Coping with trauma in domestic migrant worker narratives: Linguistic, emotional and psychological perspectives[1]

Hans J. Ladegaard

Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Trauma can be defined as an event that goes beyond ordinary modes of experience and linguistic representation. It represents a break not just with a particular form of representation but with the possibility of representation at all. Drawing on a large corpus of domestic migrant worker narratives, the article analyses trauma narratives in which migrant women share their experiences while working for abusive employers. The stories deal with unspeakable suffering and humiliation, and the article attempts to outline the narrative structures that characterise trauma storytelling: broken narratives with voids in the narrative flow. It also analyses the emotional component of trauma narratives focusing on crying, which is seen as an authentication of feeling and meaning. Finally, the article considers how the women make sense of their traumatic experiences, and how peer support becomes essential in the narrators' attempt to rewrite their life stories from victimhood to survival and beyond.

KEYWORDS: trauma, broken narratives, foreign domestic helpers, narrative therapy, crying, discourse analysis

創傷可定義為超越恆常經歷與語言表達的事件，其表達模式不但會脫離特定的形式，更可能完全談不上是一種表達行為。本文取材自一個結集大量外籍家庭傭工敍事的語料庫，分析女性外籍家傭表述如何受僱主虐待的創傷敍述。這些經歷記錄了令人髮指的傷痛與凌辱；本文嘗試分析此類創傷敍述的特有敍事結構：敍事流程破碎，中間每每留下段段空白。本文亦會分析創傷敍事的情感表述，聚焦痛哭這一行為，因為此種表現一般被認為是真實感覺與意義的佐證。最後，本文會探討女性如何理解自己的創傷經歷，而同儕支援又如何有效地協助敍事者走出受害者的陰霾，轉而以倖存者或更超然的態度重寫自己的親身經歷。[Chinese]

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analytic work on trauma narratives is still in its infancy. Most of the existing trauma narrative research has been done by people in the health professions, and these studies tend to pay little attention to language. Many of them use written accounts of trauma, and the focus is often on posttraumatic stress disorder and other health-related issues (see O'Kearney and Perrot 2006 for an overview). Only recently have scholars from outside the health professions, including sociology and social work (Duval and Béres 2007; M. Hydén 2008), communication (Bülow 2008; L. Hydén 2008), and ethnography and sociolinguistics (Drakos 2008; Guido 2013; Lambrou 2014; Trinch 2013), begun to look at trauma narratives from a discursive perspective.

Hydén and Brockmeier (2008) have introduced the term 'broken narratives' to explain what it is people do when they engage in trauma storytelling. They define a broken narrative as 'an open and fluid concept, emphasizing problematic, precarious, and damaged narratives told by people who in one way or another have trouble telling their story' (p. 10). Brockmeier (2008) further elaborates on the narrative structure of trauma storytelling, and he argues it is characterised by breaks and voids in the narrative flow. The problem, he says, is that 'ordinary' language cannot adequately capture traumatic experiences; this often leads to what he calls a traumatic gap between the experience on the one hand, and the language available to describe it on the other. When people talk about trauma, he claims [they] 'may attempt to talk, only to become even more aware of the traumatic gap between their talking and what the talking is about: an experience that goes beyond all common and ordinary modes of experience' (p. 29).

This means, then, that trauma by its very nature somehow disrupts the narrative flow, and it also breaks the continuity and flow of people's everyday lives and experiences (Tuval-Mashiach *et al*. 2004). In some cases, the telling of trauma narratives becomes fragmented and partial; in other cases, the gap between language and experience may lead to a complete breakdown in narrativity (Brockmeier 2008). Whatever difficulties the storyteller may experience in telling his/her story, many will find, as it is the case in the domestic helper narratives that will be analysed in this paper, that 'the tellability of these trauma narratives is compromised by the unacceptability of the events. These are stories about things that shouldn't happen, rather than about things that didn't happen (Shuman 2005:

19-20). Foreign domestic helper[2] (FDH) narratives, as they are being narrated week after week in shelters in Hong Kong, are stories of unspeakable suffering and humiliation (Ladegaard 2012; 2013a). Therefore, as Langer (1980) points out in his discussion of the dilemma of choice in the Holocaust death-camps, since nobody has invented a vocabulary of annihilation, we must rely on what Primo Levi has called 'free words created and used by free men' (Langer 1980: 224). This means that in the interpretation of trauma narratives 'we must bring to every "reading" of the [Holocaust] experience a wary consciousness of the way in which "free words" and their associations may distort the facts or alter them into more manageable events' (p. 224).

In the analyses that follow, I shall argue that crying may be conceptualised as the language that transcends the traumatic gap. Kottler (1996: 49) defines crying as 'a language that transcends words', and he argues that crying is essential to human communication because speech is often inadequate to describe what we feel. Frijda (1982) argues along the same lines that crying does not just *express* sorrow and helplessness; rather, it *is* these feelings in behavioural form. Crying in trauma narratives thus becomes an essential means for FDHs in distress to communicate to others that they are in need of compassion, and a way for them relate to others and to themselves (Katz 1999). The analyses will also show first, how the traumatic gap, produced by experiences of hunger, dehumanisation and depression, for some victims might be transcended through the catharsis of crying, and second, how the 'wordlessness of trauma' (Herman 1998) may help us understand why trauma victims' inability to take action against abusive employers should not be identified as indifference. Trauma incapacitates the victim, but the analyses also show how storytelling may provide a means for traumatised migrant women to regain their lost voice.

THE STUDY

The church shelter

The paper reports on an on-going research project on the life-stories of FDHs from Indonesia and the Philippines. There are about 320,000 domestic migrant workers in Hong Kong. They work as live-in maids on two-year contracts providing much-needed remittances to their families back home. Despite legislation designed to protect their rights as domestic workers in Hong Kong, many are exploited and

abused (see Chiu 2005; Constable 2007; Ladegaard 2012; 2013a; 2013b). If a domestic helper runs away from an abusive employer, she may seek help at Bethune House, a church shelter that provides temporary accommodation to migrant women who have run away from abusive employers, or whose contract has been terminated prematurely. At the shelter, she is invited to share her story with other helpers and a volunteer in a sharing session. Participation is voluntary; the invitation is issued by one of the Filipina volunteers in order to ensure that the women are free to decline if they prefer. The purpose of the sharing sessions is first, to clarify the details of a case if a FDH wants to file a complaint against an abusive employer, and second, to serve a therapeutic function by giving the women an opportunity to talk about their trauma in a safe environment[3]. If a woman declines participation in a sharing session, she will still meet a case-worker/volunteer who will help her decide whether there are grounds for a complaint case, either to the Labour Tribunal (for labour law dispute cases), or to the police (for criminal cases).

I joined Bethune House as a volunteer in 2008, and I soon realised that these stories had to be documented and shared with a wider audience. The project was therefore converted into a research project on FDH narratives, while I continued my work as a volunteer at the shelter. I am aware of the potential problems involved in trying to fulfil two roles at the same time: first, the role of the researcher who is trying to observe and analyse the narratives without 'contaminating' the linguistic and social environment I am studying, and second, the role of the volunteer whose job it is to document the stories and allow the women to talk about their traumas. I know that I cannot avoid taking sides; I am on the side of the women and I make no secret of that. I see myself as a researcher *and* a social activist, and I see these roles as complementary rather than contradictory (Phipps 2012).

Scholars have argued that a sharp distinction between research commitments and social commitments cannot be upheld in projects involving marginalised groups (Shuman 2005). Thus, I argue that research on FDH narratives should not only do research *on* migrant women, but also *for* and *with* them (Cameron *et al*. 1992). In the sharing sessions, I take on the role of the interviewer who asks questions, mainly to document the details of a particular case, *and* the role of the volunteer who encourages the participants to take action against abusive

employers. But I am also a researcher, and although I am not always conscious of which role I take on when I ask a question, I know that the research agenda has also played a part in how the sharing sessions were conducted and which questions I asked. The social activist persona would be more visible in activities other than the sharing sessions, such as language classes, fundraising, or social events (e.g. ice-cream parties at the shelter with lucky draw and singsong), or writing stories for *HerStory*, a news magazine for domestic migrant workers, or liaising with the media to publicise stories about FDHs' lives. So, the volunteer, the researcher and the activist would, at times, be distinguishable, and, at other times, melt into one with no clear boundaries between them.

Each week, I would meet with newcomers who had signed up for a sharing session (usually 4-6 women). So far, close to 300 FDHs have participated in Hong Kong, and close to 100 returnees whose stories have been recorded in Indonesia and the Philippines. As of March 2015, close to 80 sharing sessions have been audio-recorded, and 50 of them have been transcribed and, for the Indonesian data, translated[4]. Each session usually lasts between one and two hours. Prior to each sharing session, the women were given a detailed introduction to the project; they were promised full anonymity and were asked to give their consent.

Theoretical and methodological frameworks

The project draws on a variety of theoretical frameworks and analytical concepts from sociolinguistics, social psychology, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. The data was collected using the ethnography-of-communication approach (Saville-Troike 2003), which argues that the researcher needs to closely observe the research site and include as much contextual information as possible in the interpretation of data. Another framework that has been important for understanding how discourse is conceptualised is social constructionism (Burr 2003), which emphasises that talk is situated and dynamic. It argues that when people talk, they present and negotiate their social identities. A social constructionist approach would question the idea that social categorisation (such as a 'trauma-identity') should be perceived as evidence of underlying psychological states. Rather, it would see identity (and other forms of social categorisation) as discursive constructions involving not just the narrator but also the interlocutor(s) and the audience. It would see talk as constitutive of the

context, and the people who talk as social actors (see Augoustinos, Walker and Donaghue 2014).

The narratives have been analysed using a narrative-analysis approach combining Toolan's (2001) attention to linguistic detail with a therapeutic component of narrative research (Brown and Augusta-Scott 2007; White and Epston 1990). Toolan (2001) argues that analysts should pay equal attention to narrative structure and function, and by closely examining the language of narratives, we get important information about the narratives themselves, their narrators, and their audiences. He sees narratives as socially situated: they are collaborative endeavours between teller and audience/participants, which disclose identity issues as well as the tellers' cultural predispositions and values. The narrative-therapy approach argues that we live storied lives and therefore, we are encouraged to tell our stories in order to make sense of our past experiences because 'our stories do not simply represent us or mirror lived events – they constitute us, shaping our lives and our relationships (Brown and Augusta-Scott, 2007: ix). Thus, the key assumption in narrative therapy is that changing people's stories about their lives will help them change their actual lives.

Medved and Brockmeier (2008) argue that storytelling serves at least five key functions. First, it creates coherence by synthesising personal experiences that may initially appear disconnected. Second, narratives serve a distancing function in that it helps the storyteller to distance herself from the immediacy of her experiences by converting them to stories. Third, storytelling serves a communicative function: it connects the narrator to her audience and thus, makes the narrator's universe a shared experience. Fourth, narratives help storytellers evaluate past experiences; they provide perspective and the possibility of re-evaluating and considering alternative interpretations. Finally, storytelling serves an explorative function; it encourages the storyteller to compare two sides of human experience: the real and the possible. This function is particularly important in FDH narratives because the shelter encourages the women to question the dominant narratives they have been subjected to while working for an abusive employer, and try to 're-author their lives from victimhood to survival and beyond (Duvall and Béres 2007: 233).

TRAUMA NARRATIVES

An essential question to address before we turn to the analysis is how we identify trauma narratives. Among hundreds of stories by distressed women, how does one distinguish between trauma and non-trauma narratives? The characteristics I have used are somewhat arbitrary. In terms of the topics that are in focus, most of them deal with abuse, exploitation, humiliation and degradation and therefore, they could arguably all be characterised as trauma narratives. I have decided to distinguish and consider, not so much how 'serious' individual abuse cases are, but what the abuse does to individual women. Thus, it is the women's *response* to what they have experienced that has determined whether or not a particular story was identified as traumatic. However, it is possible to argue that a much larger number of the stories in the dataset could be labelled as 'traumatic.' Trinch (2013: 289) rightly points out that dominant trauma narratives 'may overemphasize women's pain, suffering, and victimization at the expense of understanding rape when it is reported in the absence of any perceived psychological damage.' She recommends therefore that any analysis of trauma must pay close attention to contextual factors as well as individual characteristics, and not exclude stories that may fall short of the listener's stereotypical expectations of what a trauma narrative sounds like.

Out of the 175 narratives, which have been transcribed so far and thus, considered for this article, 41 were identified as trauma narratives based on the four criteria listed below. I am *not* arguing that these narratives are the only trauma narratives in the dataset; it is possible (even likely) that a much larger number of women could justifiably be labelled as trauma victims. But for the purposes of this article, I have decided to focus on women whose telling *clearly reveals* that they are traumatised. The four criteria I have applied to my analyses include:

1) There is continuous crying, either throughout the telling of the narrative, or repeatedly during the storytelling.
2) The trauma that the women experienced also leads to some form of existential crisis. Thus, at some point during the telling of the narrative, the women would question the meaning of life, their faith in God, or their very existence and, in some cases, even mention suicide as the only way out.

3) Traumatic experiences are narrated repeatedly throughout a sharing session. The narrator returns to one or more of her traumatic experiences at least twice, and sometimes several times, during the course of a sharing session. This suggests that the trauma is experienced as an emotionally unfinished event, which requires repeated attention.
4) Trauma storytelling is consistently associated with fear. Thus, the women would testify repeatedly that they were always afraid/scared/terrified while they worked in their abusive employer's house.

Scholars in the health professions usually focus on the physical and psychological symptoms of trauma and have mentioned that trauma victims often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms including insomnia, anxiety and intractable depression (Herman 1998), and/or depression-related disturbances including traumatic grief, extreme sadness and hopelessness, suicidability, anorexia/weight loss, and fatigue and loss of energy (Briere, Scott and Jones 2015). As the analyses will show, many of these symptoms are visible in FDH narratives, but because this study is trying to make a contribution to the sociolinguistics of trauma storytelling, it is befitting that the focus should be on the linguistic, paralinguistic and structural characteristics of narratives, rather than on the victim's physical symptoms.

If we look across the 41 trauma narratives that have been selected for analysis, there are other salient characteristics that need to be mentioned. First, an overwhelming majority of the women who have experienced trauma are first-timers[5]. It is a clear pattern therefore that working for an abusive employer is potentially more traumatic if this is the helper's first contract. Second, Indonesian helpers tend to be more severely abused than Filipina helpers. There are many possible explanations for this finding: Indonesian domestic migrants tend to be younger and less experienced; they tend to be less educated and often not informed about their rights; and finally, they usually do not speak (much) English or Chinese, and the possibility for miscommunication (and lack of communication escalating to violence) is therefore greater. Finally, Indonesian helpers tend to be more reluctant to share trauma narratives, and they are also more likely to try to avoid crying, and other emotional outbursts. Indonesian group members sometimes ask the narrator not to cry during her storytelling. There is not one

single example of a similar pattern among the Filipina helpers, and this suggests that crying is a less acceptable form of emotional communication for Indonesian domestic helpers.

Crying in FDH narratives takes on many different forms and in order to understand their emotional impact, it is important to be able to differentiate between them. Hepburn (2004) identified seven generic types of crying in the helpline telephone calls she analysed: whispering, sniffs, wobbly voice, high pitch, aspiration, sobbing, and silence. These features do not normally occur in isolation, and most crying events would include more than one of these features. I find Hepburn's categories useful, but I would argue that it is difficult to distinguish as clearly between them as proposed by her analyses. In FDH narratives, a crying sequence would usually begin with a wobbly voice, sometimes accompanied by high pitch; and the culmination would be sobbing followed by sniffs and wobbly voice (see Ladegaard 2014). Whispering and increased aspiration were rare, and I do not wish to make any claims about silence as a type of crying activity. This study relies exclusively on audio-recordings and therefore, we do not know whether the silence is part of the crying sequence. I shall indicate in the transcripts which types of crying were deployed, but I shall refrain from using the detailed transcriptions of crying activities suggested by Hepburn and other scholars using a Conversation Analytic approach[6].

DATA ANALYSIS

Hunger, isolation and fear

A recurring theme in all of the 41 narratives that have been analysed for this article is reliving the traumatic experiences involved in working for an abusive employer, and fear is the accompanying emotion. The first example is from a sharing session with five Filipina domestic workers[7]. The session was characterised by frankness and honesty; the women's contracts had been terminated, and they were now waiting for deportation, or a new contract with another employer. Madelyn, a first-timer, is quiet during the first half of the sharing session while other women tell their stories, and only when prompted by another helper does she begin to recount the fear and humiliations she experienced while working for an abusive employer (see transcription conventions in the appendix).

Excerpt 1

Madelyn, 25 years old, 2 months in Hong Kong (HK); Irene, 44 years old, 8 months in HK, 4 years in Singapore before HK; Vanessa, 41 years old, 18 months in HK, 14 years in Singapore; Joyce, 33 years old, 14 months in HK, 2 years in Dubai. One more Filipina helper was in this session. A male interviewer/volunteer (Int) was present in all the sharing sessions (original in English).

1. Mad: I suffer a lot because (1.0) insufficient food (1.5) I wait when
2. they call me, ↑ 'Give me your plate' (1.5.) and **2** months I
3. work for them, I can, I don't eat, if we have chicken, I eat
4. only the, what's it called *puwit* [sobbing]
5. Ire: oh my God, chicken butts
6. Mad: and *dulo ng pakpak* [sobbing] what's er:?
7. Van: chicken wings
8. Mad: yes [sniffs] and it's insufficient food, some Filipina//
9. Int: //so you
10. were starving?//
11. Mad: in the building// wants to give me food because sometimes I
12. I tell them [about] my situation inside, ↑they told me I'm not
13. allowed to open the door when I'm alone inside **how can I get**
14. **the food from them?** [sobbing] because I'm not allowed to
15. open the door [sniffs] I feel like a ↑ prison inside, sometimes I
16. want to, I want to open the window and [sobbing] (1.0)
17. Joy: jump
18. Mad: jump, because I feel so, I'm in prison, and then every time
19. they get angry with me, I'm so scared, I'm so scared [sobbing]

In Madelyn's testimony, there is continuous crying throughout the entire narrative, which initially takes about ten minutes. She alternates between wobbly voice, sometimes with high pitch, and sobbing followed by sniffs. In this short excerpt, many themes are introduced, including hunger (lines 1-8), loneliness (lines 12-16), and fear (line 19). The overriding emotions are fear and despair, but if we consider Madelyn's story as a whole, it centres on reliving the trauma she experienced

while she worked for an exploitative employer. She worked 16-18 hours every day on little food, and she was constantly yelled at for making mistakes, and accused of damaging the employer's property. Eventually, she was kicked out of the house on a cold day in January with no extra clothes and no money.

A significant component of the humiliations Madelyn experienced is the constant hunger. She tells the group how she had to hold out her plate, and the employer would give her leftover food scraps (lines 1-2). In subsequent lines not reported here she says: 'I feel like a robot, even when you're eating, you have no time, you just wait, just wait like a cat or a dog, you just wait and see what they put on your plate.' Part of the humiliation many FDHs feel is the constant hunger, but equally important is the fact that they are being positioned by their employers as less than human (Tileaga 2005). Like animals, they have to wait to be fed, and they have to be content with leftover food scraps. In his account of life in Auschwitz, Primo Levi explains how their experiences in the camp cannot be encompassed by ordinary language, or 'free words' as he calls it. He says

> Just as our hunger is not that feeling is missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say 'hunger', we say 'tiredness', 'fear', 'pain', we say 'winter' and they are different things. They are free words created by men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes. If the Lagers (camps) had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have been born, and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day […] and in one's body [feel] nothing but weakness, hunger and knowledge of the end drawing near (cited in Langer 1980: 223-224).

Some of Levi's experiences in the camp are comparable to Madelyn and other helpers' situation. Their hunger, like Levi's, is not the hunger of missing a meal, but the constant hunger from living off food scraps and never having a decent meal. In another sharing session, Malaya, a 34-year old helper from the Philippines, tells the group how she arrived at her new employer's house one December night at 11 o'clock. The family has just finished their dinner, and they ask Malaya to clean the table and do the dishes. There is no food left and she is not

offered anything. She is ready to go to bed at 1am, and the employer tells her she must be ready for work next morning by 6am. Next day, she is not offered any breakfast and she is 'too ashamed to ask.' Having finished her chores in the house, she is taken to grandma's house around noon to clean. The family is ready to sit down for lunch, and she tells the group: 'waw, I feel so happy, so so happy because I smell the rice cooking so I say to myself "maybe we'll eat here."' The family eats but again, she is not given anything. When her female employer picks her up later in the afternoon, she finally musters up enough courage to tell her that she is hungry. By then, she has had nothing to eat for more than 24 hours, and her employer stops by a store, and buys her a small packet of bread. Thus, domestic helpers' constant hunger often brings them to the point of despair. Marinol, a 38-year old Filipina helper, testifies in another sharing session: 'I'm desperate [from hunger], I could not sleep well at night because I was **so** very hungry'; and when she asked her employer for food, she was told: 'you did not come here to eat, you come here to work.' So, in Asia's World City, a place of immense wealth and prosperity, FDHs are suffering from hunger to the point of despair and sleep deprivation.

Another type of humiliation that FDHs are subjected to is isolation and loneliness. Madelyn is locked inside the flat when the employers leave, and she is too afraid to open the door despite her hunger (lines 14-15). Locking helpers inside the flat and/or confiscating their passports are common practice in Hong Kong and elsewhere (Constable 2007; Jureidini and Moukarbel 2004) and a way for employers to ensure they have absolute control over their helpers. Isolated lonely individuals are easier to control, so making sure that FDHs do not get to socialise with other helpers is also a means of control and dehumanisation. In subsequent lines not reported here, Madelyn's questions become more existential and she cries: 'I feel so [sobs] what has happened in my life here in Hong Kong?' Something similar happens in line 16, where she externalises the ultimate fear among FDHs: suicide, but only through the help of one of her peers. Madelyn never verbalises the actual word, and she lets Joyce provide her with the word 'jump' (line 17). Talking about suicide is a taboo and therefore, the women use euphemisms ('to do that thing'), or they rely on implied meanings ('I want to open the window and …' line 16). It is also noticeable that Joyce knows what Madelyn is referring to even though she makes no explicit reference to 'suicide'. This also

suggests that the fear of suicide is common among FDHs. The stories in Excerpt 2 also deal with hunger, isolation and fear, as well as physical assault.

Excerpt 2

Liezel, 25 years old, Filipina, 4 months in Hong Kong, 1 year in Singapore before Hong Kong; Grace, 29 years old, Filipina, 3 months in Hong Kong, 2 years in Kuwait before HK. The women are explaining what went wrong with their employers (original in English).

Lie: er: because my *popo* [grandmother] only, she cannot
communicate with me, she don't know how to speak in
English (1.0) I don't know why she's always angry with
me, she always knock my head //every day//
Int: //knock// knock your head?
Lie: yeah, knock my head (1.0) always so painful and then I
don't know after that, after one month, she terminated me,
my ma'am, she said only 'my *popo* is, she don't like you',
she don't want me only (1.0) because I don't know how to
speak, **she** don't know how to speak in English
Int: what would she say, what would she do to you?
Lie: always like this only, she knock my head, my head always
(1.0) and then if, I said only 'sorry *popo*', and after that my
shoulder again, she beat my shoulder, sir (1.0) and then after
that, I said only 'sorry *popo*', I want to cry, but I control
myself sir […]
Int: okay, right (2.0) so Grace what about you, what happened
with your employer?
Gra: I er: I, I, I in the house sir, no breakfast sir and then sometimes
the sister sir she **hurt** me
Int: what did she do to you?
Gra: and then sometimes sir (2.0) that day sir, it's true for me
[wobbly]
Int: sorry, what did, explain again what did she do?
Gra: every time, she's always angry with me [sobs] the *popo*, if

26. I did not finish the work [sobbing] and the *popo* sir also hur
27. [sobs] **hurt** me [sobbing]
28. Int: in what way?
29. Gra: that's why I go to the agency, I said to the agency 'I will not
30. go back again' [sobbing]
31. Int: uhm, uhm, so in what way did they hurt you?
32. Gra: [sobs]
33. Int: just take your time, right (2.0)
34. Gra: and then I tell the agency [sobbing] 'if I go back there, I'm ,
35. I'm the, I'm over-worked sir, I'm the only one in the house,
36. 5000 square foot [wobbly] and then [sniffs] and then
37. [sniffs] my agency call my, and then my agency [said] 'you
38. **must** go, you **must** go, go back to the house because you
39. have the lending, I have my loans in the Philippines sir
40. (1.0) you **must** pay, you **must** pay, I don't know sir if I'm
41. terminated sir […]
42. Gra: and then I cannot work fast because I'm very tired sir
43. [sobbing]
44. Int: you're so tired, yeah
45. Gra: I have no energy because, no sleep and then no breakfast,
46. how can I work? [sobbing]
47. Int: no, so you didn't get any food either?
48. Gra: and then sometimes sir, is very, I cannot, I can, I'm not
49. feeling well sir, lying in bed, that's why I complain [about]
50. my employ, my employer [sobbing]

Liezel and Grace's stories provide typical examples of the humble subservient helpers and sacrificial daughters, wives and mothers who are prepared to suffer almost any humiliation if only they can send money home to their families (Huang, Teo and Yeoh 2000). Liezel identifies language as a major reason why her contract was terminated (lines 1-3), and her experience is typical for FDHs at the shelter. It is common for two or three generations to live together in Chinese households, and since both parents often work outside the home, it is the grandparents, who usually do not speak any English, who have to deal with the

helper. Lack of communication may lead to escalating violence, as it happens in Liezels' case (lines 3-4, 6 and 12-14). In their research on domestic migrant workers in Toronto, England and Stiell (1997) show how language is used to construct 'the competent domestic worker' (cf. 'They think you're as stupid as your English is', p. 195). Something similar happens in Hong Kong where FDHs' inability to speak Chinese is used to construct them as allegedly incompetent, stupid and unlikeable (lines 8-10; Ladegaard 2013a). Liezel explains how she is fired because she cannot speak (presumably) Cantonese, but interestingly, she self-corrects and instead, puts the blame on the grandmother's inability to speak English (line 10). Although by very subtle means, she thus claims some legitimacy for herself. But when it happened, she was struck by fear and therefore, her response to being physically assaulted was to apologise (lines 13 and 15). By apologising for the *employer's* demeaning behaviour, she not only recognises her own inferior position, but is essentially issuing the employer with a carte blanche to abuse her.

Another sign of Liezel and Grace's perceived inferiority and deference is their use of the respectful term of address 'Sir' which Grace in particular uses consistently throughout her narrative (11 times in this excerpt), despite the interviewer's request to be called by his first name. It is possible that the terms 'Sir' and 'Madam', which are used repeatedly in many sharing sessions, are automated responses to which the women do not attach much importance (see Ladegaard 2012), but it is also possible that the women signal their perceived inferior status and deference through this term of address (see Wortham and Gadsden 2006).

The first step in narrative therapy is a problem-saturated description of past events (White and Epston 1990). The narrator is encouraged to share her story and by doing so, she externalises the problem by naming her anxieties (Payne 2006). During her painful narrative, which is interrupted several times by what Toolan (2001: 162) calls 'diffuse stories', defined as 'a chunk of story … followed by a chunk of multi-party conversation glossing, clarifying and amplifying aspects of the story chunk just told', Grace takes us through a story of repeated humiliations, hunger, physical assault, fatigue and fear. It is a story that is unfortunately all too common among FDHs at the church shelter, particularly among first-timers who do not know their rights and therefore often put up with far more than they should.

A characteristic feature of Grace's narrative is that once she gets into her story, it takes over and tells itself, as it were. The interviewer asks several clarifying questions (lines 21, 24, 28 and 47), but Grace does not respond. This is a pattern we often see in the telling of trauma narratives, and the reason is arguably not that the teller does not want to answer the questions, but, more likely, that she may be so engulfed in her storytelling that she does not hear the questions.

It is also noticeable that we see signs of voids in the narrative flow in Grace's storytelling. There are incomplete utterances (lines 19, 22 and 48), repetition (lines 19, 34-35, 36, 40 and 48), a somewhat incoherent narrative at times (lines 48-50), as well as general confusion about her situation not knowing, for example, whether or not her contract has been terminated (lines 40-41). While the linguistic manifestation of these features may also be found in 'natural' conversations, their cognitive and emotional manifestations are arguably different in trauma narratives. The point here is the mismatch between the knowledge or personal meaning of events, and the words available to describe them, that trauma victims are struggling with (cf. Brockmeier 2008: 22). Thus, trauma storytelling is broken and disconnected, not so much because the teller is searching for the right vocabulary, but because a vocabulary that would adequately capture the event is not available (see further in Rowena's narrative in Excerpt 5).

Grace's story is the broken narrative of a woman in distress whose traumatic experiences have had wide-reaching consequences, including physical symptoms like sickness and fatigue (lines 42 and 49). She started working at 6am every morning, and she rarely finished until 1 or 2am, which explains the extreme fatigue. She is trapped in debt bondage (lines 37-40), and in subsequent lines not reported here, she tells the group that she was under surveillance 24/7. The employer had installed surveillance cameras in each and every room, and if she tried to sit down and rest even for five minutes, the grandmother or the employer's sister would immediately order her to get back to work.

Liezel and Grace's narratives are not solo-performances, but, in line with the social constructionist approach (Burr 2003) and Toolan's (2001) sociolinguistic approach to narrative analysis that were adopted for this study, should be seen as joint discursive accomplishments between group members in the sharing session. As Brown and Augusta-Scott (2007: xvii) put it: 'All individual stories are social stories: There is never a sole author.' Minimal response provides reassurance that

the teller has an attentive audience, which probably makes it easier to continue a story that includes painful self-disclosures. In the last part of Grace's story (lines 42-50) the feedback from the interviewer provides her with recognition and sympathy (lines 44 and 47), which may encourage her to experience the self-sympathy she has so far been denying herself and allow her emotions to be expressed through more intensive forms of crying (lines 27, 32, 43, 46 and 50) (see Ladegaard 2014 for a more detailed analysis of crying in FDH narratives).

Dehumanisation and self-blame

The next example involves an Indonesian helper who had run away from an abusive employer. Maryane's narrative is a story of unspeakable suffering, and unlike most FDH narratives, it is documented which makes it even more compelling, and the cruelty of the employer more unfathomable (see Ladegaard 2013a; 2014). She recorded her employer yelling at her and beating her on her mobile phone, and afterwards, she used her phone to take pictures of her swollen face and bruises. For four months, Maryane was beaten every day; she worked 16-18 hours a day, she was starving, and she had to sleep inside the toilet. In Madelyn's case in Excerpt 1, and in Liezel and Grace's stories in Excerpt 2, there was some small movement in identity presentation from victimhood to survival, but this is not the case for Maryane. In Excerpt 3, she recounts the repeated beatings, and she shows the pictures she has taken of her bruised face and body to her peers and the interviewer/volunteer.

Excerpt 3

Maryane, 28 years old, Indonesian, 2 years in Hong Kong, 2 years in Singapore and 2 years in Malaysia before HK; Cherie, 37 years old, Filipina, 1 month in HK; Iris, 44 years old, Filipina, 1 year in Hong Kong, 4 years in Taiwan and 5 years in Malaysia before HK (original in English).

1. Mar: because every day she beat me because I think in the
2. morning my employer want to slap or beat, this is the (1.0)
3. so many days she's doing this with me, I cannot think, I
4. don't know why (2.0) I'm scared already, I don't want to
5. see her already [wobbly voice]

6. Int: of course not, no
7. Mar: see my mouth will bleed, see this is a little bit, this is
8. my mouth [showing photos]
9. Int: yeah, yeah
10. Mar: beaten, and it's black already (2.0) not nothing, because last
11. time only my ear has blood
12. Int: yeah, yeah
13. Mar: I don't know why
14. Int: I'm sorry
15. Che: can I look?
16. Mar: you can look (1.0) you're more better than me, you know
17. Che: yes, I'm better
18. Iris: it's so worse
19. Int: yes it's terrible, your case
20. Mar: no holiday, also no money you know, she never give
21. me holiday
22. Che: no? even once?
23. Mar: **no**, she also won't give me money, just my heart is not like,
24. I just, what she wants to do I follow (1.0) just like this, my
25. heart's just like this, also I'm not angry with my employer,
26. this is my mistake, just like this, it's my xx
27. Int: it's certainly **not** your mistake, that's for sure, it's not **your**
28. fault, that's for sure
29. Mar: yes, I never like get angry with the employer, and then I do
30. the wrong things, I just try to be patient with my employer,
31. my female employer is very tired, because much more work,
32. what I care (1.0) every day patient for ma'am (1.0) go and beat
33. and slap and hit me, even on the floor, my head, big pain
34. you know, but I try to be patient, very patient
35. Int: it's terrible, terrible, terrible

Maryane returns to the beatings and humiliations she was subjected to for four months several times during the sharing session. It is as if the beatings are unfinished events that simply require several tellings. Like Grace's story in Except

2, the narrative is at times somewhat incoherent, or broken; it includes incomplete utterances (lines 2, 10, 23-24), it is not always clear what she is talking about (lines 10, 32 and 33), and she even meta-reflects on her inability to think clearly (line 3). The narrative style Maryane uses is also distinct: it is a staccato, high-speed presentation, almost at times rambling (lines 32-33), and in combination with several unfinished utterances, it gives the impression of a person in immense distress who lacks words and clarity to present a coherent story. In a subsequent line not reported here, she verbalises this dilemma when she says: 'just like this (1.0) this is my (2.5) my, I cannot talk.' Maryane is a comparatively fluent speaker of English, so it is likely that her inability to tell a coherent story is caused by the trauma she has experienced. Tuval-Mashiach *et al.* (2004: 285-286) noted that the most salient characteristic of immediate accounts of trauma is that it is 'a fragmented, partial and intensive account, which could barely be called a story.' The same can be said about Maryane's account, which she narrated only a day after she had run away from her abusive employer. The many relatively lengthy pauses might be an example of what Brockmeier (2008: 29) has called 'black outs' or 'voids in the narrative flow', and they signify a rupture within the victim's existence.

As group members look through the many photos of Maryane's bruised face and body, they express their sympathy (lines 15 and 17), as well as their disbelief and shock at what they are witnessing (lines 18 and 22). And Maryane voices her own disillusion through existential questions like 'I don't know why' (line 13), and, in subsequent lines not reported here, 'I found my life very hard [sobbing].' Arguably the most distressing part of Maryane's narrative is her remark in lines 25-26: 'I'm not angry with my employer, this is my mistake.' What often happens with trauma victims is that they blame themselves for the injustice they have been subjected to (Herman 1992). Brison (1999: 41) points out that 'victims of human-inflicted trauma are reduced to mere objects by their tormenters', and Herman (1992) argues along the same lines that trauma 'destroys the belief that one can *be oneself* in relation to others' (p. 53). What happens for the victim is 'the undoing of the self by trauma' (Brison, 1999: 39); the person's self is gradually being destroyed and therefore, needs to be reconstructed. Trauma victims are reduced to mere objects with no voice and no subjectivity, and in the face of her tormentor's dehumanisation, Maryane constructs herself as a voiceless victim who needs to be

patient and understanding, and even excuse the actions of, and sympathise with, her perpetrator (lines 29-31). The employers' demeaning treatment of their domestic helpers destroys their self-confidence so that they eventually come to see themselves as 'not worthy to be respected' (Ladegaard 2013a: 49). Later in the sharing session, Maryane says 'I always get an employer like this, I don't know', and although she claims her first employer in Singapore was not as bad as her Hong Kong employer, she still admits to not being paid for nearly one year when she worked in Singapore. Again, it is noticeable how Maryane constructs herself as the one to blame for her misfortune. When the interviewer emphasises that this is not her fault (lines 27-28), she does not respond but reiterates: 'I do the wrong things' (lines 29-30).

The ultimate defeat for FDHs is subscribing to the employer's dominant discourses about migrant women's alleged stupidity and incompetence, and reiterating that there is nothing they can do. Excerpt 4 below from Harum's story is an example of this fatalistic approach, which is also focused on self-blame and defeat. Harum, an Indonesian helper with extensive experience, has been accused of stealing expensive cosmetics from her employer. She is innocent but does not even try to prove it. She knows that the female employer reported her to the police to avoid paying the compensation she is obligated to pay by law if she terminates the contract prematurely. But Harum eventually admits to stealing, and is therefore sent to prison for two weeks and subsequently deported from Hong Kong. When asked about their dreams for the future towards the end of the sharing session, Harum says:

Excerpt 4

Harum, 28 years old, Indonesian, 11 months in Hong Kong, 7 years in Singapore before Hong Kong. Two more Indonesian helpers and a Filipina helper were in this sharing session (original in English).

1. Har: my dream is to have enough money for my future, so I can
2. help my family, then maybe when I get married, then I have
3. enough money in the bank, but God see it different, I have to,
4. I can't work in Hong Kong anymore (1.0) go back to
5. Indonesia, that's why I can't support them anymore [laughs]

6. can't work in Hong Kong anymore, have to go back to
7. Indonesia, have to go back to Indonesia (1.0) not enough
8. money, it's okay, but can't get happy [laughs] can't have
9. a happy family, maybe can't be happy, it's okay, not
10. enough money

Harum's testimony is another example of a FDH whose own voice has been silenced by repression and fear, and who has given in to a fatalistic approach to life. She keeps reiterating that she cannot work in Hong Kong (lines 4 and 6), and has no money (lines 7-8 and 9-10), and that she has to go back to Indonesia (lines 3 and 5). She even implies that God does not want her to fulfil her dreams (line 3) and therefore, she cannot be happy (line 8). The laughter (lines 5 and 8) is clearly not humorous but, more likely, a face-saving device, or a means to laugh at adversity in order not to be destroyed by it (Ladegaard 2013c). However, Harum admits to being defeated, and her mantra becomes 'it's okay' (lines 8 and 9) which she reiterates repeatedly throughout the sharing session.

Trauma storytelling: 'Like a raging river'

In the next story, Rowena, a 43-year old first-timer from the Philippines, testifies how she is maltreated and abused repeatedly for six months by her employer, a university professor and his family. She is shouted at, deprived of food and sleep, and always followed around the flat by the female employer.

Excerpt 5

Rowena, 43 years old, Filipina, 6 months in Hong Kong; Rutchel, 40 years old, Filipina, 8 years in Hong Kong, 9 years in Taiwan before HK; Lailani, 31 years old, Filipina, 2 months in Hong Kong. Two more Filipina helpers were in the sharing session (original in English).

1. Row: she's always 'Rowena do this, clean that, clean the
2. bedroom', 'but ma'am you said', 'I changed my mind', like
3. that, she's always shouting, she's always (1.0)
4. Rut: screaming also?
5. Row: screaming and I have a trauma, I I sleep like that (2.0) I have no (2.0)

6. Rut: shock?
7. Lai: scared?
8. Row yeah
9. Rut: shock?
10. Row: even now, I have er: like (1.0)
11. Rut: shock?
12. Row: I have a: (1.0)
13. Lai: you wake up?
14. Row: trauma, yeah
15. […]
16. Row: when I came back to the house, she, she, what's that
17. called?, she's screaming, she's shouting [at] me, then she
18. fired me (1.0) and then, then I always do my I know I finished
19. my, my cleaning in the house, the bedrooms, then cooking,
19. preparing the food, cooking, then I waited for sir because sir
20. is the one who sign my contract, the I said to sir that 'sir,
21. ma'am fired me [wobbly voice], so I'm not, I cannot work
22. anymore in your [sobbing] (3.0)
23. Int: it's okay
24. Row: 'I cannot work in your family because ma'am is awful,
25. she's very (2.0) very worse for me , and then, now then sir,
26. sir: 'okay, **go** to your room, room and **pack** all your things', then
27. I go to my room then pack all my things but I don't go down,
28. and then many times sir push me to go down, also my my
29. things,'Rowena, I don't see your things, go outside', 'but sir
30. I want money', even a plane ticket only, I don't go down (1.0)
31. '**no**, I don't give you **any**, any money', 'but sir, I don't go
32. down', 'just, just **go down**, **go down'**, but I go down and
33. ma'am, they push me to go down, but they don't give me, even
34. a plane ticket only , that's why they said to me, they said to me
35. that, just go down, it, it's, it's not, it's not, don't, don't bother
36. about the money they said [sobbing]

In the first part of Rowena's narrative, her friends are helping her construct her story. It is a prime example of a broken narrative where the narrator, at least initially, is struggling to continue her story, or even decide which direction it should take. Rowena is a comparatively very fluent speaker of English, so this is presumably not a question of lacking vocabulary, but more likely, because she is traumatised (line 5) and therefore, unable to bridge the traumatic gap between language and experience. Notice how Rutchel asks three time if 'shock' is the word she is looking for (lines 6, 9 and 11), and Lailani asks if she is scared (line 7) or suffering from insomnia (line 13). Although the story has some of the characteristics of a performance, defined as 'a particularly involved and dramatized narrative' (Toolan 2001: 160), suggesting a skilful storyteller, it is still noticeable that initially Rowena is unable to respond to her peers' suggestions and tell a coherent story. She appears to be imprisoned in what Herman (1998: S146) has called 'the wordlessness of trauma', so she ignores their comments, but maintains that she is suffering from trauma (line 14). Notice also how the many relatively lengthy pauses contribute to the impression of an incoherent story (lines 3, 5, 10 and 12).

In the turns omitted (line 15), Rowena gives a detailed account of what happened on the day she was fired, and when she recounts how her male employer shouted at her (lines 26-27 and 32), refused to pay her salary and the one-month notice (line 31 and 35-36), and how, eventually, she was pushed down the stairs (lines 28 and 32-33), she sobs and narrates her story in a panic-stricken voice. It is, to use a metaphor from Medved and Brockmeier's (2008: 61) research on stroke patients, 'like a raging river sucking up everything it is path; a stream of consciousness out of control.' She is completely engulfed by her story, she sobs, gasps for breath, and yet, is capable of applying several performance features to her story acting out, for example, the dialogue she had with her employers prior to her departure from their house. She uses the vicarious voice (L. Hydén 2008) of her employer, acting out, with his condescending tone, rapidly spitting out the words as it were (e.g., **go down go down**[8], line 32). The performance features include repetition (lines 21-24, 28, 32 and 35), expressive sounds and sound effects (like shouting) (lines 26, 31 and 32), and the use of the historical present (lines 24-33), and the function is to make the story more vivid, immediate and

persuasive, and to facilitate increased engagement and commitment from the audience (Toolan 2001).

An interesting case for comparison in this sharing session is Rutchel's story. Like Rowena, she has been humiliated and demeaned repeatedly by her female employer, and one particularly grotesque example is when she is forced to drink dirty water from the mop. Having washed the kitchen floor, she rinses the mop in the sink (as she has seen her predecessor do) and this infuriates the female employer: 'so she get the mop, she get the glass and she press, **you** drink it **you** drink it, **you** are very stupid, you are so dirty (1.0) and then after that I drink because she forced me.' Rutchel has no doubt experienced the incident as demeaning and humiliating. She tells the group that her feelings were hurt, but she does not *appear* to be traumatised by the event to the same extent as many of her peers. I am not claiming that Rutchel is not traumatised; as Trinch (2013) argues, trauma narratives may not always be presented in ways that conform linguistically and emotionally to the expected narrative of pain, suffering and victimisation. However, the fact that Rutchel has 17 years of experience as a migrant worker is no doubt important. When asked how she has survived all these difficulties, she tells the group that her faith makes her strong: 'I trust God, that's why I'm very strong, because I trust God, God is powerful' (see Ladegaard 2015).

Another reason that Rutchel appears to be affected to a lesser extent is that she eventually puts down her foot and calls the police. The employer has threatened her and thrown away the food she had bought for herself, so she calls the police, and meets them outside the building, saying: 'there's a bad madam inside that house, yeah, that house is like hell.' And even though the police do not do anything, she has made her point and communicated to the employer that she is able to draw the line. Thus, she keeps her self-respect, her voice and her subjectivity, despite the humiliations. Rowena, on the other hand, has lost her subjectivity and keeps reiterating that she just wants to go back to the Philippines. She cries repeatedly throughout the sharing session, but eventually, agrees to file a complaint to the Labour Tribunal for underpayment. As we saw it in Maryane's story, trauma has far-reaching consequences, and time is essential in terms of regaining the lost voice and feel strong enough to seek justice (Brison 2002; Herman 2003).

Trauma and depression

In some of the previous excerpts (particularly Madelyn in Example 1, but also to some extent Liezel and Grace in Excerpt 2), there was some evidence that the storytelling and the accompanying crying led to some degree of catharsis (Cornelius 2001). The women became visibly relieved and participated more after they had told their story. Thus, we might argue that the crying has helped bridge the traumatic gap and at least initiated a slow and gradual process towards recovery (Duval and Béres 2007; Lafrance and Stoppard 2007). However, this is not the case in all trauma narratives. Both women in Excerpt 6 cry repeatedly, and throughout the sharing session, there is a sense of hopelessness and despair. Both women are first-timers, and therefore unprepared for the hardships they have experienced. When asked what they think about the future, Rizza says:

Excerpt 6

Rizza, 30 years old, Filipina, 2 months in Hong Kong and 2 years in Dubai before Hong Kong. One more Filipina helper was in the sharing session (original in English).

1. Riz: I'll just go back to the Philippines sir because I have
2. been traumatised [wobbly] even now, I'm still always crying
3. for what happened to me [sobbing] I just want to go back and
4. take my money from the agency, they don't even help me
5. at the time [wobbly]
6. Int: yeah (2.0) right
7. […]
8. Riz: many sir, many advised me, 'find another employer' but no,
9. I'm still, still have the phobia sir [sobbing]
10. Int: uh, you still have what? Sorry
11. Riz: the phobia sir, I'm still (1.0) I'm still afraid, I'm still, I'm still
12. in trauma [wobbly], maybe it's better I will just go back to
13. the Philippines and take care of my children [sobbing]
14. Int: uh-uh, yeah, right (3.0)
15. Riz: maybe I'll apply to another place sir, but not as a
16. domestic helper because before in Dubai I was a waitress

17. in a hotel, sir [wobbly] just this first time I work as a
18. domestic helper because (2.0) I have a vision, sir, to go to
19. Canada (2.0) for the better future of my children (1.0) but
20. for this, I cannot anymore [sobbing]
21. Int: mhm, right, so it's been too difficult for you, yeah yeah
22. Riz: [sobbing loudly]
23. […]
24. Riz: I still have a lot of credit in the Philippines sir, if I go back
25. there, am I crazy anymore? If I'm back there, will I die
26. already?, I'm already dead [sobbing]
27. Int: right (4.0) has anyone been able to help you while you were
28. here? (1.0) were you able to go to church for example and get
29. some help from other Filipinos while you were//
30. Riz: //yes sir, I'm
31. always going to church, that's why sometimes I ask God,
32. '**wh**y [did] you let this happen to me?' [sobbing]
33. Int: I understand, yes

Rizza's problems go deeper than being traumatised by her employer. Herman (1998: S148) argues that 'the telling of the trauma inevitably plunges the survivor into profound grief', and Rizza's story is an example of this plunge into the darkness of depression. She is afraid that she is losing her mind (line 25), or is going to die (lines 25-26). In fact, she claims that she is already dead (line 26). According to Brison (1999), it is typical for people who have experienced trauma to feel that the 'real' me is dead because the person's subjectivity was killed by the trauma. Rizza's fear also relates to the future; she had dreamed of going to Canada, still considered as a 'the promised land' for domestic migrant workers because the government allows them to apply for residency. However, her dream of a better future for her children has been shattered. She has realised she cannot go (lines 19-20), and what is left now, is fear and anxiety about the future. She needs to return to the Philippines where loan sharks will soon begin to harass her because of the loans she took (here referred to as 'credit', line 24) to pay her agency fees.

The interviewer's question about going to church (line 28) is not so much a question about spiritual help, as a question about advice and guidance, which FDHs often get through one of the church communities in Hong Kong that provide for migrant workers. However, this question leads to another existential question for Rizza. She has put her trust in God, but unlike the majority of Filipina FDHs, who are confident that God will provide for them and help them (Ladegaard 2015), Rizza has lost faith and does not understand why this was allowed to happen. She is a woman in crisis, still afraid and still suffering from trauma (lines 1-3). She needs more time to recover, and in her case, talking about her trauma and crying appear to bring no immediate relief.

The way out

We shall conclude the analyses by looking at a couple of excerpt from a sharing session that contained at least three trauma narratives (including Madelyn's in Excerpt 1), but the session was also characterised by a certain degree of hope and optimism. Particularly Vanessa, a 41-year old helper from the Philippines with 14 years of experience as a migrant worker, was able to propose a way forward for the distressed and traumatised women in the sharing session. In Excerpt 7, Madelyn is coming to the end of her narrative and explains how her family has responded to what has happened to her.

Excerpt 7

Madelyn, 25 years old, Filipina, 2 months in Hong Kong; and Vanessa, 41 years old, Filipina, 18 months in Hong Kong, 14 years in Singapore before HK. Three more Filipina helpers were in this session (original in English).

1. Mad: and they [the family] feel so bad because of what happened
2. to me [wobbly]
3. Int: yeah, sure
4. Mad: it's so hard because (2.0) I feel so helpless sometimes (3.0) I
5. feel so bad [sobbing]
6. Int: yeah, no wonder
7. Van: don't feel bad, don't feel bad that things have happened to you
8. (1.0) we are kind of like, we pity ourselves for what happened

9. to us here, but we shouldn't feel bad because we didn't
10. do anything wrong
11. Int: right, right, it's not your fault, no, that's right, it's not
12. your fault

Scholars have defined trauma as a state of complete helplessness (Brison 2002). Herman (1992: 33) notes that trauma victims are 'rendered helpless by overwhelming force', and the problem, she continues, is that 'traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.' Thus, the task for trauma victims is to regain a sense of control of their life, however daunting and seemingly impossible this may appear to be in the immediate aftermath of traumatic events (Herman 1998; Jones, Ardern, Biere and Scott 2015). However, Vanessa, who, throughout the sharing session, is a source of wisdom, is capable of offering comfort, perspective and advice, but also, as in this case, a gentle reminder that self-pity will lead to nothing. What they need to do instead is to regain their sense of control (Herman 1998) by telling themselves that whatever happened to them is not their fault (lines 9-10). The first step towards recovery is to refrain form self-blame. Many of the traumatised women at the shelter are blaming themselves for what happened to them, and this destroyed sense of self prevents them from regaining their voice. But migrant women need to realise that they did not do anything wrong and therefore, they should not feel bad about themselves (line 9).

We shall conclude by analysing another excerpt from the sharing session with five Filipina helpers, including Madelyn and Vanessa (Excerpts 1 and 7). The women are discussing how to survive the traumas they have experienced, and, despite the seriousness of the topic and the sombre mood, the women's sharing is also characterised by hope and optimism.

Excerpt 8

Vanessa, 41 years old, 18 months in Hong Kong, 14 years in Singapore before HK; Merissa, 51 years old, 13 years in HK; Madelyn, 25 years old, 2 months in HK; Joyce, 33 years old, 14 months in HK, 2 years in United Arab Emirates before HK. One more Filipina helper was in this session (original in English).

1. Van: and they [the employers] think that okay, ‘it doesn’t matter
2. **what** I say to you, it doesn’t matter **how** I treat you, because
3. you need the money, the job, and I don’t, we don’t care’, but you
4. see sir at night when we finish our job, we cry [wobbly]
5. Mer: yeah, and then pray//
6. Van: //we cry, we pray [wobbly]
7. Mad: yeah
8. Mer: and then we pray ‘God help me to maintain my job’
9. Joy: yeah
10. Mer: ‘God, give me a job’ (1.0)
11. Van: so hopefully the next day we wake up again
12. Int: yeah
13. Mer: ‘God please help me to maintain my job because I have so
14. many er:’ (1.0)
15. Van: we’ve got a lot of (0.5) ambition, we’ve got a lot of, you
16. know sir, er: (1.0) wishes for our children’s future […] and
17. I keep telling her [the employer] ‘I wish ma’am that one day
18. when I wake up and you wake up, we’ll have a good
19. relationship, but I don’t ask you, I don’t er: like expect you to
20. treat me like your family, just only a little bit of **respect**
21. and think ‘okay, my maid may have feelings too’

For Vanessa and the other migrant women in distress, crying becomes a language that transcends words (cf. Kottler 1996). It communicates to other people that we are in need of help, but for these women, it also becomes a means for them to relate to God and to themselves (Katz 1999; Ladegaard 2014). The potential benefit in the form of immediate emotional relief is also confirmed by some of the women. As Janet, a Filipina helper aptly put it in another sharing session: ‘it [crying] is good for the heart, because if we don’t cry, we explode.’ In this final part of the sharing session, the women express a deep and fundamental need for God, and also a need to cry in order to be in touch with their emotions. And then, they are hopeful to wake up the next day with a renewed sense of hope and optimism (line 11). Ever present in their minds is their ambition and the dreams they have for their children’s future (lines 15-16). But for Vanessa, part of the

continuous prayer, and the emotional expression of despair, is also a realisation that migrant women cannot be silent when it comes to demanding respect and recognition from their employers (lines 17-21). This is Vanessa's dream, and she knows it has to be voiced loud and clear, by the migrant women themselves, in front of their employers. As Herman (1998: S145) argues: 'Trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control over her own life, therefore, the guiding principle for recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor.'

GENERAL DISCUSSION

As we have seen, for many women at the shelter, the experience of trauma led to self-blame, depression and despair, but for others, talking and crying about trauma led to a burgeoning awareness of their own role in resurrecting their suppressed voice. The discussion will focus on this theme. The promise of narrative therapy is that 'externalizing conversations [will] subsequently enable[d] a process of restructuring or re-authoring identities' (Brown and Augusta-Scott 2007: xii), and there is evidence in some women's stories that a process from passive to active resistance has at least been initiated. Madelyn (in Excerpt 1, 7 and 8) is completely quiet during the first half of the sharing session; then she tells her story and cries continuously during the 10 minutes it takes her to tell her story. During the last part of the sharing session, her verbal and paralinguistic behaviour changes noticeably. She participates in the discussion on a par with her friends, and the crying has stopped. She even jokes and laughs with her peers and she comes across as a changed person (see Ladegaard 2013c for an analysis of Madelyn's post-crying discourse). This study is unable to provide any evidence for the long-term effect of talking and crying about trauma, but it does provide some evidence that there is at least a short-term positive effect.

Thus, during the telling of her story, the identity Madelyn claims for herself changes from victimised and vulnerable FDH to, if not empowered, then at least indignant migrant worker who knows she has been wronged and is prepared to fight for her rights. As Duval and Béres (2007: 233) cogently put it

> Thinking about identity as fluid allows for the possibility for movement from an identity that focuses only on being victimized by the trauma to one that includes having

> survived and resisted it. People can move their identities from defining themselves only in relation to the traumatic experience to having identities that involve other elements of their lives.

With the support she receives from her friends in the sharing session, Madelyn is able to move from an identity that focuses exclusively on victimhood to one that also considers other aspects of her life-story. Thus, by the end of the sharing session, she is determined to pursue a complaint against her employers. Something similar happens during Liezel and Grace's storytelling (Excerpt 2). Needless to say, I am not suggesting that one telling has in any way 'fixed' the problem. As Herman (1998: S148) argues, 'The reconstruction of the trauma is never entirely completed; new conflicts and challenges at each new stage of the lifecycle will inevitably reawaken the trauma and bring some new aspect of the experience to light.' But the women have been able to move beyond the wordlessness of trauma and thus, initiated a long and no doubt painful process toward recovery.

However, for other women, there are no signs of movement from passive to active resistance. An example of a FDH who probably could have won a criminal case against her abusive employer is Maryane in Excerpt 3. She is strongly encouraged by her peers and the interviewer to fight for her rights and sue the employer, but she declines. She appears unable to act; she has been victimised by her perpetrator to such extent that she cannot take action[9]. In his discussion of the dilemmas, or 'choiceless choices', faced by death-camp inmates during WWII, Langer (1991: 131) argues that prisoners had to kill their subjectivity in order to save their life; he describes it as 'a kind of annihilation, a totally paradoxical killing of the self by the self in order to keep the self alive.' The victim is completely in his/her perpetrators' power, and therefore, in order to survive, has to kill off his/her own subjectivity. This is an incomprehensible scenario to the self-reliant Western mind, Langer argues, and therefore, inaction is sometimes confused with indifference. He continues:

> The concept of 'you cannot do nothing' is so alien to the self-reliant Western mind (dominated by the idea of the individual as *agent* of his fate) that its centrality, its *blameless* centrality to the

> camp experience continues to leave one morally disoriented. The very concept of blameless inaction by former victims is foreign to the ethical premises of our culture, where we sometimes confuse inaction with cowardice, or indifference (Langer 1991: 85).

Similar claims are made in the domestic migrant worker literature where some scholars have maintained that there is always an element of choice involved in immigration and therefore, scholars should refrain from portraying FDHs as victims (see, for example, Agustin 2003; Liebelt 2011). However, as Maryane, Rizza, Harum and many other FDH testify, for some, the self has been destroyed and with it, the possibility of agency. Despite the prospects of suing the employer and possibly win, they resign themselves to defeat. I shall argue that for these women, this is essentially a 'choiceless choice.' They are incapacitated by trauma and have not been able to regain their voice and their subjectivity. As Brison (1999) argues

> A further obstacle confronting trauma survivors attempting to reconstruct coherent narratives is the difficulty of regaining one's voice, one's subjectivity, after one has been reduced to silence, to the status of an object, or worse, made into someone else's speech, the medium of another's agency (p. 47).

In a recent court case in Hong Kong, a domestic helper (assisted by the Mission for Migrant Workers) sued her employer for physical assault and for not paying her any salary for two years. The 31-year old Indonesian helper, Kartika Puspitasari, claimed she had been tortured repeatedly by her employer for two years, and not paid any salary. The court accepted the torture claim because there was physical evidence to prove it, but the magistrate rejected the request for compensation for unpaid salary because, he argued, "if [Kartika] did not get paid at all, why did she stay on for two years?" (*South China Morning Post*, 21 May 2014). The magistrate and the court apparently did not understand the implications of trauma; they applied 'normal' logic to their reasoning arguing that anyone who does not get paid for two years will leave their employer. However, Kartika and

Maryane's stories are by no means exceptional. Several of the trauma victims in my data did not get paid for extended periods of time, but had been reduced to silence, or, even worse, like Maryane, made into her abusive employer's voice so that she would blame herself for the abuse and find excuses for her employer's inhumane actions. Reconstructing the self, and regaining a voice, takes time, and many women did not make it during the little time they spent at the shelter.

In his psychological approach to the problem of evil, Zimbardo (2007) argues that the pleasure experienced by abusers is not so much in inflicting pain on other people as in 'the sense of power and control one feels in such a situation of dominance' (p. 309) (see also Caton 2010 for a discussion of Abu Ghraib and the problem of evil). Although there is no moral justification for such actions, many FDH narratives bear witness to the lives of lonely female employers who have no professional career, whose husbands work long hours, and who have also lost the position they once enjoyed as head of the household (Constable 2007). For these women, a helper may be perceived as a threat and therefore, belittling and humiliating her, or deliberately destroying her self, may give them some form of self-aggrandisement and personal satisfaction. Foucault (1980) points out that power is always relational and interactive, rather than monolithic and unilateral. Therefore, Flaskas and Humphreys (1993: 44) argue: 'if the effects of power are to be challenged, they can only be challenged from within the power relationship itself, and it is the idea of the always-present potential for resistance that offers some optimism for change in oppressive power relationships.'

It is questionable whether the potential for resistance is always present in any oppressive power relationship. There is no doubt that resistance has to come from within the employer-helper relationship, but the question is how a broken self can regain her voice and her subjectivity and identify a language that allows her to talk about her experiences. Brison (1999: 48) argues that '*saying* something about traumatic memory *does* something to it.' Therefore, as narrative therapy proposes, by telling and retelling trauma narratives, and crying about their emotional impact, dominant repressive discourses are questioned, and over time, the victim may be empowered to rewrite her own story from victimhood to survival and beyond[10] (Duvall and Béres 2007). What Shay (1994) notes in the case of Vietnam veterans' recovery from trauma may also apply to FDHs

> Severe trauma explodes the cohesion of consciousness. When a survivor creates a fully realized narrative that brings together the shattered knowledge of what happened, the emotions that were aroused by the meanings of the events, and the bodily sensations that the physical events created, the survivor pieces back together the fragmentation of consciousness that trauma has caused (p. 188).

The narrative-therapy approach argues that changing people's stories about their lives will eventually help them change their actual lives. It is the re-authoring of identities and life-stories that, hopefully, has been initiated for some trauma victims at the church shelter and thus, suggested a possibility for coping with the trauma and take action. The suppressed voice needs to be resurrected; migrant women need to regain faith in themselves and their own resources, and believe that it is possible to speak up and take action against their employers' repressive and demeaning narratives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From a large corpus of trauma narratives recorded at a church shelter in Hong Kong, eight excerpts were selected for analysis in this article. They deal with common themes in FDH narratives, including hunger, fatigue, physical assault, isolation, and other forms of dehumanisation. The article has contributed to a burgeoning field of discourse analytical trauma narrative research in at least four areas. First, it has highlighted the narrative structure of trauma storytelling: broken narratives with voids in the narrative flow. While this linguistic manifestation is not unusual in 'natural' conversations, its cognitive and emotional manifestation is unique for trauma narratives in that it represents 'a break not just with a particular form of representation but with the very possibility of representation at all, a rupture not just with the way the world is depicted but a rupture within one's existence' (Brockmeier 2008: 29).

Second, the article has argued that crying may be perceived as a means for migrant women in distress to bridge the traumatic gap. Traumatic experiences are chaotic, elusive and paralysing and may lead to a 'catastrophic reaction' in one's mind (Medved and Brockmeier 2004, 2008). One way to deal with this reaction is

to respond emotionally by crying. In FDH narratives, crying is conceptualised as a language that transcends words and thus, has the potential to bridge the traumatic gap. Third, the research in this article has provided evidence of how abusive employers destroy their helpers' self through demeaning discourses. They silence them and make them a medium of their own agency and thus, prevent them from taking action. The only way out is through telling and retelling, and, through peer support and the joint construction of counter-narratives, help the victim regain her voice and reconnect with ordinary life (Herman 1998).

Last but not least, this article has provided evidence of the rampant abuse and exploitation of domestic migrant workers. It has documented narratives of extreme suffering and thus insisted, perhaps even more explicitly than the scientific rationale behind the study, that telling untold stories of trauma is a moral obligation (Shuman 2005). Herman (1998) reminds us that a natural response to trauma is repression, but she also warns us that those who forget the past are likely to repeat it. 'It is for this reason', she concludes, 'that public truth-telling is the common denominator of all social action' (p. S149).

Notes

1. The research reported in this article was supported by two General Research Grants from the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong [grant numbers: HKBU-244211 and HKBU-244413]. I would like to thank the editors and three anonymous reviewers for insightful comments and useful suggestions for improvements on an earlier version of this article. Any shortcomings that remain of course my responsibility. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to staff and volunteers at the Mission for Migrant Workers and Pathfinders, migrant worker NGOs working tirelessly to support FDHs in Hong Kong. Last but not least, my immense gratitude and deep admiration go to all the domestic helpers in Hong Kong, Indonesia and the Philippines who shared their painful stories with me and their friends. From the bottom of my heart: *maraming salamat po/terima kasih banyak.*
2. 'Domestic worker' is the preferred term in the research literature, as 'helper' is perceived by some as having negative connotations (Constable 2014). I (also) use the term 'foreign domestic helper' because the women in my data consistently refer to themselves as 'domestic helpers.' How groups of people

decide to name themselves is important as it often suggests (positive) self-identification, and thus, indicates how they see themselves, and want others to see them (see Milani 2010; see also Ladegaard 2015).

3. Although it is widely acknowledged in migrant worker NGOs that many FDHs are in need of professional counselling, none is provided. There are at least two obstacles: first, in most cases, the trauma is only 'discovered' when the helper runs away from her abusive employer, or her contract is terminated prematurely. In both cases, she only has two weeks to either find a new employer, or risk deportation. Immigration laws stipulate that FDHs can stay only two weeks in Hong Kong after termination of contract. This means there is no time for her to undergo proper therapy. The second obstacle is resources and availability; whilst migrant worker NGOs in Hong Kong might be able to provide professional therapy, provided they have volunteers who can work pro bono, these services are non-existent in the rural communities the women come from.
4. The two dominant groups of migrant workers at the church shelter, Filipinas and Indonesians, are quite different in terms of their social characteristics. The majority of Filipina women tend to be older, married with children, and relatively well educated. This means they are usually fluent in English and therefore, sharing sessions with the Filipinas were conducted in English. The Indonesian women, on the other hand, tend to be younger, single, and with little or no formal education. This means that most Indonesian FDHs do not speak (much) English, and sharing sessions with them were therefore conducted with the help of an interpreter (usually a volunteer or another FDH) using a mix of English, Bahasa and Javanese. The recordings with the Indonesian domestic workers were transcribed and translated by three Indonesian students who were fluent in all three languages.
5. It is impossible to present exact figures because, for some of the women, we only know that it is her first contract in Hong Kong, and it is possible she has experienced abusive employers during one of her previous contracts in another Asian or a Middle-Eastern country. We only know for sure that this is the helper's first experience of abuse if the current contract is her first contract.
6. Hepburn (2004) proposes a detailed transcription of crying events based on their physical characteristics. The starting point for these conventions is

Jefferson's (1985) Conversation Analytic (CA) work on the transcription of laughter. I concur with Hepburn that the physical characteristics of crying are important, but I argue that the transcription conventions proposed by CA scholars are of little value to people who are not intimately acquainted with the CA paradigm. It is virtually impossible to distinguish between transcriptions of laughter and crying, for example.

7. Some of the migrant women whose narratives have been analysed in this article have also appeared in other articles, including Ladegaard 2013a, 2013c, and 2014. However, different excerpts have been used, and/or the foci of the analyses are different.
8. As Rowena tells her audience in a previous turn not reported here, the employer's flat is on the 5th floor. So when she is being ordered repeatedly to 'go down', it presumably means leaving the flat and going down to the ground floor.
9. One possible alternative avenue for action for traumatised women, who find it difficult to verbalise their trauma and subsequently take action, is drama (see Seligman 1995). This has in fact been attempted at the shelter on various occasions, but the effect is yet to be studied in the current context. Future research on returnee narratives will also study bilingual capabilities as a means to deal cognitively and emotionally with trauma (see Tehrani and Vaughan 2009).
10. A recent initiative, derived directly from the research reported in this article, is regular counselling to domestic workers in Hong Kong. The challenge will be to identify the women who need it *before* they lose their job and thus get deported, so that they can receive regular counselling before they return to their home countries where therapy is an impossibility.

References

Agustin, Laura M. 2003. Forget victimization: Granting agency to migrants. *Development* 46: 30-36.

Augoustinos, Martha, Ian Walker and Ngaire Donaghue. 2014. *Social Cognition. An Integrated Introduction* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Briere, John N., Catherine Scott, and Janelle Jones. 2015. The effects of trauma. In John N. Briere and Catherine Scott (eds.) *Principles of Trauma Therapy*

(2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. 25-61.

Brison, Susan J. 1999. Trauma narratives and the remaking of the self. In Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.) *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press. 39-54.

Brison, Susan J. 2002. *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press

Brown, Catrina and Tod Augusta-Scott. 2007. Introduction: postmodernism, reflexivity, and narrative therapy. In Catrina Brown and Tod Augusta-Scott (eds.) *Narrative Therapy. Making Meaning, Making Lives*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. ix-xlii.

Brockmeier, Jens. 2008. Language, experience and the 'traumatic gap': How to talk about 9/11? In Lars C. Hydén and Jens Brockmeier (eds.) *Health, Illness and Culture: Broken Narratives*. New York: Routledge. 16-35.

Burr, Vivien. 2003. *Social Constructionism* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Bülow, Pia. 2008. 'You have to ask a little': Troublesome storytelling about contested illness. In Lars C. Hydén and Jens Brockmeier (eds.) *Health, Illness and Culture: Broken Narratives*. New York: Routledge. 131-153.

Cameron, Deborah, Elizabeth Fraser, Penelope Harvey, Ben Rampton, and Kay Richardson. 1992. *Researching Language. Issues of Power and Method*. London: Routledge.

Caton, Steven C. 2010. Abu Ghraib and the problem of evil. In Michael Lambek (Ed.) *Ordinary Ethics. Anthropology, Language, and Action*. New York: Fordham University Press. 165-184.

Chiu, Stephen W. K. 2005. *A Stranger in the House. Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies & the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Constable, Nicole. 2007. *Maid to Order in Hong Kong. Stories of Migrant Workers* (2nd ed.). Itacha, New York: Cornell University Press.

Constable, Nicole. 2014. *Born Out of Place. Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press

Cornelius, Randolph R. 2001. Crying and catharsis. In Ad J. M. M. Vingerhoets and Randolph R. Cornelius (eds.) *Adult Crying. A Biopsychosocial Approach* Hove, Sussex: Brunner-Routledge. 199-211.

Drakos, Georg. 2008. Globally distributed silences, and broken narratives about

HIV. In Lars C. Hydén and Jens Brockmeier (Eds.) *Health, Illness and Culture: Broken Narratives*. New York: Routledge. 99-121.

Duvall, Jim and Laura Béres. 2007. Movement of identities. A map for therapeutic conversations about trauma. In Catrina Brown and Tod Augusta-Scott (eds.) *Narrative Therapy. Making Meaning, Making Lives*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. 229-250.

England, Kim and Bernadette Stiell. 1997. 'They think you're as stupid as your English is': constructing foreign domestic workers in Toronto. *Environment and Planning A* 29: 195-215.

Flaskas, Carmel and Catherine Humphreys. 1993. Theorizing about power: Intersecting the ideas of Foucault with the 'problem' of power in family therapy. *Family Process* 32: 35-47.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977.* New York: Pantheon.

Frijda, Nico H. 1982. The meanings of emotional expression. In Mary R. Key (ed.) *Nonverbal Communication Today: Current Research*. Berlin: Mouton. 103-120.

Guido, Maria G. (2013). Interpreting trauma narratives in crosscultural immigration encounters between outer-circle and expanding-circle ELF users: Sociolinguistic issues and pedagogic implications. In Yasemin Bayyurte and Sumru Akcan (eds.) *ELF5: Proceedings from the Fifth International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca*. Bogazici: Bogazici University Press. 335-343

Hepburn, Alexa. 2004. Crying: Notes of description, transcription, and interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 37: 251-290.

Herman, Judith L. 1992. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic Books.

Herman, Judith L. 1998. Recovery from psychological trauma. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* 52 (supplement), S145-S150.

Herman, Judith L. 2003. The mental health of crime victims: Impact of legal intervention. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 16, 159-166.

Huang, Shirlina, Peggy Teo and Brenda S. A. Yeoh. 2000. Diasporic subjects and identity negotiations: women in and from Asia. *Women Studies International Forum* 23: 391-398.

Hydén, Lars C. 2008. Broken and vicarious voices in narratives. In Lars C. Hydén

and Jens Brockmeier (eds.) *Health, Illness and Culture: Broken Narratives*. New York: Routledge. 36-53.

Hydén, Margareta. 2008. Break-up narratives. In Lars C. Hydén and Jens Brockmeier (eds.) *Health, Illness and Culture: Broken Narratives*. New York: Routledge. 154-168.

Hydén, Lars C. and Jens Brockmeier (eds.) 2008. *Health, Illness and Culture: Broken Narratives.* New York: Routledge.

Jefferson, Gail. 1985. An exercise in the transcription and analysis of laughter. In Teun van Dijk (ed.) *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (vol. 3). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. 25-34.

Jones, Janelle, Heidi Ardern, John N. Briere and Catherine Scott. 2015. Treating the effects of acute trauma. In John N. Briere and Catherine Scott (eds.) *Principles of Trauma Therapy* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. 231-258.

Jureidini, Ray and Nayla Moukarbel. 2004. Female Sri Lankan domestic workers in Lebanon: A case of 'Contract Slavery'? *Journal of ethnic and Migration Studies* 30: 581-607.

Katz, Jack. 1999. *How Emotions Work*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago press.

Kottler, Jeffrey A. 1996. *The Language of Tears*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ladegaard, Hans J. 2012. The discourse of powerlessness and repression: Identity construction in domestic helper narratives. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 16, 450-482.

Ladegaard, Hans J. 2013a. Beyond the reach of ethics and equity? Depersonalisation and dehumanisation in foreign domestic helper narratives. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 13, 44-59.

Ladegaard, Hans J. 2013b. Demonising the cultural Other: Legitimising dehumanisation of foreign domestic helpers in the Hong Kong press. *Discourse, Context and Media* 2, 131-140.

Ladegaard, Hans J. 2013c. Laughing at adversity: Laughter as communication in domestic helper narratives. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 32, 459-480.

Ladegaard, Hans J. 2014. Crying as communication in domestic helper narratives: Towards a Social Psychology of crying in discourse. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 33, 579-605.

Ladegaard, Hans J. 2015. 'We're only here to help': Identity struggles in foreign domestic helper narratives. To appear in D. v. d. Mieroop & S. Schnurr (eds.) *Identity Struggles. Evidence from Workplaces around the World.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins (forthcoming).

Lafrance, Michelle N. and Janet M. Stoppard. 2007. Re-storying women's depression: A material-discursive approach. In Catrina Brown and Tod Augusta-Scott (eds.) *Narrative Therapy. Making Meaning, Making Lives*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. 23-37.

Langer, Lawrence L. 1980. The dilemma of choice in the deathcamps. *Centerpoint* 4: 222-231.

Langer, Lawrence L. 1991. *Holocaust Testimonies. The Ruins of Memory*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Lambrou, Marina. 2014. Narratives of trauma re-lived: The ethnographer's paradox and other tales. In Bronwen Thomas and Julia Round (eds.) *Real Lives, Celebrity Stories: Narratives of Ordinary and Extraordinary People Across Media*. London: Bloomsbury. 113-128.

Liebelt, Claudia. 2011. *Caring for the Holy Land. Filipina Domestic Helpers in Israel.* New York: Berghahn.

Medved, Maria and Jens Brockmeier. 2004. Making sense of traumatic experiences: Telling your life with fragile X syndrome. *Qualitative Health Research* 14, 741-759.

Medved, Maria I and Jens Brockmeier. 2008. Talking about the unthinkable. Neurotrauma and the 'catastrophic' reaction. In Lars C. Hydén and Jens Brockmeier (eds.) *Health, Illness and Culture: Broken Narratives*. New York: Routledge. 54-72.

Medved, Maria and Jens Brockmeier. 2008b.

Milani, Tommaso M. 2010. What's in a name? Language ideology and social diffentiation in a Swedish print-mediated debate. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14: 116-142.

O'Kearney, Richard and Kelly Perrott. 2006. Trauma narratives and posttraumatic stress disorder: A review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 19: 81-93.

Payne, Michael. 2006. *Narrative Therapy* (2nd ed.) London: Sage.

Phipps, Alison. 2012. Voicing solidarity: Linguistic hospitality and poststructuralism in the real world. *Applied Linguistics* 33: 582-602.

Saville-Troike, M. (2003). *The Ethnography of Communication* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Seligman, Zivya. 1995. Trauma and drama: A lesson from the concentration camps. *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 22, 119-132.

Shay, Jonathan. 1994. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character.* New York: Atheneum.

Shuman, Amy. 2005. *Other People's Stories. Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy.* Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Tehrani, Noreen and Sarah Vaughan. 2009. Lost in translation – using bilingual differences to increase emotional mastery following bullying. *Counselling and Psychotherapy* 9, 11-17.

Tileaga, Cristian. 2005. Accounting for extreme prejudice and legitimating blame in talk about Romanies. *Discourse and Society* 16: 603-624.

Toolan, Michael. 2001. *Narrative. A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Trinch, Shonna. 2013. Recalling rape. Moving beyond what we know. In Chris Heffer, Frances Rock and John Conley (eds.) *Legal-Ley Communication. Textual Travels in the Law.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 288-306.

Tuval-Mashiach, Rivka, Sara Freedman, Neta Bargai, Rut Boker, Hilit Hadar, and Arieh Y. Shalev. 2004. Coping with trauma: Narrative and cognitive perspectives. *Psychiatry* 67: 280-293.

White, Micheal and David Epston. 1990. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. New York: Norton.

Wortham, Stanton and Vivian Gadsden. 2006. Urban fathers positioning themselves through narratives: An approach to narrative self-construction. In Anna De Fina, Deborah Shiffrin and Michael Bamberg (eds.) *Discourse and Identity.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 314-341.

Zimbardo, Richard. 2007. *The Lucifer Effect. Understanding How Good People Turn Evil.* New York: Random House.

APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions

Bold = pronounced with stress/emphasis

Italics = Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia or Cantonese

↑ = high pitch

[it's a] = word(s) inserted by the transcriber to ease comprehension

, = short pause, less than 0.5 second

(2.0) = pause in seconds

'give me that' = reporting direct speech

: (as in ah:) = the vowel sound is prolonged

xx = incomprehensible

// = interruption; //as I said// = overlapping speech

? = question/rising intonation

[…] turn(s) left out

underlining = the feature of crying in [ ] applies to the previous underlined part of the discourse, as in: I have no money [sobbing]

Address correspondence to (from 1 September 2015):

Hans J. Ladegaard

Department of English

Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Hung Hom, Kowloon

Hong Kong SAR

Email: hans.ladegaard@polyu.edu.hk

RUNNING HEAD: Coping with trauma in narratives