriage migrants, and the street. In both projects, a variety of strategies to reach migrant women and gain their trust were used, including attending professional make-up classes, dance courses, language courses promoted by the Taiwanese government, teaching free English classes to migrant women, and volunteering in local associations helping migrants. The contacts initially made through these informal activities revealed crucial in establishing our presence within the community of migrants and reaching other informants.

QUEST A PARTE LA TOGLEIREI TUTTA PERCHE" L'ho inserita sopra: together with their intersubjective interactions, emotional experiences, and collective practices to take a place in the society of arrival, and to contest the situations of vulnerability they faced. Separately, along the two projects, we attended professionalising make-up classes promoted by the Taiwanese government, dance courses, we taught free English classes to migrant women, or volunteered in local associations which assist migrants. This enabled to identify several informants and use them as a bridge to reach others.

In these multiple spaces, both of us have conducted ethnographic work and integrated it with in shops, offices), as well as local civic organizations which advocate for marriage migrants and offer them various kind of services and support.

Commented [Lara Mome3]: Questo nn ha molto senso messo qui, lo cancellerei

In total, we did in-depth interviews with more than 200 Chinese female marriage migrants aged between 18 and 72 and living in Taiwan, belonging to different social classes, education backgrounds and areas of origin in China (Anhui, Sichuan, Henan, Shandong, Guaxi, Heilongjiang, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian provinces). For this paper, we have first developed a diachronic crossed analysis of the similarities and differences within the social, professional, and familiar situations experienced by women, as well as their biographical and migratory paths. Later, we have sketched the common elements within the emotional experiences and practices produced and performed by women to identify the emotional states they commonly experience as Chinese marriage migrants in Taiwan.

~~Figures of emotions~~ Emotional states

Let us look back at the snapshot we used in our initial rationale. When Haizheng woke up in the night and suggested that we have a drink and discuss her divorce, she expressed strong sentiments of disillusionment, unfulfillment and depression. She manifested dissatisfaction towards her current life and employment, as well as a desire to divorce and to leave Taiwan. Surprisingly, while speaking out, her anger, frustration and sadness, such repertoires of negative emotions, faltered. She looked perplexed. She asked for our opinion, even though she seemed not to care much about the reply. The impression she gave was that she needed to externalize her feelings in order to better understand how to act. She said that she was a mother and that she had responsibilities. She explained that she was not ready to give up her life in Taiwan, especially because marriage-migration had been her individual choice. In China, she had to fight against her family's opposition to her marriage migration to Taiwan and she was thus proud of her determination. After a long chat, Haizheng seemed to change her mind. Ostensibly, she still felt melancholic and distressed, yet she seemed less disconsolate. The negative emotions produced at the beginning were progressively transformed into new positive feelings of determination and aspiration.

Doubtlessly, emotions can be positive and negative. They can be produced through heterogeneous and contradictory repertoires of social and moral resources. Emotions can generate intimacies, affections and sentiments of comfort and consolation, or fear and insecurity, both by the actors and among the actors. Emotions, feelings and affections can thus sustain the production of action (Lutz and Abu-lughod 1990), but they can also inhibit it, and limit the potential for biographical and social transformation. In a context characterized by multi-situated forms of vulnerability, emotions can bring about processes of subjectivation and cause intersubjective reactions. Yet, they can also produce individual withdrawal and lead to paralysis of action.

In the following sections, we will provide evidence of the ways in which marital and migratory experiences, like Haizheng's, are constructed through repertoires of positive and negative emotions. We will assume that Chinese women in Taiwan cross a plurality of social, familial and professional

inegalitarian and hierarchical orders. Our aim is to analyse how emotions, as resources, competences and practices are produced and performed to cope with these orders and to lessen the position of subalternity experienced by women. To illustrate how emotions sustain experiences and how experiences are constructed through emotions, we have identified three *states of emotions*: *imaginative, implosive and mutual* emotions. While mapping out these *states*, what must be kept in mind is that they are not immutable and universalistic ideal types. On the contrary, they correspond to situations, moments and practices empirically observed in situ (Martuccelli 2004). Empirically rooted in *in situ* observations and lived narratives, these *states* demonstrate the contingency, temporality and variability of emotional situations and performances.

Imaginative emotions

Imagination, aspiration and projection (Appadurai 1999) as resources and practices contribute to orient and shape migratory paths and mobility patterns. Imagination means 'the capacity to make present what is absent' (Feagin and Maynard 1997: 41) and may become a socially and emotionally situated and constructed competence. Imagination has a creative capacity that not only arouses emotions but also engenders them. From China to Taiwan, women's mobility paths correspond to different forms of translation of their imagination and aspiration. Movements within China have been made relatively easy since the opening of China to neoliberal economics. An increasing number of people have been moving from rural to urban areas within and across provinces. The capacity to aspire (Appadurai 1999) and the desire to access a modern, independent and autonomous self, contribute to women's rural-to-urban displacements in China, and to marriage-migration from China to Taiwan as a first or second step in the migration process. In this regard, globalisation, modernity and the social and economic transformation of Chinese society and labour market, which have all occurred during the last thirty years (Li 2013), are significant in expanding the frontiers of Chinese women's imagination. Haizheng's two-step experience of migration reveals this accumulation of desires. From rural Guanxi province, she was thirty-four years old when interviewed. Coming from a rural village, and being the eldest daughter, her family was not willing to invest time and money in her education. At the age of fourteen, she left her home-village and migrated to Guangdong province to sell her labour within the urban industrial apparatus. Her biographical and professional path in China was constructed through pluri-migrations, mainly in different cities of Guangdong province, where she worked in several local factories. Despite low salaries and poor working conditions, she enjoyed city life and was not ready to give it up. With her colleagues, she used her salary to go shopping, or dancing in the city's nightclubs, during her free time. Yet, as a low-qualified rural migrant, she experienced social and economic disqualification in the urban space. She could not 'improve herself', to quote her own words, or 'develop upward social mobility' because, as a rural migrant worker in a Chinese city, her rights were restricted (Li 2013). She saw many of her female co-villagers working for years in the factory without any opportunity for upward social mobility. Moreover, like other rural women, she was supposed to move back to the countryside to get married, and give up the modern and metropolitan lifestyle she wanted. Sad and worried, she explained more than once that she had no education, no rights and no money. She had few

chances of settling down in Dongguan, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, or elsewhere [Interviewed on 16 December 2016, Zhudong].

Oscillating between subjectivation, with her desire to become a modern and autonomous self in China, and subjection, with a lack of control of her life as a migrant in a Chinese city, Haizheng's aspirations constitute the pivot around which her projects of upward social mobility are constructed. These could, for instance, imply re-migration. In this scenario, the end of movement restrictions from China and Taiwan provided her with novel resources and opportunities to re-migrate and to imagine alternative biographical paths. The construction of Taiwan as an 'imagined scape' (Appadurai 1999) for many Chinese women flowed from the production of an imagery based on emotions. The island was inaccessible for most Chinese people during the Cold-War era. Despite a gradual liberalization of cross-strait exchanges since the late 1980s, movements of people, ideas, goods, information have occurred mainly from Taiwan to China, and much less in the opposite direction. This has created space for imagination, especially for Chinese citizens who have less freedom of movement across the Taiwan Strait. Images of a free and economically developed Taiwan have filled the imagination of Chinese citizens, who, in some cases, used marriage as a channel to access the forbidden island.

Like Haizheng, several women we interviewed explained that before marriage-migration, they considered Taiwan to be a place that would allow upward social and economic mobility. There, they could fulfil their dream to marry and create a family, to obtain a modern, urban status unachievable in China or even to escape the stigma of their personal and family life, related to poverty or previous divorce. From this perspective, Mi Xian, fifty-five years old, Sichuan native, previously divorced in China, explained: 'When I met my future husband, I forgot about my past. I felt happy. I wanted to forget my previous husband and the painful divorce experience I went through. I felt free to reconstruct my life there. I felt lucky to be given the opportunity to rebuild a family. After I divorced, I was depressed. People looked down on me. People look down on divorced women in my village' [Interviewed on 26 January 2017, Taipei].

Differently from Mi Xian, Xiao Xue, twenty-eight years old, had never got married before. When from her rural home in Henan she migrated to Guangdong province, she met her future husband in a Taiwanese factory, in the city of Dongguan where she was working. From Henan's countryside to Guangdong province, she experienced the frustration of an exhausting industrial labour regime, of poor salaries and of disqualification inside the factories where she was employed. Re-migrating to Taiwan opened new unexpected possibilities for her: a migratory and biographical turning point (Abott 2001) which, she imagined, would enable her to enter a new biographical stage and would contribute to social and professional transformation.

In other cases, Taiwan was pictured as the place where women could fulfil their long-chased dream of creating a family with the man they loved. This is the case of Minyi. A young and ambitious administrative assistant in a company in Chengdu, Minyi had met a young man from Taiwan when she was in her late twenties. He was young and good-looking, and he had a good job. Even her mother liked

him a lot. When he asked her to marry him, Minyi could not hide her happiness. Then he moved back to Taiwan because his father was ill. The two of them would meet in Shenzhen every now and then, but one day the man abruptly changed his mind and broke up with Minyi during a telephone call in which he explained that he no longer wanted to start a family with her. Minyi was extremely disappointed: 'I had already planned everything, I was very sad! I wasted so many years with him, and now it was all gone!' [interviewed in Taipei, 28 March 2011]. Disheartened, and too old to be competitive in the local marriage market, she opted for the first man who came along who she felt was good enough to restore the dignity she had lost during her previous experience. She met him in an online chat room. With no means to verify whether what he said was true – because, as a mainlanders, she could not freely go to Taiwan – she decided to trust him. The first time he visited her in China, she immediately understood that he had lied to her. He had deceived her in several respects with regard to his financial situation, lifestyle and occupation. Yet she could not bear the emotional pressure of confronting failure for a second time, or, above all, of facing her family, friends and colleagues, who all expected her to marry soon. Minyi was pressed by social pressures and legal constrictions that produce unequal power relations between Taiwanese and Chinese citizens. These pressures required her to make apparently incomprehensible life choices. Minyi accepted her destiny and created a family with this man. Visibly, in Minyi's story, imagination as an emotional resource contributed to the shaping and orienting of her marital experiences and to the strengthening of the foundations of familial projects. In this regard, imagination, as a resource for projecting a different social and family status, intersected with Minyi's experience of disqualification and misrecognition. It also became part of her solution, one that was deeply regretted once she managed to achieve her objective to marry and move to Taiwan.

Cross-strait migration is constructed through emotions such as enthusiasm and ambition, which generate novel expectations. Nevertheless, like Haizheng, Xiao Xue and Mi Xian, as soon as Minyi arrived in Taiwan, she immediately realized that the order of things did not correspond to the imaginaries she had previously constructed: Taiwan's social world seemed to be very different from what these women had expected. Unhappiness, frustration, loneliness, distance and humiliation are some of the feelings that women experienced upon their arrival, as narrated to us while they described their processes of settlement. On this base, we draw the figure of implosion.

Emotions of implosion

If imagination can be a resource for making present what is absent, this needs to be projected inside the social worlds where it is constructed. Disillusioned, Chinese migrant women had to reframe their previously constructed 'imaginary scape' of Taiwan. When dismantling a positively constructed representation, negative repertoires of emotions are involved, such as unfulfillment and frustration. Also, and crucially, deconstructing such representations generates novel feelings of sadness and dissatisfaction, bringing about what we define as implosion.

Let us move back to Haizheng's experience. She explained that as soon as she got out of the flight in Taoyuan Airport, she felt astonished, melancholic and sad: 'I had thought Taiwan was heaven, but as

soon as I arrived I realized it was earth, full of sand and roots, earth even deeper than the factory where I worked in Donguan', she explained [Interviewed on December 16 2016, Zhudong]. Like many other women, she realised that she was alone in an unfamiliar world. After spending six months at the mercy of her mother-in-law, taking care of the children and doing the housework, she realized that she was 'going mad', as she argued. She felt imprisoned, lonely and homesick. She did not know who to talk with; she had no friends. Looking for work, she experienced social contempt and marginalization: 'We are Chinese. We can only look for small, informal jobs in factories. They [the Taiwanese] do not want us. Some factories refuse even to employ us. They ask for Taiwanese ID'. After several months of searching, she was employed in a local factory with an illegal contract, working 12 hours per day, and earning around NT\$ 30,000 per month. She found the job even harder than in China and when she came back home in the evening, exhausted, she still had to provide her reproductive, unpaid labour within the familial sphere. She cooked for her mother-in-law and father-in-law, she cleaned, washed the dishes, did the laundry and was a good, devoted wife towards her husband at night. Such a condition was shared by many other fellow migrants, as Taiwanese society expected them to carry out their caring duties rather than to work towards their own personal and professional goals.

Implosion is therefore gradual. It emerges through a process of transformation where previous repertoires of positive emotions, such as joy and aspiration, turn into repertoires of negative emotions, such as dissatisfaction towards the present. These bring about new experiences of dissatisfaction, sustained by feelings of sadness, melancholy and nostalgia. The gap between what Haizheng expected and the reality she experienced manifested itself becomes visible through the ordeals of misrecognition and social contempt she had to cope with upon her arrival. What catches the eye is that this transformation of the women's repertoires of emotions, from positive to negative, can become 'fuel for action' (Lutz and Abu-lughod 1990). In this sense, Haizheng's frustration and dissatisfaction brought about the conditions that would lead to a reaction:

I could not stand that life anymore; I cannot stand my life anymore even now. I did not come to Taiwan to become a slave; I wanted to improve myself but I got no chance. I feel so frustrated and tired (she cries); I do not know what to do. I am still young: maybe I should consider having a better life. I still want a better life! That's why I am trying my best to improve, and I will succeed, but I need to abandon my husband's house to be freer'. [17 March 2017, Hsinchu].

Regardless of their social status, age, level of education or migratory and professional experiences, most of these women's narratives are characterized by sense of belonging to their society of origin: China. This feeling of belonging grows according to the rhythm and the intensity of the condition of exclusion in Taiwan. Curiously, but not surprisingly, despite the multiple social hierarchies and situations of economic inequality which characterized their previous positioning in China, most of women's experiences were sustained by feelings of anchorage, security, stability, and attachment to their home country, where their family, relatives, friends and social networks resided. Yet, as soon as they switched the narrative to their experiences in Taiwan, such repertoires of positive emotions seemed to fade

away. Their expectations quickly fell away when they began to feel unwelcome in Taiwan, regardless of their efforts to settle down, find a job and integrate. From feeling like someone in China, they turned into an invisible no-one (Momesso 2016), with social prejudices and moral contempt sustained by the political standoff between Taiwan and China, the latter pictured as a national enemy.

These experiences turned emotions from positive to negative. The original enthusiasm, determination, and fervour expressed at the moment of leaving China to go to Taiwan were transformed into negative feelings of depression, sadness, abandonment and rejection. Such feelings are not anodyne, and their transit deserves attention. The positioning of women in a condition of social and cultural subalternity is not only socially but also emotionally constructed. Women's words suggest how arrival and settlement are accompanied by, but also generate negative emotions of dissatisfaction, unfulfillment, sadness, regret, disillusionment and depression. Yet, a realization that they were subjected to injustice also pushed many women to develop novel strategies to transform their social and moral positioning. If the above-mentioned cases suggest that emotions can sustain action, a logic puzzle emerges. How is action constructed? To what extent can it bring about processes of transformation?

Qianmin's experience could offer some explanation. Exhausted by the overwhelming presence of her mother-in-law in her life, she thought on many occasions of giving up and divorcing her husband. Instead, she managed to find a way through it, by engaging with her husband. As she recollected, 'When I could not bear the situation anymore, I decided to speak to my husband. I asked him, after so many years of marriage, who he regarded as his family, me and his son or his mother? After that discussion, things started to change for the better' (Interviewed on 16 March 2011). Qianmin eventually was able to break her husband's exclusive relationship with his mother and was able to create an intimate alliance with him, which allowed her to resist her mother-in-law's authority and control. As Momesso (2015a) noticed, rather than trying to ensure continuity and authority within the family by having children, a practice that is recognised as the 'uterine family' in anthropological literature (Wolf 1972), our informants often identified the solution to the problem in the relationship with their spouse. By building up intimacy and trust with their spouses, they could establish new alliances and change the broader family order. As Qianmin recollected these events, despite the fact that they belonged to her past, her emotions emerged again and she cried for a long time, feeling angry for the abuses she endured, yet relieved at being able to regain control in her life.

By turns, as shown, Haizheng's negative emotions of depression, abandonment and discouragement went through processes of transition and, temporarily, were re-transformed into positive sentiments of tenacity and self-assurance. Curiously, we observed that this happened during our interaction, when Qianmin or Haizheng shared their feelings with us during the production of intersubjective discourses.

Thereby, what may require attention is how such processes of transformation did not occur only at an individual level, but also at a collective one. The intersubjective production of novel repertoires of both positive and negative emotions among women can have some impact on is not without any impact on the practices of opposition to an order considered as unfair (Zani 2018). As Liliang, a Chinese migrant

interviewed, stated: 'All Chinese spouses who come to Taiwan have some kind of sorrow in their heart' (Liliang, 3 March 2011, Taipei).

Mutual emotions

Although Liliang says that 'all' Chinese marriage migrants feel this sorrow and suffer this social contempt, deeper scrutiny reveals something more. In some cases, individual emotions can be collectively shared. The shift from the individual to collective levels of emotional discourse brings about new intersubjective practices of mutuality and reciprocal support which, to some extent, represent temporarily and in situ responses to contest, and even 'undo' (Butler 2004) the commonly experienced situations of subalternity. condition of subalternity. The following ethnographic snapshot offers an idea of the performative dimension of emotions in coping with situations of inequality and injustice.

In December 2016, sitting around the table of a Sichuanese restaurant, Haizheng helped the owner of the restaurant to cut garlic and green beans. Liyun, thirty-six years old, Sichuanese native, and Feifei, thirty-two years old, Hunan native also worked as waitresses there. These three women met in Zhudong, where they currently still live and work. As simple as it seems, they all met in a shop where Feifei was working, mutually recognising their common Chinese origin from their accent, which made their social identity visible. Soon, they became friends. Liyun and Feifei are both divorced. They decided to cooperate to develop a low-legitimized economic activity to earn money for their children and families still living in China. Liyun said: 'Thanks again for your help, Haizheng. Many people are coming for dinner tonight, and there is still so much food to cook'. Then, she looked at me and added: 'They are my family. Haizheng sometimes comes here for free. She brings food to me and helps me to cook and to clean'. Haizheng interrupted and answered: 'You do not need to say this. We are friends; we are sisters. I help you because I also feel comfortable here [...]. Look, I feel at home sitting here. I feel more at home here than at in my lodgings with my husband. Here, I do what I wish. If I am hungry, I eat. If I want to smoke, I smoke. When I cannot stand my life anymore, when I am sick of my husband and of my children, I come here and have a talk with them. They do understand me. As soon as we start talking, I feel better'.

Individually produced, Haizheng, Liyun or Feifei's emotions of implosion exceed the sphere of an individual performance. When women gather together, cook, talk or share time together, implosion can turn into mutuality to lessen, to a certain degree, the repertoires of negative feelings of anxiety, stress or regret. Two points require attention. First, the intersubjective nature of emotions (Crossley 1998) that becomes visible through the making of bonds of closeness (Bondi 2005) and friendship relationships (Cronin 2014). And secondly, the relational connection of such affectional ties to socio-spatial contexts (Cronin 2014). Far from her lodgings where she feels uncomfortable and surveilled by her husband, within the place of the restaurant Haizheng's emotional state metamorphoses. Not only we can observe a transformation of the emotions she produces and shares with the other Chinese women, but we also need to look at how these challenge the perception of her status and of the vulnerable condition she

experiences. New positive sentiments of ambition, satisfaction, but also of attachment and belonging are collectively negotiated within the affectional spaces of women's discourses. And these sustain the production of novel practices of mutual help or reciprocity, as shown in Haizheng's narration.

Negative emotions of dissatisfaction, disillusionment, anger or frustration which had been individually produced are not only collectively appropriated, but also transformed. These women generate mutuality and reciprocity, which are added to new affection and a dynamic sense of attachment to other women, what she calls 'sisters' (*jiemei* 姐妹). The 'all' mentioned by Liliang here takes the shape of a sense of belonging which is simultaneously socially and emotionally constructed through interactions. As a way to minimize her personal sorrow and, in the meantime, to intensify it by turning it into a collective sentiment, Liliang made an important point clear. Chinese marriage migrants' biographical and migratory paths in Taiwan are individually but also collectively constructed, oscillating between ambivalent and transformative repertoires of positive and negative emotions. From the individual level of emotional experiences, when social resources are combined with affection for their peers, emotions undergo processes of collectivization, which are synchronously produced from and supporting novel interactions among women, as well as practices of reciprocity, of solidarity and of mutual help.

A few days after the above-described situation, Haizheng and one of us spent the evening with Liyue at her lodgings, cooking traditional Sichuanese hotpot, drinking wine and eating dinner together. That evening, Liyue cried. She was exhausted by the pressures of life and needed a good talk with her friend, who she addressed as a 'sister', who could console and support her. 'We all came here from mainland China and faced the same problems. We are all Chinese women who married Taiwanese men and we need to support each other like a family. We have to help each other because we come from a faraway place and have gone through the same difficulties. These sisters are my new family here'.

Implosion brings about novel duties and senses of belonging among women who collectively perform emotions and affections. Women address each other in terms of 'sisters' (*jiemei*) and gather together in an 'emotional community' (Roseweird 2006), composed of novel ties of reciprocity produced in the social and emotional spaces of women's daily lives and economic activities. Hence, the sense of belonging is emotionally constructed, by belonging to the same society of origin in China, by having similar marital and migratory experiences, by belonging to the same gender and by developing similar new affections in Taiwan (Zani 2018).

Inside 'emotional communities' (Roseweird 2006), Chinese 'sisters' individually and collectively generate and perform overlapping and vivid emotions such as excitement and deception, joy and frustration, suffering and consolation, and regret and trepidation. The emotional connection to the 'sisters' (*jiemei*) is not only composed of affections and of co-constructed narrative of migratory and biographical experiences. Emotions are relational and mutualistic since they are actively generated within a specific space for friendship (Cronin 2014) where the rigid social and familiar orders experienced by Chinese migrants are less likely to occur. Within the restaurant they work in, inside their lodgings or in the parks,

far from their husbands and mothers-in-law, FeiFei, Haizheng, Liyue's repertoires of positive and negative emotions mix and merge into daily practices of reciprocity that, as claimed by Haizheng, contribute to lessen the individual and collective condition of subalternity experienced by women, at least to a certain degree.

Although Haizheng, Feifei and Liyue's gatherings represent an informal practice which makes up part of the frame of everyday interactions, they can also go beyond the level of informal practices and produce novel subpolitics. In this respect, we observed the creation of civil society organizations, which, by providing support to mainland spouses, institutionalize mutualism as a tool for claiming fairer immigration policies, for negotiating social rights with local governments, and for ending the discrimination this group experienced. If informal social and affectional networks of sisters provide a space for solidarity and informal everyday resistance (Scott 1987), the formality of civil society organizations greater negotiating power when dealing with women's family members, Taiwanese society and the Taiwanese government.

All in all, civil society organizations are not much different from informal social networks, and the two often intersect with each other. Divergences relate to repertoires of action, which include formalized activities of negotiation in public spaces, for example awareness campaigns and protests, and in private spaces such as the organization's premises, including, for example, closed-door meetings with government representatives. Overlaps occur as a consequence of the fact that migrant women may decide to refer to organizations for certain issues, for example those related to citizenship rights, the acquisition of documents and collective rights. They may refer to informal networks for other personal issues related to friendship, mutual-support and exchange of information. Yet, for non-citizens, organizations are also perceived as a form of protection. This generates emotions of trust, of security and feelings of protection. Majun, sixty-years old, a woman from Zhejiang province, was married to a veteran of the Nationalist army. Especially in the first years when she arrived in Taiwan, her husband showed distrust towards her and was not, for example, happy to let her go out on her own. This constituted a problem for Majun, who was unable to increase her confidence by, for example, establishing a network of confidants or to exploring the neighbourhood. For this woman, membership of the organization, a detail she concealed from her husband, constituted a form of protection, a safe place where she could ask for help if anything went wrong as she waited for Taiwanese citizenship. Alone in a strange country, without full citizenship rights, she felt vulnerable to injustice and abuse (interviewed on 14 September 2011, Taipei). Thus, she considered membership to the organization she joined to be a form of support, a sort of investment in case of future problems. The organisation, seen as their natal home, a safe space where migrant women could find protection, information, practical help, also allowed women to understand that their personal plight were shared by others. Through the recognition that shared needs and experiences were also translated into mutual emotions, a powerful and emotional narrative of the injustice they were subjected to was gradually built and used to enact broader transformation (Momesso 2015b).

In informal daily frames of socialization or more formal activities through civil society organizations, women fix their emotions into discourses which sustain the production of heterogeneous practices. From these, women bring about new intimate ties which support professional socialization, practices of mutual help and even claims for social rights and recognition, as mentioned by Majun. In this respect, emotions, their construction and their performance, enable the multiplication of critical registers (Boltanski 2004). These are in tune with the immediate experience of a social world which is perceived as unfair and inequalitarian. Clearly, emotions are not solely 'about' the world, they also help to constitute it (Brenneis 1990: 113) and to contest it. Repertoires of positive and negative emotions vary according to the situation, the circumstances and the timing of their production, and undergo processes of maturation, of transition and of collectivization which can sustain action and a transformation of social, familial or moral orders. Emotions are revealed to be important resources which help with adaptation, negotiation and even contestation and subversion. They create the potential for new forms of visible or invisible action, on an individual and a collective level. Along these lines, emotions have the potential to alleviate the daily situations of fragility and precarity experienced by women and to improve their subaltern positioning through the design of new spaces of imagination and possibility.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried, empirically, to solve the conundrum raised in the introduction: 'can the subaltern feel?'. The answer is positive. The subaltern can feel, and, above all, their individual and collective production of emotions, sentiments and affections proves to be an effective tool, individually and collectively performed, for transcending and transforming a common condition of subalternity. Nonetheless, feelings, emotions and affections are generated in situ, and cannot be extracted from the biographical, migratory, familial and professional experiences of the actors involved. The results of our research help to shed new light on the ways the production and the performance of emotions, at an individual and collective level, help Chinese migrant women to cope with the social, economic and moral inequalities and hierarchies they face in Taiwan.

To do so, we have outlined three ~~states figures~~ of emotions: *imaginative*, *implosive* and *mutual* emotions which concomitantly give evidence of the ways Chinese migrant women experience a subaltern condition within their Taiwanese social and familial worlds after marriage-migration. In this sense, we have conceptualized emotions in terms of experiences, practices and competences to cope with vulnerability and precarity. **Emotions proved to be not only important resources for inter-action. Crucially, their agential substance (Tappolet 2016) sustains the 'undoing' (Butler 2004) of condition of subalternity experienced throughout rigid social, migratory, economic and familial orders, at least partially.**

Socially constructed, emotions are translated into practices and vary over the temporalities and the spatialities of women's biographical and mobility paths, **as well as the experiences of social and familial exclusion or economic marginalisation which characterise the social worlds Chinese women are positioned in in Taiwan.**

~~as do the states we have outlined in this work.~~ Despite their liability, the analytical interest of the emotional states we identified ~~these figures shed new light on the links between emotion, migration and subalternity in the shaping of migrant women's biographical and mobility patterns, and their co-constructed, indissociable dimension. The analytical interest of such emotional states figures lies in the fact that these show the performative potential of the repertoires of positive and negative emotions in sustaining processes of transformation of the rigid order women are positioned in during pluri-migration. An imaginative emotional state, characterised by feelings of ambition, of aspiration and of projection towards the future sustain the making of marriage-migration to Taiwan. Later, implosion, that is to say feeling of anger, of regret, of frustration or of sadness often emerge throughout women daily lives within the familiar space or working places in Taiwan. Yet, If the subaltern cannot speak while being maltreated by their husbands and mothers in-law, discriminated at work, or misrecognised in the public space, they can nevertheless 'feel' and transform such repertoires of negative emotions into individually and collectively performed resources to cope with the inequalities and the hierarchies which characterise their migratory status. From implosion, emotions can become mutualistic, i.e. intersubjective practices of mutual help and solidarity, which sustain processes of negotiation of an alternative positioning in the society of arrival. The dialectics between emotion and subalternity become evident when migrant women 'can feel' and perform feelings as competences to 'undo' (Butler 2004) a subaltern condition experienced along the different temporalities and spatialities of migration.~~

~~their very incompleteness embedded within the ephemeral nature of emotions and the constantly changing social worlds which prompt them.~~

Broadly, throughout our experiment, we could not aim at achieving exhaustiveness. Such states of emotions draw are incomplete, because they are situated within the liable and changing social worlds they are produced in and according to the subjective and intersubjective ways migrant women feel a subaltern condition and perform emotions to 'undo' this. Being an experiment, proposing such a conceptualisation may, in itself, be helpful to draw new ones within the different spatialities, temporalities and experiences of migrants. All in all, they provide important insights into future possibilities for empirical research on migration and emotion, and into questions regarding the most appropriate instruments the social sciences have available for apprehending feelings and sentiments.

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