Precarious Work and its Complicit Network: Migrant Labour in Singapore

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ABSTRACT
How does precarious work entail social vulnerabilities and moral complicities? Theorists of precarity pose two challenges for analysing labour conditions in Asia. Their first challenge is to distinguish the new kinds of social vulnerability which constitute precarious work. The second is to assign moral responsibility in the social network that produces vulnerability in depoliticised and morally detached ways. In this article, the social and normative dimensions of precarious work are connected through a conceptual investigation into how Singapore allocates responsibility for managing temporary migrant labour. First, it analyses how various management strategies, driven by globalisation and government deregulation, increase worker vulnerabilities. These strategies intensify relations of dependence, disempowerment and discrimination, which the workers may accommodate or resist in limited ways. Second, it assesses why the strategies leave the state, employers, agents and others complicit in producing the vulnerabilities. These actors enable, collaborate with, or condone the production of precarity. Their complicity is complicated by varying support or resistance to reforms. The result is a novel conceptual scheme for analysing the complicit network behind precarious work, which can be used in other sites of precarity where some are complicit in the vulnerability of others.

KEY WORDS: Precarity, precarious work, social vulnerability, complicity, migrant labour, Singapore

Where some work in vulnerable conditions, others live in complicitous ones. This article investigates how precarious work entails social vulnerabilities and moral complicities. In particular, it will look at how vulnerabilities for workers are produced through a complicit network that includes the state, employers, agents and others. In their introduction to this Special Issue, Cruz-del Rosario and Rigg (2019) observe that other theorists define precarity as a more general condition of life. Some associate it with dependence, powerlessness, and unpredictability (Butler 2004, 2012; Ettlinger 2007). For the purposes of this article, *precarity* is defined narrowly, as a set of vulnerable labour conditions. It afflicts some workers in Asia because globalisation and government deregulation have made their labour more like a commodity. This definition follows the social theorists, social scientists and labour organisers who focus on the employment conditions and experiences of precarious workers (see, for example, Standing 2014; Waite 2009; Rigg 2015, 70-9).

According to the International Labour Organization (2011), precarious work typically involves low wages, short fixed-term contracts, numerous intermediaries such as recruitment agencies and sub-contractors, and poor legal and social protections. Under these employment terms, workers are economically insecure and socially marginalised. They are thereby more likely to be harmed through exploitation, abuse or injury. This list of labour conditions indicates the social dimensions of precarious work (see Kalleberg and Hewison 2013). Precarity for these workers arises, primarily, through their problematic relations with others – with the employers who provide them with contracts and wages, intermediaries who recruit and sub-contract them, authorities who protect them in limited ways, and others who leave them marginalised.

In the literature on precarious work, two conceptual challenges centre on these social relations. Both are relevant to the analysis of labour conditions in Asia. The first

challenge is to distinguish new kinds of *social vulnerability*, inside and outside the workplace, which constitute precarious work. These are conceptually distinct from the wider social causes and consequences of precarious work, for example, the neglected consequences which Yea (2019) identifies as "secondary precarity" for the families of migrant workers. Before we examine these consequences, we need to show how precarious work, in itself, consists of vulnerabilities tied to different social processes and structures. Wilson and Ebert (2013), for instance, distinguish between the vulnerabilities in employment relations, market conditions, as well as wider social and political relations. Strauss and McGrath (2017) remind us that employment relations are embedded within wider networks in society. By investigating the networks, we can illuminate the relations within which workers are more likely to be harmed by exploitation, abuse, or injury. Once we identify these social vulnerabilities, we can also explore the dynamic connections between them.

But the difficulty in this challenge is to demonstrate novelty in the social vulnerabilities. We can do so by studying how contemporary conditions shape these vulnerabilities. Precarious work takes its current form due to the globalisation and government deregulation promoted by neo-liberalism. We can thereby distinguish it from past forms of insecure and intermittent employment, which others have analysed (Kalleberg 2009; Quinlan 2012). If we examine how regional and developmental conditions shape the vulnerabilities, we can also compare precarious workers in Asia with those outside it (Kalleberg and Hewison 2013). This kind of analysis develops a "geographical spatiotemporal concept of precarity" (Waite 2009, 420) – a conception of precarious work which can accommodate some geographical and historical variations and thereby be meaningfully applied to Asia (see del-Rosario and Rigg 2019).

The second challenge is to assign appropriate kinds of *moral responsibility* in the social network that produces these social vulnerabilities. When we find vulnerabilities tied to different social processes and structures, we need a conceptually clear way to attribute responsibility to the actors involved – the state, employers, agents, and others who live with and around the workers. Waite (2009, 421), in particular, argues that "responsibility for vulnerability" and "blame for the production of precarity" are normative concerns central to the analysis of precarity. That explains why, for her, the concept of precarity represents "both a condition and a point of mobilisation." By assessing how various actors are responsible for producing precarity, we can clarify the grounds for redress from these actors. Yet this responsibility is currently concealed through regulatory and managerial practices, which emphasise market competition while limiting political oversight and worker involvement (Wilson and Ebert 2013). This suggests that we need to conceptualise, in a systematic way, the moral responsibility of different actors in relation to those regulatory and managerial practices.

Here the difficulty is to counter what Wilson and Ebert (2013, 267) call "depoliticisation," which minimises debate on the "norms and values" underlying precarious work. Under conditions of globalisation and government deregulation, regulatory and managerial practices tend to be justified by appeal to global competition and market constraints. In public discourse, responsibility is thereby displaced onto these impersonal processes and structures. Managerial decisions "appear as global forces" which are "beyond the power of local communities and collectives to address" (Wilson and Ebert 2013, 268). Workers also become less involved in determining their own labour conditions. Because they lack effective representation at work, they have "fewer resources to contest work and resist" (Wilson and Ebert 2013, 268).

This article will address both challenges with a conceptual investigation, connecting the social vulnerabilities that make up precarious work with the moral complicities that make for it. It will build on recent social scientific research on how the state and employers in Singapore allocate responsibility for managing the migrant workforce. First, it will analyse how various management strategies, driven by globalisation and deregulation, increase the workers' social vulnerabilities. These strategies intensify relations of dependence, disempowerment, and discrimination, which the workers may accommodate or resist in limited ways. It will also clarify how such relations reinforce each other. Second, by extending the earlier arguments, it will assess why the management strategies leave the state, employers, agents, and others complicit in producing the social vulnerabilities. They either enable, collaborate with, or condone the production of precarity. This network of complicity will be delineated more precisely by considering how far they support or resist reforms that may reduce the vulnerabilities.

Before these analyses, it is necessary to explain why the precarity of migrant workers in Singapore provides an illuminating case for this conceptual investigation. Why should we focus on migrant workers? First, migrant workers face multiple social vulnerabilities (see, for example, Burawoy 1976; Strauss and McGrath 2017). By studying their precarious position, we can see how the vulnerabilities arise inside and outside the workplace. The workers' position leaves them unusually dependent on employers and disempowered in the workplace. It also leaves them with less support outside the workplace; often the community in host countries discriminates against them based on race and nationality. In this sense, migrant workers lead lives that are "hyper-precarious" (Lewis et al. 2015). Second, many of their social vulnerabilities arise from globalisation and government deregulation. Both forces combine to make their labour mobile and flexible in distinctive

ways (Waite 2009). Therefore, studying the migrant workers' vulnerabilities helps to clarify the impact of neo-liberalism on precarity. We can also better understand the rise of precarious work in Asia. As Kalleberg and Hewison (2013, 281-282) note, migrant workers play an increasing role in Asia, where they are "remarkably mobile" and "labor in a largely disorganized and vulnerable state."

In Singapore, migrant workers play a substantial and indispensable role in the economy. In June 2018, they made up 37.4% of the workforce, 1.3717 million out of 3.6644 million workers in total (Ministry of Manpower November 12 and 29, 2018). Of these, 84.3% were temporary migrant workers who hold highly restrictive work visas, known as work permits and S passes.[1] These 1.1559 million workers come from developing nations in Asia, primarily China, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines. They work in labour-intensive sectors of the economy, such as construction, manufacturing, shipbuilding, service and conservancy work and domestic work.

Two aspects of Singapore's migrant labour make it suitable for this investigation into precarious work. First, the migrant workers in Singapore are "bifurcated" (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Yeoh 2006). In June 2018, the majority stream consisted of the 1.1559 million low-wage low-skilled workers with work permits and S passes (Ministry of Manpower November 12, 2018). Their work visas tie them to specific sectors and employers, who must pay monthly levies to the state. Without access to permanent residency and citizenship, each worker obtains only a temporary status. Yet, collectively, these migrants are now a permanent part of the workforce, doing the jobs that are "dirty, dangerous, and degrading." We can compare their conditions to those in the minority stream, which consisted of 184,400 high-wage high-skilled professionals and entrepreneurs. Their employment passes permit them to work in any sector of the economy and bring along family members. They

are also offered preferential access to permanent residency and citizenship. Second, in June 2018, the temporary migrant workers in Singapore included 280,400 male construction workers and 250,000 female domestic workers with work permits (Ministry of Manpower November 12, 2018). They made up 14.5% of the workforce. Construction workers and domestic workers arrive in Singapore with different forms of debt (Platt et al. 2017). Their work permits impose different restrictions; for instance, construction workers are not allowed to change employers while domestic workers can transfer to other employers. Their work conditions also differ. Domestic workers are required to live and work in their employers' homes (Teo and Piper 2009; Yeoh and Huang 2010). Construction workers are often deployed in small groups at different work sites (Bal 2015b). As a result, these two groups bear some different social vulnerabilities. By comparing their vulnerabilities, we can better understand how sector-specific conditions shape the social and moral dimensions of precarious work.

Fortunately, there is a rich supply of research on these temporary migrant workers in Singapore. The conceptual analysis in this article draws from the overlapping accounts made by social and labour geographers, sociologists, political scientists and social anthropologists who explore the precarious lives of migrant construction workers and migrant domestic workers. Their accounts examine how precarity arises from different social processes and structures. These include: the bureaucratic framework set by state laws and policies; the business interests and practices which need flexibility in hiring; the limited roles played by unions and non-governmental organisations in advocating for better labour conditions; and the dynamics of workplace discipline and bargaining, which allow some limited resistance by workers.[3]

In the following sections, these accounts are not surveyed comprehensively. Rather, they are used in a comparative way, to analyse the conceptual connections between the management strategies of the state and employers, the social vulnerabilities of precarious workers and the moral complicities of those who depend on their work. By systematically distinguishing vulnerabilities, we can assess more precisely the actors and processes involved in producing them. This will allow us to assign responsibility through a more widespread yet fine-grained approach, compared to other approaches which centre on either the unjust state or errant employers. The result is a novel conceptual scheme for analysing the complicit network behind precarious work. It can be used in other sites of precarity, wherever some live complicitly with the vulnerability of others.

SOCIAL VULNERABILITIES IN PRECARIOUS WORK

What are the kinds of social vulnerability that constitute precarious work? Recent studies on vulnerability define it broadly as a state of being exposed to the possibility of harm (Fineman and Grear 2013; Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds 2013b). Some theorists of vulnerability conceive of it as a general condition of humanity: all humans risk being harmed because we have fragile bodies and social needs. But other theorists focus on more context-specific forms of vulnerability, in which some conditions expose specific groups of humans to specific kinds of harm.[4] For workers, three social relations make them more likely to be harmed by exploitation, abuse or injury. These are dependence, disempowerment and discrimination. Each can be defined, abstractly, in terms of the workers' relation with others and the harm to which the workers are exposed. Some workers *depend* on others to provide goods essential to their well-being. Their access to these goods is, accordingly, vulnerable to

others' decision to limit or withhold support.[5] When workers are *disempowered* in interactions with others, they are deprived of power to fulfil goals essential to their well-being. So their fulfilment of these goals is vulnerable to others' domination. When others *discriminate* against workers, the workers are deprived of equal treatment. Facing this discrimination, they are less likely to access goods and fulfil goals essential to their well-being.

This section will identify, more concretely, the variations in dependence, disempowerment, and discrimination that afflict some of the most precarious workers in Singapore.[6] These relations will be delineated more precisely by looking at how the workers accommodate or resist them in limited ways. The analysis will focus on strategies used by the state and employers to allocate responsibility for managing Singapore's migrant workforce. These strategies shape the social vulnerabilities of migrant construction workers and domestic workers differently. They also determine how the workers' dependence, disempowerment, and discrimination reinforce each other. In particular, the workers' dependence on employers deepens their disempowerment, primarily when they have to negotiate terms of employment and seek redress for wrongs. The widespread discrimination they face both deepens and sustains their workplace disempowerment. The arguments on vulnerabilities will centre on three management strategies, which diffuse, displace or disentangle responsibility (see Table 1). For each strategy some key policies and practices will be analysed. This analysis will be the basis for the arguments on complicities in the next section.

Table 1. How management strategies increase social vulnerabilities

	Management strategies	Social vulnerabilities
(a) Diffusion	Exemption of domestic workers from the Employment Act Live-in requirement for domestic workers Sub-contracting of construction workers	Discrimination in legal status Dependence for basic goods Limited bargaining power Unpredictability of exit Vulnerability to coercion Vulnerability to repatriation Limited workplace redress Limited collective action
(b) Displacement	Use of foreign recruitment Reliance on foreign regulation of recruitment process Maximum periods of employment	Indebtedness Vulnerability to deception Vulnerability to coercion Limited legal redress Limited workplace redress Lack of permanent residency Lack of political participation Limited collective mobilisation
(c) Disentanglement	Maximum periods of employment Restrictions on family and reproduction Social segregation Medical screening	Limited social support Social prejudice Ethnic and national stereotypes Dehumanisation as masses, tools, or threats

Diffusion of Responsibility

The main management strategy diffuses responsibility widely in Singapore. Both the state and businesses can use this strategy. For instance, the state diffuses some responsibility for determining the labour conditions of temporary migrant workers. It exempts migrant domestic workers from the Employment Act.[7] This official discrimination does not apply to local domestic workers or migrant construction workers. The Employment Act is Singapore's main labour law, which covers most local and foreign workers whether they work full-time or part-time. Part IV of the Act provides for working hours, overtime pay, rest days, annual

leave and medical and welfare benefits for manual labourers who earn less than US$3,333 per month. The exemption of migrant domestic workers is justified on practical grounds. Each employer gains more flexibility to negotiate their worker's conditions so that they fit the household's requirements for care and service. The Ministry of Manpower argues that it is "not practical" to regulate such conditions of domestic work (Ministry of Manpower June 21, 2018). Moreover, its "hands off" policy serves an ideological function. It reinforces the governing ideal of a self-reliant family that does not need state support or intervention (Teo and Piper 2009, 153-156).

However, this exemption leaves the migrant domestic workers more dependent on their employers. First, their legal status as workers in Singapore is only secured by the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act. This Act regulates their work permits, which tie each worker to an employer. Both parties may terminate contracts early without cause, though employers are responsible for repatriating workers to their home countries. According to the Ministry of Manpower, early termination is allowed to "maintain flexibility" since "circumstances may change" (Ministry of Manpower June 21, 2018). Second, domestic workers depend on their employers to provide basic goods such as accommodation, food, medical care, and rest. The ministry's guidelines state that workers should be given "enough mental and physical rest"; three meals a day sufficient for a female "engaged in moderate activity"; shelter with "adequate space and privacy"; and medical care and insurance (Ministry of Manpower December 6, 2018). There is no limit to working hours each day, though workers are entitled to a weekly rest day.

Such relations of dependence are deepened because their work permits require domestic workers to live with employers. They cannot rely on the social boundaries that are normally drawn between being at work and being at home. Instead, employers can monitor,

to an unusual and oppressive degree, the workers' daily movement and food intake. For a worker, the home is governed by a set of unwritten rules demarcating areas that she can occupy at different times (Yeoh and Huang 2010). She is under constant pressure to negotiate its space – to "know her place" and "know when and where she is needed" (Yeoh and Huang 2010, 229). Employers also use a range of disciplinary techniques at home: checking on workers through telephone calls, unexpected returns and surveillance cameras; locking workers in the home without keys; using relatives, friends, or agents to supervise workers when the employers are away from home; and giving workers "tests" of integrity by leaving precious items unlocked (Yeoh and Huang 2010, 231). Even when a worker has her own room, which is not assured, her rest hours are often counted and calibrated by employers (Yeoh and Huang 2010, 230).

Being exempted from the Employment Act also disempowers the domestic workers. First, when workers negotiate terms of employment individually with employers, they have limited bargaining power (see Koh et al 2017; Yeoh, Huang, and Devasahayam 2004). As foreigners, they may not fully understand terms used in Singapore; they usually have to rely on agents to write contracts and broker arrangements with employers. The Ministry of Manpower's vague guidelines do not give workers much leverage in negotiating what counts as "enough mental and physical rest," "sufficient food to perform household chores" and "adequate space and privacy." Without unionisation or other forms of collective action, workers cannot ask for a standardised wage. Their working conditions vary dramatically according to nationality, depending on how much their home countries protect them (Yeoh, Huang, and Devasahayam 2004, 9-10). Second, workers cannot properly plan exits from employment since their contracts can be terminated at any time. Indeed, some employers tell workers only on the day of termination. This unpredictability is only partly balanced by

the flexibility that workers gain, which lets them transfer to other employers; to do so, they must incur the agents' penalties.

There are two ways in which the domestic workers' ongoing dependence reinforces their disempowerment. First, their dependence on employers to provide rest, food, and accommodation makes them more vulnerable to coercion during informal negotiations. This vulnerability is most salient in negotiations over weekly rest days. According to the guidelines, if workers forgo a rest day, then employers should compensate them with at least a day's salary or a replacement rest day. In their survey, Yeoh and colleagues (2017, 424) found that around a third of respondents does not have rest days, while another third has one day either fortnightly or sporadically. Significantly, the majority are not compensated in lieu of the rest days they forgo. Second, the workers' dependence makes it more difficult for them to seek redress against wrongs. They may face "trouble" and retaliation at home if they complain to their employers, agents, or neighbours (Yeoh and Huang 2010, 231-234). It need not be assumed that all employers are exploitative. What matters is that the diffusion of responsibility leaves workers unusually vulnerable to the employers who are. Some workers, nevertheless, resist wrongs in the home through verbal or physical defiance – by disputing claims, adopting defiant looks or postures, and rejecting chores (Yeoh and Huang 2010). Indeed, their defiance can be a "subtle politics" to force employers to end contracts early, which frees the workers from penalties and enables their transfer to other employers (Yeoh and Huang 2010, 232). But this circuitous tactic of resistance suggests that the workers are less able to seek redress in conventional ways.

Next, sub-contracting is used by businesses in Singapore to diffuse responsibility. In the construction industry, large firms rely on many smaller ones to hire migrant construction workers. Typically, a property developer hires a main contractor, which in turn

hires a group of sub-contractors. Each sub-contractor may parcel out jobs to their own sub-contractors. At the bottom of this pyramid are labour sub-contractors, which employ teams of migrant workers and move them between sites. Many of these labour sub-contractors are one-person operations with no formal procedures. Through sub-contracting, the main contractor boosts its "labour-market flexibility" (Debrah and Ofori 1997, 691). Because it is not contractually committed to a large pool of workers, it avoids the overhead costs of always maintaining workers. It can thereby adapt quickly to fluctuations in demand. The risk from such fluctuations is instead "down-sourced along the supply chain" to the sub-contractors (Wise 2013, 442). These sub-contractors then transfer the risk to migrant workers, by maintaining them under conditions that minimise labour costs (Baey and Yeoh 2015). This system, in effect, shifts labour into regulatory and managerial structures that minimise the costs for firms.

For migrant construction workers, sub-contracting leaves them dependent on the small firms at the bottom of the supply chain in two ways. First, their legal status as workers is tied to these employers. Their work permits allow employers to terminate contracts early and repatriate them. Unlike domestic workers, constructions workers are not usually allowed to transfer employers; they must return to their home countries and apply anew with other employers. Second, the workers' well-being is maintained by the employers. But these sub-contractors are under constant pressure to lower labour costs, so as to bid competitively for contracts (Bal 2016, ch. 2; Koh 2016, ch. 2). To do this they often reduce what is spent on workers' pay, safety, food and accommodation. This encourages them to rationalise, in economic terms, any reduction in welfare provision. An employer interviewed by Koh (2016, 45) confesses to "so much pressure these days to cut corners." He reasons:

"Developers want to make money, so they ask contractors for cheap prices. There are so many contractors around that you have no choice."

Sub-contracting also leads to the workers' disempowerment in two areas. First, workers lose bargaining power in negotiations over the terms of employment. Their negotiations with sub-contractors are not overseen by trade unions, though the workers can in principle join unions (Bal 2016, ch. 2). They are vulnerable to sub-contractors who impose new contracts or condition papers amid employment (Yea 2017). As a result, they face unforeseen changes to their pay: salary withheld as security deposits and variable deductions for food, accommodation, and utilities (Baey and Yeoh 2015, 24-26; Bal 2016, ch. 2; Koh 2016, ch. 1). Moreover, workers tend to be deployed by sub-contractors in small teams across several construction sites. So they lack the power of collective action when they informally negotiate workloads and rest periods with supervisors (Bal 2015b). Instead, they are susceptible to threats of early termination and repatriation, which are occasionally used as a disciplinary technique to direct work (Bal 2015a; Yea 2017). We can demarcate this disempowerment more precisely, by contrasting it with the everyday tactics that remain available to workers. To improve their labour conditions, some workers use what Bal (2016, ch. 4) calls "tactical accommodation": they look for opportunities to display their competence and obedience to the supervisors, in order to lobby individually for pay increases and preferred deployments. Meanwhile, during periods without direct supervision, more experienced workers commit acts of "everyday resistance," by simulating work, slackening their pace and taking longer breaks.

Second, workers cannot easily seek redress against wrongs. Most sub-contracting firms are too small to have formal mechanisms for lodging complaints or resolving disputes (Bal 2016, ch. 6). They maintain vague records on working hours, salary payments and

overtime payments. Some employers even forge contracts and payslips by asking workers to sign blank sheets in advance (Wise 2013, 443-445; Yea 2017, 184-185). As a result, workers often lack the proper documentation to lodge complaints against their employers (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Chok 2013, ch. 6; Koh 2016, ch. 1). Because of the pyramidal structure of sub-contracting, workers are also easily confused about who is their legal employer, who is responsible for committing the wrong, and who is responsible for addressing their complaints. So they may lack a "clear target" for their anger and resentment (Wise 2013, 438). For some workers, this induces a "generalised sense of helpless despair and disempowerment" (Wise 2013, 438). Not all employers behave irresponsibly or illegally towards their workers. The point is that, in the sub-contracting system, workers are made more vulnerable to the employers who do so.

Again, it is clear why workers' dependence reinforces their disempowerment. Since their legal status is tied to the employers, workers are loath to complain about exploitation, abuse, or injury. Many cite the fear of being terminated early and repatriated as their reason for not seeking redress (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Bal 2016, ch. 4; Harrigan and Koh 2015). Those who lodge complaints with the Ministry of Manpower have to remain in accommodation provided by their employers. This puts them at risk of being forcibly repatriated before their complaints are addressed; in some cases, employers have tried to deport workers who have compensations claims pending and injured workers who are in medical treatment (Ye 2016, ch. 3; Yea 2017, 186). At last resort, some workers desert their employers to seek outside assistance, often from non-governmental organisations that support migrant workers (Bal 2016, ch. 6; Harrigan and Koh 2015; Yea 2017). But even this move adds to the workers' vulnerability since they must now find food and accommodation. When the employers cancel their work permits, the Ministry puts them on special passes

which do not allow them to work legally. Finally, employers can nominate repatriated workers to the ministry's blacklist, without submitting conclusive evidence and with no obvious means of appeal for the workers (Chok 2013, ch. 6). This possibility makes some workers concerned about confronting their employers: whatever their discontent, they prefer to "good good come, good good go", arriving and leaving Singapore on good terms with the employers (Bal 2016, 97).

Displacement of Responsibility

The second management strategy displaces some responsibility outside Singapore. The use of foreign agencies to recruit migrant workers extends the supply chains of labour into the workers' home countries through intermediaries. Foreign agents are better placed to recruit workers since they can draw on social networks in the home countries (Bal 2016, ch. 3; Platt et al. 2017; Wise 2013). To facilitate recruitment, the Building and Construction Authority in Singapore appoints overseas testing centres to certify the skills of workers. Testing centres in Bangladesh, for instance, work closely with privately-owned training centres, which provide potential migrants with skills training and job placement in Singapore (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Koh 2016, ch. 1). This recruitment process is not covered by Singapore's labour laws and regulations. Instead the migrants' countries, with fewer resources, are left to regulate it. In economic terms, the production system is thereby adapted to how transnational supply chains work under neo-liberal conditions. Each link in these chains, including the recruitment of labour, is maintained under regulatory structures that minimise labour costs (Wise 2013).

For the migrant workers, the recruitment process increases their dependence through indebtedness. Workers incur debts because of the exorbitant fees charged by

overseas agencies and training centres. The resulting dependence differs between domestic workers and constructions workers (Platt et al. 2017). Domestic workers pay recruitment and training fees through salary deductions. Usually, employers transfer these deductions to agents in Singapore who have arrangements with overseas agents. Surveying Indonesian workers, Platt et al. (2017, 127) calculate that they owe an average of US$2666 in fees. They will take around seven to nine months to clear these debts to the agents. The majority of workers do not receive any salary during this period. Instead they depend on employers for nominal allowances – 61% receive US$7.50 or less per month, while 8% get nothing at all. In contrast, construction workers often borrow from family, friends or money lenders because they need to pay recruitment, training, and testing fees upfront. Baey and Yeoh (2015, 18-19) report that, among their respondents who came from Bangladesh after 2011, the average recruitment fee is US$5,650. Workers will take an average of 16.5 months to repay the loans for their fees.

The recruitment process also adds to the workers' disempowerment. They are left vulnerable to deception by agents in their home countries. In an interview reported by Baey and Yeoh (2015, 22), a construction worker describes his hapless position after the agent's fee was raised by more than 37% in the middle of his training: "Whatever money it takes, I eventually have to go to Singapore. I went through the hard work, I paid some money, so what's the point of sitting down?" Many workers recount false promises made by the agents about the salaries and working conditions available in Singapore (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Bal 2016, ch. 3; Koh 2016, ch. 1; Platt et al. 2017). Such deceptive recruitment practices, which may involve collusion with agents in Singapore, are not prohibited by Singapore's laws and regulations. So workers lack the legal power to seek redress. Whether they can pursue compensation in home countries varies according to their laws and politics;

it may be difficult for workers to do so while they are working in Singapore (Bal 2016, ch. 3; Wise 2013).

Indebtedness also deepens workers' disempowerment. They work in fear of their contracts being terminated before their debts are cleared. This makes them even more vulnerable to coercion during negotiations over working hours, rest days, food, and accommodation (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Koh et al. 2017; Ye 2016, ch. 3). It also makes them less likely to challenge exploitative conditions (Bal 2016, ch. 6; Platt et al. 2017). However, in two limited ways, domestic workers are less disempowered by debt than construction workers. First, if domestic workers have their contracts terminated early, they can transfer to other employers and still service their debts. Construction workers, on the other hand, are generally not allowed transfers. They must return to their home countries and pay another round of recruitment fees if they wish to continue working in Singapore. The most vulnerable workers who do so land in spiralling debt (Bal 2016, ch. 3). Second, some domestic workers may default on their debts to the agents by deserting their employers and leaving Singapore (Platt et al. 2017). The tactic carries some legal risk: if they return to work in Singapore, they need to do so with new identities and agents. But even this risky tactic is not available to the construction workers whose debts are to family, friends, and money lenders in their home countries.

From a more general perspective, the reliance on temporary migrant workers reflects a significant displacement of responsibility. Singapore takes on the burden of maintaining the workers' short-term welfare, but displaces onto their home countries the burden of renewing each generation of workers with another. So it need not plan for the long-term well-being of the workers and their families. It need not be concerned that the workers' precarity in Singapore harms them and their families elsewhere. This displacement

follows the economic logic of migrant labour: the processes of labour maintenance are geographically separated from those of labour renewal, in order to lower costs for the firms which employ migrant workers (Burawoy 1976). To enforce that separation, the state imposes maximum periods of employment on most migrant workers. In construction for instance, basic-skilled workers from most countries are limited to ten years in total, while higher-skilled ones are limited to 22 years.

As a result, migrant workers face two forms of political discrimination. First, unlike foreign professionals and entrepreneurs who are granted employment passes, these workers are not offered any path to permanent residency and citizenship, however long they remain in Singapore. This entrenches their disempowerment in the workplace, for they have to depend on employers to renew their work permits. Second, unlike local workers, migrant workers lack the basic rights of political participation and representation. So they are relatively powerless to challenge their labour conditions through collective means. This disempowerment fits how precarious work elsewhere is "depoliticised" to limit worker involvement (Wilson and Ebert 2013). But, in Singapore, it is exacerbated by the lack of significant union support for migrant workers, since the labour movement is politically co-opted and constrained by the government (Bal 2016, ch. 2; Chok 2013, ch. 5). Even when the unions offer support, they do so in a way which undercuts the collective mobilisation of workers (Bal 2015b). For instance, in 2009, the National Trades Union Congress set up the Migrant Workers Centre to address the welfare needs of workers in workplace disputes. It also offers a semi-official venue for workers to resolve disputes with their employers, individually rather than collectively.

Rather than unions, some small non-governmental organisations advocate on behalf of the workers' well-being through formal complaints at the Ministry of Manpower and

public campaigns (Bal 2015b; Lyons 2009). With the help of these organisations, the workers' acts of resistance can occasionally lead to state reform. During the financial crisis in 2008-9, almost 1,500 construction and shipyard workers deserted their employers, often citing under-deployment and unpaid wages (Bal 2015b). In Bal's analysis, this unusual provocation in "production politics" presented non-governmental organisations with a compelling case-load to support their advocacy. Eventually the Ministry of Manpower responded with several reforms. It required companies to pay a basic wage even when workers are not deployed; it prohibited, then criminalised, kickbacks claimed by employers; and it criminalised the forced repatriation of workers. This might be a rare occasion when worker resistance and civil advocacy prompted the state to improve labour conditions. Yet the workers' extreme conditions and desperate tactics also highlight the limited space in which they can mobilise effectively.

Disentanglement of Responsibility

The third strategy disentangles the management of migrant workers from the lives of others in Singapore. The state and employers thereby minimise the costs inflicted on those who have more political and economic power than the workers. This disentanglement is already evident in the state's maximum periods of employment for workers with exit permits. According to the Ministry of Manpower (2012), these limits are an "administrative control" to ensure that the workers "remain transient and do not sink roots in Singapore." The state also severely restricts the workers' family life and reproduction. Unlike those with employment passes, these workers are not permitted to bring their spouses and children to Singapore. They are prohibited from "immoral and undesirable activities" and "breaking up families in Singapore" (quoted in Baey and Yeoh 2015, 11). They cannot marry Singaporeans

without the state's permission, which is only granted on a case-by-case basis. In addition, domestic workers are not permitted to get pregnant or give birth in Singapore; those who do are immediately repatriated. Through these regulations, the state separates, as far as possible, the burden of maintaining migrant workers from the burden of maintaining others in Singapore.

Employers tend to socially segregate migrant workers from others in the community. Construction workers are housed in cramped dormitories on worksites or in remote areas (Bal 2016, ch. 2; Yea 2017). Domestic workers are often confined to the homes they work in; their movements and interactions with others are closely monitored by employers (Bal 2017, 255). The state requires employers to provide six-monthly medical screens for pregnancy, syphilis, HIV and tuberculosis. Employers are also responsible for reporting work permit violations and repatriating the workers. This encourages them to limit the workers' "spatial and social mobility" within Singapore (Platt et al. 2017, 124).

For the migrant workers, these policies and practices promote two kinds of social discrimination that make them more likely to be harmed through exploitation, abuse, or injury. First, compared with local workers and foreign professionals, they find less social support from the community. The state prevents construction workers and domestic workers from forming families, or reuniting with them, in Singapore. This keeps them in a "social quarantine," where they cannot engage in normal social lives (Teo and Piper 2009, 152-153). The workers also form fewer stable relationships with the non-migrant population. Even during rest days, they are not welcome in most social activities and community events. Instead, they must depend on informal networks made with other migrant workers (Yeoh and Huang 2010). These networks are likely to be more fragile due to the workers' rapid rates of turnover and erratic access to communication. A few non-

governmental organisations support the workers with food, shelter, subsidised healthcare, training, and legal assistance when necessary (Bal 2015b; Chok 2013, ch. 5; Yeoh and Huang 1999). The staff or volunteers will accompany workers to lodge complaints with the Ministry of Manpower. But, if workers are isolated in inaccessible places, these organisations cannot easily monitor their conditions or support their welfare (Yea 2017). So their social isolation deepens the workers' disempowerment in interactions with employers.

Second, migrant workers suffer more social prejudice. This often appears in the form of racial or ethnic stereotypes about the workers. Some races come to be "synonymous in the public mind" with manual labour (Wise 2013, 448). Racial stereotyping is compounded by the fact that, in Singapore, ethnicity is confused with nationality. For instance, the category of the Filipino has been "remoulded" from a nationality to a race (Yeoh and Huang 1999, 1155). In their interviews, Yeoh and Huang find employers of domestic workers projecting character traits onto these confused categories. One employer, for instance, believes that Indonesians are "simpler in outlook" than Filipinos (Yeoh and Huang 2010, 227). Chok (2013, 177) describes this stereotyping among employers of construction workers. One of them claims that Chinese workers are "smart" but "cause more trouble." Ye (2016, 78) cites a site-engineer who favours Chinese workers over Bangladeshi ones: "…they are very fragile people, I think. Sometimes I scold them a little bit only and they will give me attitude. Chinese workers are tougher." Such prejudice is rooted in what Yeoh (2004, 2441) calls the "deep-seated colonial hierarchies and mentalities within society", which rank migrants according to race or ethnicity, and regulate them in subtle ways to protect "moral hygiene" and "racial purity."

In a more extreme form of prejudice, migrant workers are dehumanised. This occurs when others treat the workers like masses or objects. Due to their social segregation, most

workers gather on rest days in ethnic enclaves – for instance, Little India for the Bangladeshi and Indian construction workers, Lucky Plaza for the Filipino domestic workers and Golden Mile Complex for the Thai and Myanmar workers (Teo and Piper 2009; Yeoh 2004). They are avoided by others and seen as a "racialised mass" (Wise 2013, 448). In news interviews, they are described by others as the "crowds," the "crush," the "human barricades" and the "hordes" in these enclaves (Yeoh, Huang, and Gonzalez 1999, 124). As a result, there is less resistance to using migrant workers as tools. They become "foreign bodies" brought to Singapore to "use and discard" (Yeoh 2006, 36). They are reduced to being "disposable economic subjects" (Bal 2015a, 268). The state contributes to this dehumanisation when its regulations pick out the workers as potential threats to social order, bringing disease, immorality and criminality (Teo and Piper 2009; Yeoh 2006). As Bal (2017) argues, this myth about the workers obscures the truth about their vulnerabilities in society. In 2008, it led to apprehension among residents of the Serangoon Gardens estate when the state announced plans for a worker dormitory near them. More seriously, it undermines the struggle, by migrant workers and their allies, to improve their labour conditions. In this way, social prejudice sustains the workers' disempowerment in the workplace.

MORAL COMPLICITIES IN PRECARIOUS WORK

It has been shown how three management strategies increase the social vulnerabilities of migrant workers by intensifying different relations of dependence, disempowerment and discrimination for construction workers and domestic workers, which the workers may accommodate or resist in limited ways. It has also been clarified how these vulnerabilities reinforce each other. The workers' dependence on employers deepens their

disempowerment when they have to negotiate terms of employment and seek redress for wrongs. The widespread discrimination they face also deepens and sustains their workplace disempowerment. Using a range of social scientific research, this analysis shows that the migrant workers' precarity is produced through a social network that includes the state, employers, agents and others who live with and around the workers. This leads to the next conceptual challenge: How are these actors morally responsible for producing the workers' precarity? It will be argued that the management strategies leave them morally complicit in different ways: they are complicit by enabling, collaborating with, or condoning the production of precarity.

The approach taken here can be situated among three accounts of moral responsibility for the workers' plight. They centre, respectively, on the unjust state, the errant employers and the complicit network around migrant workers. The first account blames the *unjust state* for its treatment of migrant workers. This is based on the arguments of political philosophers who acknowledge that temporary migrant workers pose a special problem of justice for liberal democratic countries. Provoked by Walzer (1983), many philosophers focus on the workers' rights (Miller 2016, ch. 6; Ottonelli and Torresi 2012; Owen 2013). Some claim that the workers ought to be treated as potential citizens, while others accept only that they deserve special protections against exploitation. We face three related limitations in using this account to assign moral responsibility for producing precarity. First, it is too focused on the state. This neglects the roles played by employers, agents and others.[9] Second, it is tied to the obligations of justice. This neglects those aspects of precarity which need not be unjust, such as the workers' dependence on employers to provide basic goods. Third, it assumes norms about workers' rights that are not yet shared outside the circle of liberal democratic countries addressed by these philosophers.

The second account blames *errant employers* who exploit or abuse migrant workers. It appears in the Ministry of Manpower's press statements, which Bal (2017) traces back to the late 1980s, when the state targeted employers who hire irregular migrants. This account is promoted by the mass media through regular reports of criminal exploitation and abuse (Bal 2017; Yeoh, Huang, and Devasahayam 2004). Again, this approach has three limitations. First, by focusing on criminal cases, the account deflects attention from less extreme but more everyday cases of exploitation. Second, by focusing on employers who exploit, it draws attention away from the state policies, business practices, and social processes that increase the workers' vulnerability to those employers. Third, the actors involved in these policies, practices, and processes include the state, non-errant employers, and others. In different ways, they too are morally responsible for producing the workers' precarity.

The third account avoids these limitations in the two previous accounts, by uncovering a *complicit network* around the migrant workers. It acknowledges that the workers' precarity arises from state policies, business practices, and social processes. So it tries to assign moral responsibility to all who are involved in these policies, practices, and processes – not only the unjust state which fails to protect the workers well, and the errant employers who exploit or abuse the workers. As Wise (2013, 442) argues, "all are implicated" – all the actors along the supply chain of precarious work. When we reconstruct these actors' roles in the supply chain, we can resist what Wise calls their "moral detachment" from the workers as human subjects. Similarly, Koh (2016, 14) analyses the social network around the workers, in which "every actor is equally complicit" in producing their precarity. Yet her analysis points to the main challenge for this account. We need to make more fine-grained judgements of complicity, based on the different roles played by the state, employers, agents and others.[10]

To build a framework for making these judgements, it is necessary to make some conceptual clarifications about moral complicity.[11] In simple cases of wrongdoing by others, we are morally complicit in their wrongdoing if we causally contribute to it, either knowingly or with culpable ignorance. This definition can be extended to the production of precarity by others. We are morally complicit in their producing social vulnerabilities when we causally contribute to it, either knowingly or with culpable ignorance. Two conceptual points, drawn from the philosophical literature, are worth highlighting. First, to be complicit, we need not intend to produce the vulnerabilities. So, against the charge of complicity, they cannot plead that these vulnerabilities are just unintended consequences of their actions. As Lepora and Goodin (2013, 170) emphasise, "complicity is as complicity does: not as it wants or hopes or tries to do." Second, the we need not know that our actions contribute to producing the vulnerabilities. We need only be culpably ignorant: that is, we should know that our actions would contribute to producing these vulnerabilities.

There are three kinds of moral complicity in the production of precarity (see Table 2). They are ranked in order of diminishing responsibility, according to how the actors contribute to producing the workers' vulnerabilities. Actors who *enable* the production of precarity make it possible for workers to be employed under vulnerable conditions. Those who *collaborate with* the production of precarity make it easier for workers to be employed under vulnerable conditions. Those who *condone* the production of precarity overlook the employment of workers under vulnerable conditions; they thereby fail to prevent it or encourage it to continue. This section demonstrates, more concretely, how to ascribe these complicities in the workers' social network. The three management strategies, as analysed in the previous section, make room for different moral complicities among the state, employers, agents, and others.

Table 2. Why moral complicities underlie social vulnerabilities

	Actors in complicity	*Bases of complicity*
(a) Enabling	The state and firms which make it possible for workers to be employed under vulnerable conditions	Exemption of domestic workers from the Employment Act Limited reform on labour conditions Sub-contracting of construction workers Resistance of firms to reforms of sub-contracting
(b) Collaborating	The state and brokers which make it easier for workers to be employed under vulnerable conditions	State support for foreign recruitment Resistance of state to reforms of recruitment process Deflection of blame onto home countries and workers Brokerage in foreign recruitment
(c) Condoning	The bystanders who overlook how workers are employed under vulnerable conditions	Limited resistance to discrimination Tacit encouragement of discrimination Lack of mass support for NGOs and workers' cause Lack of ethnic or national solidarity

Enabling Precarity

By diffusing responsibility to others in Singapore, some actors enable the production of

precarity. The first case concerns the state.[12] In the previous section, it was shown how the

state diffuses responsibility by exempting migrant domestic workers from the Employment

Act. This "hands off" policy leaves workers more dependent on their employers. They rely

on employers for work permits to secure their legal status and for basic goods essential to

their well-being. At the same time, the policy disempowers workers. They must negotiate working hours, rest days, annual leave and medical and welfare benefits individually with employers, who are granted much leeway through the Ministry of Manpower's vague guidelines on rest, food, and accommodation. In this analysis, the state is directly responsible for disempowering workers in their negotiations with employers. It is less directly responsible for the workers' dependence on employers to provide rest, food, space and privacy, and medical care, since it does not dictate these terms in their contracts. But its policy contributes, in causal terms, to the workers' unusual dependence – by making it possible for workers to be employed under these vulnerable conditions. Such conditions would ordinarily not arise without the workers' exemption from the Act. This means that, in moral terms, the state is complicit by enabling the production of the workers' dependence.

We can clarify the extent of the state's complicity by considering its reforms to improve the workers' conditions. For instance, in 2013, the Ministry of Manpower introduced a mandatory weekly rest day for domestic workers. This reform implicitly acknowledged that the ministry's guideline on giving them "enough mental and physical rest" had been inadequate. The impact of the reform was dramatic. By 2015, 41% of workers surveyed have a weekly rest day, compared to 12% in 2011 (cited in Koh et al. 2017). However, the new policy allowed an exception to enhance flexibility: if workers agree to forego a rest day, then employers should compensate them with at least a day's salary or a replacement rest day. This suggests that the state continues to prioritise the interests of employers over those of workers. Its policy leaves workers vulnerable to being coerced over the rest days, since they still depend on employers for providing rest on work days, food, and accommodation. As noted earlier, the majority of those surveyed by Yeoh et al. (2017) did not receive any compensation in lieu of the rest days forgone. Because its reform on rest

days neglects the workers' disempowerment, the state has yet to fully discharge its complicity in producing their dependence.

The second case focuses on the large firms which diffuse responsibility for employing migrant construction workers. Sub-contracting leaves workers dependent on the small firms at the bottom of the supply chain. Like domestic workers, these workers rely on employers for work permits and basic goods. Unlike domestic workers, they cannot transfer to new employers, even though their contracts can be terminated with limited notice. Sub-contracting also leaves workers disempowered during their negotiations with the small firms. Without union support or collective action, they are vulnerable to employers who impose new contracts or threaten repatriation. Without formal mechanisms for seeking redress, they are more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, or injury. So, in causal terms, sub-contracting makes it possible for workers to be employed under these vulnerable conditions. If the large firms did not diffuse responsibility along the supply chain to sub-contractors, then the workers would be less vulnerable. The same logic of complicity applies: in moral terms, the large firms are complicit by enabling the production of the workers' precarity.

In this case, we can cast light on the firms' complicity by considering their resistance to reforms of the sub-contracting system. Since the 1980s, the state has tried to reduce the construction industry's reliance on extensive sub-contracting and migrant labour (Debrah and Ofori 1997; Bal 2016, ch. 2). This reliance is associated with low worker productivity and low consistency in work quality. It discourages long-term commitment and mutual learning between firms. Due to high worker turnover, firms also find it difficult to maintain a core of skilled workers. As Debrah and Ofori (1997) argue, they tend to increase work rates rather than organising work better and using better equipment. They also increase work hours

while under-paying workers for overtime. In 1987, the state implemented a migrant worker levy to control the number of workers. In 1991, it enacted the Employment of Foreign Workers Act to regulate the maintenance of workers. Yet these reforms have had limited impact on the industry's reliance on migrant labour. Many sub-contractors pass the levy and maintenance costs onto workers through salary deductions (Baey and Yeoh 2015; Bal 2016, ch. 2). The large firms thereby avoid any significant pressure to reform the sub-contracting system. As a result, they continue to be complicit in producing the workers' precarity.

Collaborating with Precarity

After displacing responsibility onto others outside Singapore, some actors collaborate with the production of precarity. Earlier it was shown that the recruitment process contributes significantly to the workers' dependence and disempowerment. It leaves them indebted from the exorbitant fees charged by overseas agencies and training centres. It also leaves them vulnerable to the agents' deception, since they lack legal power to seek redress while in Singapore. Their indebtedness makes them more vulnerable to the employers' threats of repatriation. As a result, they are less likely to contest exploitation or abuse by employers. Yet the state continues to support this recruitment process. For instance, the Building and Construction Authority in Singapore appoints overseas testing centres that cooperate with private recruitment and training centres. In causal terms, the state thereby makes it easier for workers to be recruited under vulnerable conditions. It does not adopt the foreign agents' plans as its own, but adjusts its services to facilitate those plans. This means that, in moral terms, the state is complicit by collaborating with the production of the workers' precarity.

The extent of the state's complicity can be assessed by examining its resistance to reforms. Faced with criticism for its failure to protect migrant workers, some state representatives disavow responsibility for overseas recruitment. In 2012, then-Acting Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin made this appeal in Parliament: "We cannot police the recruitment practices of foreign employment agencies outside our jurisdiction, who are responding to the demand by their countrymen to come to work in Singapore" (quoted in Chok 2013, 339). Blame is thereby deflected onto the home countries for their inadequate policing of recruitment practices. However, this response obscures the possibility of bilateral or multilateral arrangements that tackle the transnational nature of migrant recruitment and employment. As Chok (2013, ch. 9) argues, states already cooperate on other transnational issues, such as trade, crime, and defence. Indeed, the state has forged other bilateral agreements to facilitate the overseas recruitment of workers. So it is not obvious that a similar approach cannot reduce the precarity that the recruitment process brings for workers. Since 2012, the state has shown more interest in investigating recruitment practices. It has conducted research and visited non-governmental organisations overseas (Bal 2015b). If this leads to more protection for workers, then the state is accordingly less complicit in their precarity.

Sometimes state representatives try to deflect blame onto the workers themselves. Chok (2013) reports multiple instances where officials reproach workers for signing contracts with exploitative terms that they challenge later. An official from the Ministry of Manpower warns: "Workers who sign these contracts must take personal responsibility too" (quoted in Chok 2013, 221). But this reasoning is morally problematic for three reasons. First, as noted earlier, some workers are recruited through a non-transparent, even deceptive, process. Their contracts are, therefore, not based on informed consent. They

cannot be held responsible in an unjust recruitment process which they do not control. Second, on-going consent is as important as initial consent when assessing vulnerable conditions over time (see Walzer 1983, 59-60). This is especially so when the workers' dependence on employers leads to their disempowerment during employment. Third, even if workers are not coerced, their consent alone does not override the state's responsibility for regulating their recruitment and employment. The state often intervenes in agreements made between consenting adults because it has interests in protecting them and others.[13]

Aside from the state, brokers in Singapore also support the overseas recruitment of workers. They liaise between foreign recruitment agencies and employers in Singapore. In causal terms, these brokers make it easier for workers to be recruited in their home countries under vulnerable conditions. If they know, or should know, about agents who charge exorbitant training fees or deceive workers with false promises, then they are complicit by collaborating with foreign recruitment agencies. Koh (2016) interviews a broker, who acts as the middleman between agents in Bangladesh, India, and China, and employers in Singapore. He admits that around 50% of the employers are paying workers less than what the agents promised. Immediately, he disavows any responsibility for this wrong: "What they do is their business, not mine. I'm just the third party" (quoted in Koh 2016, 41). Yet the broker tacitly acknowledges the charge of being complicit as a third party, for he tries to excuse his actions: "Look, business is tough. There are many agencies, competitors. Living in Singapore is not cheap, you know. I will lose my business if I tell employers to pay workers more."

Condoning Precarity

When the management of migrant workers is disentangled from the lives of others in Singapore, many actors come to condone the production of precarity. Earlier it was argued that the "social quarantine" imposed by the state and employers on migrant workers produces two kinds of social discrimination. First, workers find less social support from the community. They cannot form or reunite with families in Singapore and they form fewer stable relationships with non-migrants. Second, workers suffer more social prejudice. They face stereotypes that place them in racial or national hierarchies. At the most extreme, they are dehumanised. Others in Singapore are bystanders to this discrimination against migrant workers. They do not resist when the state and employers see workers as bodies to "use and discard"; they rarely protest when the rest sees workers as crowds to be avoided or criminals to be curtailed. As Teo and Piper (2009, 150) note, this discrimination is unspoken – part of the "taken-for-granted reality of everyday life." In causal terms, bystanders contribute to the discrimination indirectly. By overlooking the discrimination, they fail to prevent it. They also tacitly encourage the rest to continue it. This means that, in moral terms, they are complicit by condoning the discrimination against workers.

We can draw some bounds around this condoning by considering those who resist the social discrimination.[14] Despite the fraught circumstances, some individuals, including employers, nurture caring relationships with migrant workers. Others join non-governmental organisations that support the workers' well-being with food, shelter, subsidised healthcare, training, and legal assistance (Bal 2015b; Chok 2013, ch. 5; Lyons 2009; Yeoh and Huang 1999). These organisations also lobby for reforms to improve the worker's conditions and raise awareness through public campaigns and reports. As noted earlier, they seem to have prompted some reforms by the Ministry of Manpower, including

the requirement of a daily wage even when workers are not deployed, the criminalisation of kickbacks between agents and employers, the criminalisation of forced repatriation, and the requirement of a weekly rest day for domestic workers (Bal 2015b; Koh et al. 2017). Other community groups organise cultural activities which focus on migrant workers or offer them opportunities for self-expression through art (Chok 2013, ch. 5); these activities counter the dehumanisation of workers.

However, the lack of mass support for these organisations and the workers' cause reflects a degree of widespread complicity in Singapore. Through inaction, many continue to condone the social discrimination against migrant workers. Most poignantly, even those who share the racial or national identities of workers may be complicit. Yeoh and Soco (2014, 180) mention the "transnational shame" felt by Filipinos with higher status, who are "anxious to distance themselves from the stigma of being a maid." The domestic workers, in turn, resent "Filipino nurses who snub them when they were trying to be friendly, or Filipino female employers married to foreigners who avoided speaking to their Filipino maids in their native tongue, or impose hierarchical boundaries when relating to their compatriots." In cases of "co-ethnic" discrimination, some who live in Singapore even use their shared ethnic identities against the workers. For instance, a resident with Tamil ancestry can draw on his "dual knowledge of the home and host economic landscape" to target a Tamil migrant worker who lacks contacts and knowledge outside their ethnic enclave (Wise 2013, 448).

CONCLUSION

This article raised two conceptual challenges on the social dimensions of precarious work. The first challenge is to identify the social vulnerabilities that constitute precarious work; the second is to assign moral responsibility in the social network that produces these vulnerabilities. Both challenges were addressed by analysing how precarious work entails social vulnerabilities and moral complicities. This analysis built on recent research on how the state and employers in Singapore allocate responsibility for managing its migrant workforce, particularly its large population of male construction workers and female domestic workers.

The arguments made in this article centred on three management strategies which diffuse responsibility widely in Singapore, displace responsibility outside Singapore, or disentangle the management of migrant workers from the lives of others in Singapore. First, as Table 1 summarises, these management strategies increase the social vulnerabilities of migrant workers. They intensify relations of dependence, disempowerment, and discrimination, which differ between construction workers and domestic workers. The strategies also determine how these vulnerabilities are connected. The workers' dependence on employers deepens their disempowerment when they have to negotiate terms of employment and seek redress for wrongs. The widespread discrimination they face deepens and sustains their workplace disempowerment. Workers' disempowerment was demarcated more precisely by examining how they accommodate or resist it in limited ways. While these unusual tactics attest to the workers' situated agency and substantial

ingenuity, they affirm that the workers are deprived of ordinary means to fulfil goals essential to their well-being.

Second, as Table 2 summarises, a complicit network underlies the workers' social vulnerabilities. In different ways, the state, employers, agents and others are complicit – by enabling, collaborating with, or condoning the production of precarity. Some actors make it possible for workers to be employed under vulnerable conditions, while others make it easier. The bystanders fail to prevent or tacitly encourage it. These actors are complicit despite attempts to deflect blame onto the workers and others. Their complicity is compatible with the agency of the workers and the direct responsibility that others bear. It was more precisely delineated by considering their support for some reforms to the workers' vulnerable conditions and their resistance to other reforms.

Through these analyses, a systematic framework was assembled with conceptual connections between the management strategies of the state and employers, the social vulnerabilities of migrant workers, and the moral complicities of everyone who depends on their work. This framework enables us to investigate other, neglected, aspects of precarious work and its complicit network. First, we can explore the mechanisms that link the workers' social vulnerabilities with each other. This will clarify the dynamic connections found between the relations of dependence, disempowerment and discrimination. Second, we can examine other actors, such as medical professionals, police forces and foreign firms, that may be complicit in producing the workers' precarity. This will uncover a wider network of enablers, collaborators, and bystanders, beyond those cited in the cases examined above. Third, we can evaluate reforms more thoroughly, in terms of their uneven impact on vulnerabilities and complicities. This will bring a more nuanced perspective on the transformation of precarity.

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Notes

[1] Both work visas are valid for up to two years, though they are renewable with conditions. Work permits are for "foreign domestic workers" and "semi-skilled foreign workers in the construction, manufacturing, marine shipyard, process or services sector." S passes are for "mid-level skilled staff" who earn at least US$1,704 per month (US$1 = S$1.35).

[3] On laws and policies, see Baey and Yeoh (2015); Bal (2015a, 2016, ch. 2); Chok (2013; ch. 4); Koh et al. (2017); Teo and Piper (2009); Yeoh, Huang, and Devasahayam (2004); Yeoh et al. (2017); on business, see Bal (2016, ch. 2); Debrah and Ofori (1997); Wise (2013); Yeoh (2006); on unions and non-governmental organisations, see Bal (2015b, 2016, ch. 7); Chok (2013, ch. 5); Lyons (2009); Yeoh and Huang (1999); Yeoh, Huang, and Devasahayam (2004); and on workplace discipline and bargaining, see Bal (2015b, 2016, ch. 4); Koh (2016); Ye (2016, ch. 3); Yea (2017); and Yeoh and Huang (2010).

[4] This divide between theorists of vulnerability is surveyed in Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds (2013a). They propose a taxonomy that partly classifies vulnerabilities according to their inherent or situational sources. Among the situational vulnerabilities are "pathogenic" ones, which arise from problematic social relations, structures and interventions.

[5] The theoretical connections between dependence and vulnerability are analysed in Dodds. According to Dodds (2013, 182-183), dependence is "one form of vulnerability," which "requires the support of a specific person (or people)." She argues that dependence can promote other forms of vulnerability – a point which I demonstrate in relation to precarious work.

[6] Chok (2013, 377) proposes an "expanded precarity package" including what she terms "dependency", "deportability", and "discrimination." The classification used in this section focuses on three kinds of social vulnerability, while Chok's is tied to a broader list of insecurities. I thank the referee who drew my attention to her illuminating work.

[7] The provisions of the Employment Act and the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act can be found at the Singapore Ministry of Manpower website (http://www.mom.gov.sg/). Other exemptions to the Employment Act include managers or executives who earn more than US$3,342.50 per month; seafarers; and statutory board employees or civil servants. The effects of exempting migrant domestic workers are analysed in Koh et al. (2017); Platt et al. (2017); Teo and Piper (2009); Yeoh, Huang, and Gonzalez (1999); Yeoh, Huang, and Devasahayam (2004); Yeoh and Huang (2010); and Yeoh et al. (2017).

[9] I put aside the question of how other actors are collectively responsible for the state's actions. The answer will depend partly on the state's decision-making processes. In the rest of this section, I assume that an actor can be (in one role) complicit in the state's wrongdoing even when it is (in another role) collectively responsible for that wrongdoing.

[10] This challenge is noted in Chok (201, 309), who recommends a model of shared

responsibility tied to the "social connections that implicate all agents, albeit in differentiated

ways." Her model emphasises the agents' political responsibility for *correcting* injustices,

rather than their moral responsibility for *producing* vulnerabilities.

[11] There is a rich philosophical literature on complicity. Key distinctions from the conceptual

framework in Lepora and Goodin (2013) are used here (see also Driver 2015; Kutz 2006;

Mellema 2016). Tognazzini and Coates (2016) situate complicity in relation to blame and its

appropriate conditions.

[12] Caleb Yong and Alexandra Serrenti prompted me to clarify the state's role in this section.

[13] As Lenard and Straehle (2011, 214) observe: "it is a mistake to think that the only issue of

moral relevance should be maximizing agency." They add that even democracies "constrain

the agency of their citizens as a matter of course", for example through minimum wage

requirements (see also Carens 2013, 115; Miller 2016, 195, n. 16).

[14] Both Nicole Constable and a referee raised the significance of migrant labour advocacy for

my arguments on condoning