

**Outside and inside borders: class, gender and power relations in the migratory
journey of a Filipina in Germany**

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Preface

This paper examines part of the migratory journey of a (nowadays) 45 year old filipino lady from Cebu married to a german national and living in Germany for more than five years. By doing so, it aims to address issues of gender, class and power relations, that impact one individual's trajectory which itself can be described as part of a larger picture that defines (and delineates) today's borders: the world wide female migrations of the past thirty years connecting South-East Asia with North America and Europe. The image of the "filipino bride" or the "filipino nanny", common subject of debate in countries like the United States or Spain, join those of filipinas working in bars in Japan. If these portraits aren't exact representations of reality, they evoke the gendered character of borders and of border crossing. Also evoked by some sociologists and historians, class acts as another element of hierarchy, establishing the possible and the impossible in terms of border crossings. The element of age is oftenly also a marker, younger women having often (not always) more possibilities when it comes to "marriage migration" or becoming entertainment workers. These are some of the issues that will be partially discussed in our paper and that we will address by combining theory and empirical research in order to understand the "moving borders" of gender and class. The migratory journey we address here, which represents only part of these women's life stories, is part of a Master's degree research conducted by the author of the paper in 2015 in Germany within three associations of filipina/south-east asian migrants (in cities near the french-german border of Alsace). The empirical reasearch was conducted among 20 women mainly around their 50's, married with german nationals (or divorced). Some were association leaders. It has been continued as part of a Phd programme and incorporates, besides the individual narrative, an extensive bibliography, as well as other research addressing the subjects of social relations and migration.

1. Introduction

"One narrative among 'a thousand other' narratives

"Nearly five million migrant workers from the Philippines are employed in over 190 countries and territories. They work as doctors and domestic helpers, engineers and entertainers, seamstresses and surveyors. It is through their collective labor that the Philippines has assumed a global presence." (Tyner James A., *The Philippines: mobilities, identities, globalization*, 2009, preface)

Filipino migrant women leave traces. They form families, forge links with the host and arrival countries, educate their children, suffer and live moments of joy. Around them a real universe is formed, made up of community associations, churches, means of mutual aid.

The fragment of biography that inspired the following article is part of a vast ocean of other biographies revealing the deep structures of class and gender at both local and global levels. It allows the analysis to go from the individual to the structural and by doing so it unveils some of social, economical and cultural forces that connects the Philippines with the world-wide economy and current migratory flows. This fragment is only part of someone's life story and was brought to me by a 45 year-old intelligent, self-confident filipina whom I had the opportunity to talk to for about three hours in a row.

I've met Rita during a lunch promoted by the association she belonged to. A small association that promoted filipino culture and folklore for the filipino community in a german region situated in the alsatian-german border, its leader was one of my first contacts in the field. That day I was supposed to have lunch with them and, as the leader had told me, maybe "find some other filipinas to talk to". Having introduced me to the other members after my arrival, she was the only member who accepted to talk to me.

Rita was born in the island of Cebu, one of the many islands of the Philippines. It is one of the most important zones of the country, its capital being an important harbour and one of the important economic zones of the country. Coming from a poor family from the countryside, Rita had to quit school after finishing high school. Soon after having stop studying, she left her parent's house to work in Cebu city, where she spent some years having small jobs and struggling to "pay her bills". A few years later, she married a man from her home town, someone she said to be "the love of her life" but who deceived her many times with other women and spent money gambling. Having had a daughter with him, when the relationship came to an end, she found herself alone with her daughter, and had to ask her family for help. Her father, as she told me, suggested her to go to work as a domestic helper at an acquaintance's house in Madrid - Spain.

Rita told me that she thought a lot before accepting the idea. She didn't want to leave her daughter alone but at the same time had to do it in order to support her (and the family). When she left, as I've

learned from her, she was still young. After leaving the Philippines, Rita went to Madrid to work for a wealthy Filipino family who lived there. Her years with them weren't easy as she didn't like her bosses, whom she blamed for being arrogant and treating her badly, and for paying her too little for the hard work.

As she didn't feel comfortable there, Rita told me that she contacted a friend from the same region who was living in Germany after having married a German man. This friend had told her that life there was much better than in other countries and that this man had a friend, named Herman, who was looking for "the love of his life". After thinking for a while, she made the decision to travel to Germany in order to spend some time with this friend and see if it could work with the man her friend wanted to introduce to her. Rita had told me that she didn't think it would work and that the reason why she had went was to visit her friend and see if it was possible to live and work there.

After spending a few weeks at her friend's house, she found out that life in Germany wasn't bad and that in any case it was better than the one she was living in Spain. After going out a some time Herman, someone she said to be very kind and serious, who had never found true love, she decided that it could work with him even if she wasn't in love. Rita told me that this man was one of a kind because he accepted the fact that she had been married to another man. She told me that the fact she had a daughter in the Philippines didn't bother Herman, him having said to she could eventually bring her to live with them there. Rita told me that it was enough for her to make the decision to leave for once her life in Madrid.

Some time after moving to Germany, and living for a while with her friend, she made the decision to get married. After the marriage, they went to live together in Herman's home town. A few years later, as she told me, he accepted to bring her daughter from the Philippines, fulfilling the promise made at the beginning.

"The Philippines in the world and the world in the Philippines"

"For over five centuries the Philippines has been integrated into the world economy. Only recently, however, has the Philippines been a proactive agent in the production of a global economy. Since the 1970's the Philippine state, in connection with myriad private institutions, has recruited, trained, marketed, and deployed a mobile work force. Annually, approximately one million Philippine migrant workers travel to all corners of the world" (Tynes James A., op.cit)

Arriving at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Spaniards left the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century. The Spanish presence bequeaths to the current Filipino society a conservatism based on the catholicism, as well as a political and economic elite whose power is based on

agricultural holdings. The Philippine societal configuration has such characteristics as patrimonialism, systematic corruption and strong inequalities between the rich and the poor. These characteristics are indeed the legacy of a matrix of Iberian colonization that can be found in other countries that were part of the Spanish or Portuguese Empire (For instance Brazil or ex south american spanish colonies).

Spanish colonization was followed by a North American presence of almost half a century. The nearly fifty years of North American rule left deep marks in Philippine society. The presence of mass american culture and life style is an important mark left by the american years, as well as the United States as the ideal model of wealth and well-being.

To the consequences of the colonization, we should add those brought by the fact of migrations. Migrating is not recent element in the history of the Philippines. During the time of Spanish colonization, and then in the half century of North American occupation, Filipinos were already migrating. If in the days of the Spaniards one can speak of the members of the Filipino elite who were studying in Spain, in the time of the North Americans one can talk about the Filipino migrants on working in the fields in Hawaii.

The end of the second world war announced the exhaustion of North American colonization. The cycle of colonization ended with the transmission of power by the Americans and the consequent proclamation of the young Filipino republic. The regime that is born of decolonization historically accumulates the consequences of almost four centuries of foreign presence. This Philippine state is consequently the result of a syncretism constituted by the mixture of Iberian patrimonialism and North American liberalism. Patrimonialism, endemic corruption, inequalities between the rich and the poor, and immense external debt are the challenges that the Philippine state faces in the post-independence years. It is in this crisis that the issue of migration becomes a major issue for the country.

From 1965 to 1986, the Philippines lived under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. This is a very important period in the history of the country as it is a key moment in the construction of the modern Philippine State, as well as in its appropriation of migratory flows that will characterize the model of belonging to the world global economy.

From the 1960's to today, the Philippines has been playing an important role in world globalized economy. Filipinos and filipinas are literally everywhere. From the domestic helpers working in Europe or the middle east to filipino sailors travelling all around the globe, from filipinas entertainers in Japan to those who get married in countries like Taiwan or the United States, the presence of the Philippines in world-mide migratory flows is undeniable.

A country who faces enormous social and economic problems, among which poverty, lack of infra-structures, concentration of wealth and land, the filipino current model of integration to the global economy as a "work force exporter" relies for the most part on these men and women who, acting

within class structure of filipino society, work abroad and send their families their income earned abroad. This model, a small piece in global economy, and based on cheap work force moving around the world, is framed by power and class relations that nationally and internationally establish the conditions of further border crossing.

Therefore, the Philippines more than any other country in the world has on border crossing a main element of it's economy, to some extent the way it perceives itself, and definetly the way it relates to the rest of world. Acknowledging the diversity of these filipino mobilities through out history affirms the importance of historical analysis to better understand them. After having quickly established the historical context, we will try to go deeper into how the south-easian country's model of border crossing tells us a lot about social relations of class and gender that shape and are shaped by how each one of us cross borders.

2. "Crossing borders" within multiple social relations

The long and complex biographical trajectories that make the presence of the Philippines in today's world-wide power, gender and class relations, is above the story of multiple experiences of crossing multiple borders. Some cross them temporarily, others cross them and establish themselves in other places. Others have border crossing as a way of living, while many aren't able to go beyond their countries limits. Borders can be geographical if one refers to space, but also cultural, when one crosses distinct cultural areas. These boundaries are also social insofar as we cross according to our belongings and constrained precisely by the organization of the society from which we come and to where we are going. They are also historical, in that the crossing clearly depends on the period and the temporal context, and legal for what is, for example, the tracing of the borders between one country and the other according to the international and national laws. The border or borders thus can create, at the same time, and in different ways, division and cohesion according to the period, social norms and categorizations, spatial organization or legal norms.

Rita has crossed several borders. She has crossed them according to her social belonging: woman, originally from a "southern" country belonging to an inferior social class, young, a low level of education, as she only had to quit school to work. On arrival other borders were added other lines the separate her from women from other places in the world: immigrant, speaking very few spanish. Border crossing was possible and took place within the framework of what it is socially. Borders are therefore largely dependent on social constraints, since we do not cross in any way, neither when nor as we want. As a woman "from the south of the world", she does not move like a man or woman "from the north", nor have the same possibilities to move as if she came from France or Norway. In the same way, she didn't move either as a "southern" woman from a high social class in her own country. Thus the social class is present, but also social relations of sex, nationality, belonging to the

"center" or the "periphery" of the world, level of urbanity, belonging to one generation or another, having studied or not, among other important social markers.

Being a woman from a "poor country", the aspect of sex relations is clearly an element that structure borders, and border crossing. It establishes the possible and impossible in terms of female migratory trajectories in the global arena. Saying social relations of sexe means understanding what unites and separates men and women as the result, as in any social relationship, of a tension around which antagonisms arise. This way to perceive social relations of sex, as according to the writings of Danièle Kergoat (2005) and other important feminist researchers, result in understanding "sex" as the production of a hierarchy that subordinates women to men by assigning tasks and social roles determined in advance by this dynamic. This tension that divides society and that generates as well gendered imaginaries, takes place around resources (power, mobility) and the resulting gender inequality has concrete consequences, including the difficulty of access to power (or mobility) by women, differences in wages between men and women, but also the fact that domestic work is largely provided by women. In the case of some european countries like Italy or Spain, some of these come, like Rita, from the Philippines.

The symbolic aspects of this dynamic of inequality are, among other things, certain representations that pictures women in several areas of social life with regard to feelings ("a woman loves more than a man", "a woman always acts with her "heart", work ("a woman can not do the same things as a man") or sexuality ("sex is a domain of men"). In this sense, we prefer to talk about social relations as one of the social forms of the border, class, "race" and generation being some others.

At the center of the narrative of her migratory journey the fact of having been a domestic helper in a well-to-do Filipino family living in Spain and the occasion of her meeting with her german husband. Being a domestic helper represents in for what her biography is a difficult start, while meeting her german husband and getting married to him is the occasion for the stabilization of this same trajectory. That Rita had first arrived as a domestic helper and that she was subsequently married is hardly surprising. How she crossed borders illustrates a significant trend of female migration at the global level already seen in the years of 1980-1990 and analyzed in 2004 "*Global woman: nannies, maids and sex wokers in the new economy*" by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie R. Hochschild. Today, many women from the so called "southern countries" take the migration path to work as domestic workers in European countries, North-america, and/or in the oil monarchies of the middle east (Qatar, Saudi Arabia).

Many of these women come from the Philippines, other south-eastern asian countries, or even latin america (If we talk about the spanish example). If they come to work as domestic servants in the "north", many also move to work in hospitals as nurses or sometimes to work in the European prostitution market. If the examples seem rigid, they aren't. Moving from prostitution to domestic work might happen as borders between one thing and the order are thin and unstable. An important

number of women migrate as well to marry a man from the "north" or a "developed" country", as in the example of Nicole Constable's 2003 work *"Romance on a global stage: pen-pals, virtual ethnography and mail-order brides"*, that presents the stories of chinese or filipinas and their european or american husbands.

Coming to Spain as a domestic helper unveils another important aspect of Rita's trajectory. The emotional work or *care* she was expected to do as she "took care" emotionally and physically of the family's children expresses the grip of the boundary between gender relations on women's migration trajectories and, more generally, the expression of the social boundary (norms and social organization) on the migratory paths of all (men or women, social classes). It is not surprising that she could have arrived in Spain as a domestic helper. In her 1979 work, *"The managed heart: commercialization of human feelings"*, american sociologist Arlie Hochschild analyzes contemporary feminine migrations by highlighting their link to what is called emotional work or the work in which an effort to mobilize emotions is required of those who do the job.

The concept mobilized by Hochschild makes it possible to understand the presence of *care* work of women in occupations in which emotions occupy a fundamental place. We can talk about emotional work, at instance, in the case of, nurses and domestic workers, but also other medical professions. The 1980's, for example, marked the deepening of the phenomenon of care related migration and of migration in general in the Philippines. This fact reveals, among other things, the share of women in international migration. Often forgotten at the time of the construction of statistics, women are a non-negligible part of international migration.

In the developed countries, the need for workers for the so called *"care jobs"* is added as a catalyst for their participation in the phenomenon of migration. The the lack of state policies for early childhood in some european countries as Spain or Germany also contributed to an increase in demand for work in the *care sector*.

Rita's example therefore falls within the framework of the migrations which aim, in some way, to ensure this emotional work in several areas of the economy (Domestic helpers, nurses, life assistants). If she is a "global woman" as in Ehrenreich and Hochschild's work, Rita's and many other women's way of "becoming global women" is framed by social relations that in the world-wide and local levels separate men from women, rich from poor, the north from the south.

All these ideal-types of frequent female migration are most often intertwined. One can thus move from prostitution to the market of domesticity and vice versa. One can also become a prostitute along the way, study and find work as a nurse. The line of feasible and non-feasible is constructed according to the local and global gender, power and class relations in which their heterogeneous paths are inscribed. If this unequal order is indeed the border that separates women and men in migration, it also lays the groundwork for its crossing.

3. "Imagining borders, playing with them"

Rita's migratory trajectory allow do not allow us to grasp it from a reductive perspective. What lies in between her migratory journey, broader social processes (power relations, social relations of sex, of class), and individual framing, is the structure within someone like Rita imagined and managed the possible issues while on the move. As imagination and individual characteristics let us room to act while facing a situation, she managed to find an issue for something that for her represented a problem: working for a family who treated her badly.

If Rita managed to imagine the issue, as she was able to imagine the way to leave the situation that was bothering her by contacting a friend who was married in Germany. She managed to access her personal network in order to find a solution. As both of their examples illustrate world-wide sex and power relations, as one migrated through marriage and the other through domesticity, networking happens within the borders of how one imagine issues.

Imagining inside thin and moving borders means being able to find and use means that are shaped and established within social relations. Rita's migratory trajectory allowed her to accumulate knowledge and skills that gave her the tools to imagine and create solutions for her problems. As she moved from the Philippines to Spain, from Spain to Germany, she was necessarily moving inside social borders, reconstructing her life, finding solutions and facing challenges.

By becoming a migrant worker, Rita moved inside class imaginaries, as at home migrants are often imagined to be wealth. She moved inside power borders, as she managed to move from a "poor country" to a "rich country", even if this doesn't necessarily means reaching what one is looking for. She also moved inside sex borders by conquering an important place inside the hierarchy of her own family, as she was the one providing for the family. The fact of border crossing meant for Rita also a mobility inside local hierarchy as it gave her the possibility to find a "better" place in it's chain. By moving, she created a tension that gave her new possibilities and that also made clear the limits and possibilities of the gender, class and power global structures. Rita's fragment of biography makes clear not only how border crossing depends on social relations but mainly how these same power relations function in the current global arena of world migrations.

Conclusion

The current state of borders and how borders are crossed by individuals or groups depends on world-wide and local social relations of power, gender and class. Looking at these relations and how they are expressed in the trajectories of migrant women such as Rita means trying to understand the history and the functioning of the world-wide stream of social relations that permanently shape and reshape biographies, producing gendered imaginaries and establishing what crossing border means today.

Our research was able to partially clarify the place of the gender boundary in the migratory paths of Rita. We have also been able to make the link between Rita's singular trajectory and a more general reality of contemporary female migrations. Even if our attempt is limited by its scope, which is assured from the outset, it also makes it possible to rest in its own way the very important debate on the borders in social sciences. Our contribution, as it only represents a grain of sand in the desert, remains an open window.

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