

Philippine Women on the Move A Transnational Perspective on Marriage Migration

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We [Filipinos] are now a quasi-wandering people, pilgrims or prospectors staking our lives and futures all over the world – in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, North and South America, Australia and all of Asia; in every nook and cranny of this seemingly godforsaken earth.

E. San Juan, Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*

Introduction and theoretical framework

Within the field of migration studies, the Philippines are known as a ‘place of origin’ of marriage as well as labour migrants (cf. Constable 2004, Parrenas 2001). Of the approx. 190,000 Filipinos married to foreigners, over 90% are women. The United States and Japan are the most preferred destinations for marriage immigration. Compared with the huge percentage of foreign partners from these countries (30% to 40%), Germany, with approx. 4% is comparatively marginal in terms of Filipina marriage migration (cf. Commission on Filipino Overseas 2004). Considering the historical, colonial and postcolonial ties between the Philippines and the countries of destination, this geographic distribution of the foreign partners is not surprising.

This paper draws upon long-term and multi-sited ethnographic research both in Germany (between 1993–1996) and in the Philippines (between 1996–1998) (cf. Lauser 2004, 2003, 2005a, b). It is informed by an anthropology of transnational spaces and “global ethnoscaapes” (Appadurai 1991, 1995; Glick-Schiller et al. 1992, 1994, 1995; Kearney 1995; Marcus 1995, 1998; Ong 1999; Parrenas 2001).

Following Arjun Appadurai, who provides a framework for examining the “new global cultural economy as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive

order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models" (Appadurai 1996:32), I look at various forms of female marriage migration. Corresponding to Appadurai's conceptual metaphor of "scape" I understand the transnational marriage "landscape" as a site – a marriage-scape. This site is not "fixed" as a typical landscape, but – depending on context and perspective – of various, disjunctive sizes, amorphous and flowing. Marriage-scapes are shaped and limited by existing and emerging cultural, social, historical and politico-economical factors. They are also shaped by what Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler call the "gendered geographies of power", which inform all transnational migration as so they tell us "gender operates simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales (e.g. the body, the family, the state) across transnational terrains. It is both within the context of particular scales as well as between and among them that gender ideologies and relations are reaffirmed, reconfigured or both" (Pessar/Mahler 2001:5).

With this theoretical framework in mind, my paper discusses how Philippine transnational marriage migration is intertwined in complex and paradoxical ways with global, local and personal matters. Building on ethnographic description of both local constraints of marriage opportunities and dreams of transnational romance, I accentuate the diverse ways in which Philippine women may renegotiate their options within a transnational migratory space. Thus, the boundaries usually applied to categorised forms of migration such as "marriage", "family strategies", "reunification" or "contract work" become blurred.

By challenging the dominant artificial analytical division between marriage migrants (wives) and labour migrants (workers), the multiplicity of roles as wives, mistresses, workers, mothers, daughters and citizens in a transnational migratory space and the intersections are analysed.

Whereas Philippine transnational marriage-scapes fit the pattern of brides from a poor country and grooms from richer ones, I want to stress that such migrations are not only shaped by economic geographies but also by geographies or "sites of desire" (Manderson and Jolly 1997). These follow their own cultural logics (cf. Constable 2004). Filipina women form their own identities within colonial histories that privilege a particular form of Americanised modernity and imaginary of romantic love (cf. Cannell 1999, Rafael 2000, Lauser 2004:174ff., Constable 2003). "American" men – a category that includes all "Caucasian" or "Western" men – are imagined as good providers, romantic lovers and, unlike Filipinos, as men who do not keep mistresses (*querida, kerida*).

Similarly, the logics or fantasies that might support the desire of "Caucasian" men for Asian women are a product of colonial and postcolonial histories. Filipinas are described and imagined as more "traditional" women, more "old-fashioned" and committed to family values as well as less demanding and less liberated. The underlying paradox of such marriages is that the men seek a traditional wife while the women hope for more modern husbands and marriages than they may find in their homeland.

One of the women whose stories I present – Lilia – is a single, middle-class professional in Manila looking for a "Western" husband on the internet. She is already in her thirties and seems to know quite well what kind of marriage she does not like. Moving between "modern" and "traditional" images, values and lifestyles, she is nonetheless afraid of becoming a so-called old maid (*matandang dalaga*). Another woman – Delia – is married to a German and lives in Germany. She reflects on her past life as "*kerida*"¹ – i.e., an unmarried "second wife" or a kind of mistress – of a Filipino man. The third – Melinda – is a widow with children. She asked her cousin to arrange a transnational (re)marriage for her.

These – and other – marriage histories illustrate how Filipina migrants make more or less active use of different socio-cultural and socio-economic situations across transnational space in order to renegotiate and reclaim a respectable and desired marital status. On the one hand, these women are subject to manifold localised, legal and religious-moral definitions as women and wives while at the same time they creatively use structural differences and new opportunities across transnational space to redefine themselves.

The narratives show both the women's agency and the importance of structural factors, also that Filipinas do not only marry in order to migrate (as those scholars suggest, who see marriage above all as an economic bridge to the rich West). On the contrary, because marriage is seen as an important aspect of social fulfilment, they migrate in order to achieve the valued status of a wife. I start from the fact that labour migration is never simply economic and that marriage migration is not only motivated by "private" or individual concerns. Rather, migration is always political and deeply interwoven with personal, familial, local and global factors.

Before presenting the stories of the individual women who feel attracted by "transnational desires", let me briefly sketch local Philippine gender construction. This is described as "double standard in male and female sexual practices" (Parrenas 2001:68, Yu and Liu 1980:179–202) with

¹ *Kerida* or *querida* is a Spanish word and carries the connotation of "kept woman" or "mistress".

disadvantages for those women whose relationships or marriages have failed. At the same time a high priority is given to having children and being married while an unmarried woman is seen as 'incomplete'.

Articulating gender constructions in Philippine everyday life

One perspective in understanding male-female relationships is to look at legal infrastructure and everyday practice. Both the Philippine state and the Philippine Catholic Church officially prohibit divorce. According to the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, marriage as the foundation of the family, is an inviolable social institution, and must therefore be protected by the state (Jones 2002). This "protection" forbids legal divorce (except under certain circumstances²) and protects the inheritance rights of illegitimate children. Since legal separation or annulment are difficult and expensive to obtain and are normally not available to ordinary people, formal separations are extremely few and remarriage is rare. The absence of legal divorce and the difficulty in obtaining an annulment, however, does not result in lifelong monogamous conjugal relationships. Separations and abandoned spouses are not rare and consensual marriage arrangements (i. e. common-law cohabitation without legal status) are widespread among lower-class people. Such arrangements are accepted in the neighbourhood as long as neither the man nor the woman is promiscuous and as long as they live harmoniously (Medina 1991: 104).

However conjugal relationships – as well as potential separations and extramarital relations – have different implications for men and women. They reflect the above-mentioned "double standard" in male and female sexual practices (Parrenas 2001: 68, Yu/Liu 1980: 179–202): Whereas women are theoretically expected to be virgins at marriage, men are not. Women who have had previous sexual experiences are said to become mistresses but not wives, whereas men should be sexually experienced before marriage. Having a second wife outside of marriage is so widely practiced by Filipino men that one has to speak of a triangular (triadic) *querida* system (cf. Yu/Liu 1980):

A man may establish a separate household with a mistress (*kerida*, *querida*). This practice is not stigmatised as long as he does not neglect his responsibilities towards his legal family. Men who have mistresses and who maintain their economic responsibilities for more than one household may

² If the marriage is not consummated, for example.

even be admired for being a "real man" (*pagkakalaki*) and for conforming to a macho image of masculinity. As long as a man remains responsible for his wife and the familial situation, he need not fear legal sanctions. Thus, a *querida* relationship allows him relief from an unhappy or insufferable marital relationship. The *querida* system is even seen as restraint to his wife's domineering manner: If she does not try hard to be a good wife, she may lose him to another woman.

From the wife's point of view the *querida* system threatens the security of her legally contracted and socially recognised marriage union. Women whose marriage failed are pitied and even blamed for not maintaining their husband's interest, since it is considered the wife's duty to hold the marriage together. Besides being emotionally humiliated, it is in her interest as the manager of the family budget to put a stop to her husband's liaison. By insisting on this responsibility, the wife also reinforces her claim to her husband. By performing her duties as a wife, it is far easier to rally her kinsmen and those of her husband to her side. A man who cannot even support his legal family is viewed as irresponsible despite the image of masculinity he may serve with having a mistress.

By Filipino standards, a good wife is someone who protects the interests of her husband and who manages the household and children efficiently. There are no restrictions on wives who are working, as long they do not neglect their duties as outlined above. This means that if the wife's activities are in accordance with keeping her husband, home and children in good order and foster the family, she can do almost anything.

From the perspective of the *querida*, the relationship does not only mean emotional involvement but also financial support (which can mean a great deal of privilege and conspicuous consumption). Although the role of a mistress is not valued very highly, the stigma of being a mistress can be mitigated if a woman is successful with regard to social mobility. If children are born, the *querida* relationship is stabilised, since the children are legally those of the "*querido*". A pregnancy – however shameful it is – might have useful consequences. Having children with her *querido* is the best way to forge a commitment. If he leaves her for another woman / *querida*, she will at least have legitimate economic claims as the mother of his children. The law protects their children, notwithstanding their illegitimacy (Yu/Liu 1980:201f.). The role as *querida* implicitly involves that of a wife of the *querido*. In many cases the mistress is preferred to the wife because the former is a better wife than the latter. Usually there is much rivalry between a *querida* and the wife. This rivalry centers not only on sexuality but on cooking and taking care of the husband. The *querida* is regarded as a second wife by her partner and by her social environment. Although *querida*

families are not legally accepted by the predominantly Catholic society, the mistress still considers herself as her partner's wife. This claim results in conflicts with the legitimate wife.

Paradoxically, these different perspectives of husbands, wives and *queridas* at the same time strengthen and undermine the institution of marriage (and the family) in the Philippines. As a result, legal marriage and a church ceremony remain the preferred and most highly valued form of formalising male-female unions.

Given this unequal, double standard for men and women, transnational marriage migration presents an alternative for those women involved in an unhappy *querida* system or for those abandoned by their husbands. The alternative may be imagined as an escape and may even be experienced as a liberation from a troubled relationship without really breaking with conventional ideologies and frames of gender constructions.

Marriage migration is deeply inspired by the hope of reconciling conflicting gender roles that are sometimes difficult to negotiate and articulate: Marriage migrants – especially those who are still single – pursue on the one hand the prospect of starting their own families. On the other hand – and at the same time – they can meet the cultural norm of “depths of gratitude” (*utang na loob*) and of gendered responsibilities towards their primary families by supporting the older generation (their parents). Furthermore, marriage migration enables the social mobility of younger siblings through remittances.

The following narratives of different women present the reasons and motives of rejecting local men or local marriage prospects as well as the hopes connected with marriage migration. Some women, like Delia and Melinda, are considered less marriageable by local standards, because they are unwed single mothers or because they are known to have had previous “romantic” involvements (affairs) or common law marriages. Other women are less desirable on the local marriage scene due to their age or their status as a widow. These are some of the factors that contribute to a Filipina's decision to look for a partner abroad.

Let me start with Lilia's story, a single woman in her early thirties who had previously migrated from the countryside to the capital of Manila in order to study and find decent work.

Lilia's story: "I need a husband who goes well with me"

When I first met Lilia in Manila, she was working as an interpreter, teacher and assistant for different international development agencies. Her employers were mostly from western (European) countries. In Manila they resided in the rich "villages"³ with a high standard of living. And they talked quite openly about life, relationships, their future and so on. Exposed to these foreign culture and transnational connections, Lilia was attracted by these international and cosmopolitan lifestyles. She envisioned a similar future for herself.

"You know", she told me one day, "I have an European pen pal. I found him on the internet. We have been corresponding for a couple of months – and almost every day! His mails are so nice and sensitive", she went into raptures, "when I tell him about a book I liked, or a movie I've seen, you know, the next week he has read it or seen it and we philosophise on it. He is so understanding!" After a short pause she continued: "He will travel now to the Philippines to visit me! What do you think: Will he propose to me? Should I marry him?"

When I asked her about her motivations for marrying a foreign man, she told me that she had already been as good as engaged to a Filipino man, but that she was not convinced of this arrangement made by her parents in accordance with convention.⁴ She could not respect this man who pretended to be a dominant personality – a real macho. In reality, however, he was not a worthy person, but somebody who was quick-tempered, jealous (*siya ang laging highblood*) and not able to live in an equal partnership of mutual understanding.

Lilia seemed to disapprove of conventional gender role ascriptions. Instead she was looking for a more "modern" and "equal" family life and conjugal relationship. Because America, and the West in general, are constructed in the "neo- and postcolonial" context of the Philippines as the desired outside (Rafael 2000), foreign men are imagined as more romantic and open-minded than Filipino men. Life with a western man promised to fulfil her desires for "modernity".

³ These are "gated communities", districts kept under surveillance.

⁴ Note that arranged marriage is only one end of a continuum of parental intervention in children's marriages, which at the other end tails off into complete freedom of choice for the child. There have always existed institutionalised means to circumvent parental consent, especially elopement (cf. Cannell 1999).

Although Lilia was living in an urban „modern” context where she was able to earn a good salary and support her family back home in the countryside, she still felt trapped in the old-fashioned image of being a so called old maid (*matandang dalaga*). Being in her early thirties and unmarried made her feel like an “incomplete woman” who was not able to find the right man. On the one hand she was afraid she would never have the opportunity to marry and raise a family of her own. On the other hand, she was not willing to give up her wish to find a husband who suited her well. She was longing to be a wife and mother, and she did not question the common idea that children are a blessing, a gift of God and that they would bring her happiness. A marriage with a well educated and wealthy “Caucasian” would fulfil her aspirations and dreams of a life as a respected wife and mother as well as a member of the privileged middle class.

In this special case, however, Lilia’s virtual aspirant from Switzerland turned out to be a huge disappointment. Later on, she realised that on his trip to the Philippines he visited not only herself but other Filipina pen pals as well. By coming to the Philippines his own imaginations about the “paradise in the South Sea” became challenged and he was unable to make a decision.

Delia’s story: “I wanted to be a married woman”

Delia had been married to a German husband for 10 years when I met her in Germany. The reason for our first encounter was that both of us had to make a statement in court on the occasion of the divorce proceedings of a Filipina we both knew. Delia was touched by this stirring separation story, which probably called her own sad story to her mind. “You know, Andrea, it was my most serious aim in life to be a married woman, to be a wife!” she told me, explaining why she could not really understand the decision of her friend to get divorced from her unfaithful but otherwise tolerant German husband.

In the Philippines, Delia herself had been the “second wife” – the *querida* – of an already married Filipino. Before she met this older man and fell in love with him, she had lived a carefree life, as she emphasised. It was not poverty or the hardships of life that attracted her to that man, but love. Later she had to admit that this love had been naive and romantic and that she had been blinded by love (*bulag sa ibig*). Her *querido* had supported her generously. She had lived in an apartment in a provincial capital and had given birth to two children – a girl and a son. She had tried hard to discover

his needs, which put her in keen competition with his wife⁵, and she had longed for the day when she would be the only one to attract his attention. After a couple of years, however, this man lost interest in her and their children and began another *querida* relationship. Delia felt shocked and torn between 'volcanic'⁶ anger and depression. Personally humiliated and locally stigmatised as a *querida* with children, she began to organise an escape from this failed relationship by moving to the global (marriage) scene. Since this happened in the early 1980s long before the internet age, she used conventional pen pal agencies and other informal migration networks to look for a western husband, hoping to be able to leave her troubled relationship behind. To her, a respectable marriage with a church wedding was the most important sign for regaining her honour and being rehabilitated (cf. Constable 2003).

After exchanging a couple of letters, she finally chose her German husband – this time with her right mind (instead of her blind heart). She was convinced of his introduction as a successful engineer and she liked the enclosed pictures.

During her first three years in Germany, her two children remained in the Philippines with kin caregivers.⁷ Through marriage (migration), she easily received a legal working permit in Germany (otherwise known for its restrictive migration policy). In addition to caring for her own household – including her mother-in-law, who was in need of care – she worked as a carer in a retirement home. Although she was a proud wife, she felt unhappy (with her husband, who was impotent and very reserved) and homesick (for her children). As a mother and a marriage migrant at the same time, she became a transnational mother for a time. Because of the physical distance that kept her from performing her "labour" of love and care for her children, she now displayed her love through letters, phone calls and money earned as a carer. Similar to the findings of Rhacel Parrenas (2001), she equated her

⁵ For instance, when she once heard him complain that his children by his legal wife did not respect him enough, she taught their children to look up to their father and respect him.

⁶ As she characterised her feelings by comparing her emotions with the explosion of the Philippine volcano Pinatubo.

⁷ In the literature the "care drain" is discussed under the aspect of "care chain", meaning that migrant mothers work in foreign households as paid carers in order to pay the hired carers in their own household. In the Philippine context, however, care-work is usually not really "hired" but organised within extended familial networks and mostly done by relatives. This does not necessarily mean that they are cheaper than wage workers; quite the reverse may be the case. Migrants are obliged to provide relatives with financial support under the cultural norm of *utang na loob* (debts of gratitude) which means an endless process of exchange and indebtedness.

love and motherhood with money and relied on expensive gifts and sending generous remittances (cf. also Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997).

Delia was absolutely determined to stay married, even when she realised that she would not have children with her husband and that their marriage would not be consummated. She convinced her husband to adopt her two children and to take (*kuha*) them to Germany.

"Our family life was not uncomplicated", described Delia the new patchwork situation. "At the beginning, my children had not been as happy as I wished. They missed the warm and lively family life of the Philippines. They missed their cousins, aunts and uncles, and their grandmother. I could not replace them, nor could we afford to take them all to Germany. ... Okay, now we try to make our life here and there. You see, my son is not yet 18 years old and he moved to his German girl-friend's home, to 'live-in' ... and my daughter is fighting with me. ..."

Delia's marriage migration is not to be told like a fairy tale. It is not as happy as she would have wished. She did not find the real "love story" she was longing for. But at least she found a settled marital status.

With regard to her children and her role as a mother, this sketch shows that mothering can not be seen in isolation from other familial or caring relationships. By considering the bilateral sibling relationships (including cousins and aunts and uncles), discourses on the primacy of the mother-child dyad are put into perspective. Delia's case shows that extended family networks are instrumental in facilitating the migration process by providing support in terms of childcare. This pattern fits quite well with traditional kinship relations and obligations. As ethnographic studies of the Philippines have shown, in both rural and urban contexts, housework and childcare are often performed in a wider social framework of extended-family members and neighbours (see e.g. Trager 1988, Illo 1995, Jocano 1969).

In the logic of German state immigration legislation, however, the nuclear family is the only family type recognised for purposes of immigration and thus extended family ties continue to be significant as support networks.⁸ The disruption of these extended-family relations in everyday life constituted the most obvious break for Delia's children.

A final note: not only women tell stories of transnational mobility and transmigration. The lives of Western husbands are involved in transnational familial spaces as well, even if they do not move physically.

The next narrative displays us these dynamics.

⁸ The reproductive labour of child raising is thus often 'outsourced' in the sending countries by female migrants needed in receiving countries to take on precisely this task of care-work.

Melinda's story: "I have to make sacrifices"

Marriage migration is not only constructed as an alternative to divorce. It serves as a vision of remarriage for those who are mothers and middle-aged widows, too.

Before her marriage migration to Germany (in the mid 1990s), Melinda was living – as the youngest daughter – in a rural household with her widowed mother and her six-year-old son. Her husband abandoned her shortly after their marriage because of another woman and left (the province of) Mindanao to live elsewhere in the Philippines. Even though Melinda was permanently separated from her husband – she did not even know of his actual whereabouts – she was still formally considered married (by the standards of the church and of the Philippine legal system). For this reason she could not officially marry her next „husband” (*asawa, kinakasama*) with whom she lived in a common-law marriage. Since, especially in the country (*sa bukid*), gender-balanced households are seen as the normal way of things, couples that have decided to live together as man and wife and perform the functions of a “real” married couple, are quite accepted.

“Fate” however, took its course and after a couple of years, Melinda lost this man too. He was killed while fighting insurgents.

“Life is hard and you have to make sacrifices – *mahirap ang buhay kaya nga kailangan ko magmatir*”! With these words, Melinda repeatedly framed her story like a refrain. After this stroke of fate, Melinda's marital state could be characterised as a “widow by heart” and an “abandoned wife by law”. As time went by, Melinda let herself be persuaded to start a pen pal relationship. She did not mind that her older sister (who had also been abandoned with children) and her cousin took on the task of writing and reading the letters for her. After one year of correspondence, Stefan, the German “future husband”, went to the Philippines to propose to her. There, he also wanted to find out if he could find a “place like paradise” for his retirement.

Stefan's martial history has to be briefly sketched as well. He was once married to a German woman. This marriage broke up in a kind of all-round midlife crisis and after the collapse of his business. He blamed his wife for the failure of the marriage because she left him with their almost grown up children. After a brief relationship with another German woman, he turned to Asian women as a desirable alternative because of imagined family values and gender roles. He hoped and believed that an Asian woman would be more committed to make a marriage work.

To cut a long story short, Melinda and Stefan finally married.

Melinda repeatedly emphasised that she is sacrificing herself for her (extended) family.⁹ This sounds a little bit like an ambivalent counter-argument to the impression that her (re-)marriage could also be an adventure and an exciting experiment, and not only a sacrifice.

In the traditional discourse on (attractive) women in the Philippines, the seductive and sexual female is usually young and unmarried, but not middle-aged, separated or widowed. Women like Melinda are not supposed to express sexual desire, but only maternal tenderness. These practices are in accordance with the cultural model of ideal, virtuous and modest womanhood (*mahinhin*) and selfless motherhood (*inang martyr*), embodied in the Virgin Mary as well as in the "noble" Filipinas like the "mystical" Maria Clara or the "national mother" Corazon Aquino (Siapno 1995).

With this interpretation I do not intend to question the economic context and hardships under which migration in general and marriage migration in particular takes place. On the contrary, I want to underscore the importance of monetary remittances both for family subsistence or for future investment and social mobility. At the same time, however, I argue for consideration of non-economic conditions like emotional motivations, cultural values, family obligations and gendered positions in society. Migration means both that economic motivations are shaped by family issues and that love for the family is expressed by economically supporting the family.

Melinda's motivation to accept marriage migration is without doubt related to her duty as a daughter. As a good daughter (and sister), she had to support her widowed mother and her abandoned elder sister and her children. Her investment in the future of her nephews and nieces is seen not only as a familial obligation but also as an investment in her own social security. Marriage migration at least gave her an opportunity to create a new marital subjectivity that seemed unavailable in her homeland.

As for Melinda's legal marital status, I should add that by paying bribes, they finally received a verification of her legal capacity to marry (*Ehefähigkeitszeugnis*), which is required for the German marriage procedure. Fake travel documents, sometimes with a false name and false marital status, are not uncommon. Due to the fact that bigamy is illegal (and punishable) in the Philippines, this is reason enough to stay abroad and even avoid returning home for visits.

These stories challenge the popular myth that most Filipina brides are poverty-stricken or sexy bar girls (of the American-based rest-and-recreation

⁹ As a good daughter and sister she felt obliged to support her old widowed mother and to invest in the upbringing of her nephews and nieces.

industry or the international tourism industry). Again, I do not deny that Filipina brides are recruited through the tourism and sex industries. But this is only one side of the story of marriage migration which has to include other perspectives too. Such marriages should not be seen as simple uni-directional movements from East to West, from oppressed to liberated, from traditional to modern, or local to global, although some men and women indeed imagine them within these oppositions. A more differentiated approach will show that meanings and practices go beyond such narrow dichotomies.

Conclusion and outlook beyond the individual stories

In my paper I have sought to point out some aspects of gender roles in the context of global marriage migration. Questioning the wife/worker dichotomy, I wanted to demonstrate how women travel through these often assumed public-private, labour-love dichotomies by describing multiple roles and fluid trajectories. I do not question the economic commitments associated with strategies of marriage migration. But by acknowledging non-economic and "value-driven" motivations as well, we can open up new ways of conceptualising female marriage migration across both the "public and private" and the "money and love" spheres.

A single migrant woman's life story might criss-cross all categories of scholarly migration discourse, including "labour migration", "marriage migration" and "family reunification". As an "ideal type" model, a Filipina migrant often begins her migration career as a single woman moving for work purposes (rural-to-urban) to the transnational public space of an export-processing factory in one of the major cities of the Philippines. These women have not seldom experienced the breakdown of a relationship (for example as a *querida*) or are stigmatised as being a single mother (cf. McKay 2003). With the next move she will take up domestic work in the private space of an employer's home elsewhere in Asia — in Singapore, Hong Kong or Taiwan. After that, she will look for a foreign western husband since transnational romance is part of Philippine popular culture and a familiar theme for migrant women, even before leaving home (Rafael 2000, Constable 2003). She may marry a "Caucasian", a European, a German citizen, and relocate again, this time patrilocally to the husband's place, where she will work in the private realm as a "dependent housewife" and/or in a migrant enclave with co-ethnics. There she moves through typical roles as geriatric carer, cleaner, service worker and so on. Eventually she herself

will sponsor female family members to join her work team and/or marry her husband's co-nationals (Lauser 2004, 2005a; Piper and Roces 2003).

Thus, through their life course, individual women may engage in diverse forms of domestic, mothering/familial care work that are nevertheless all constructed as women's work. The German labour market (like in other immigration countries) demands care work mainly in the (illegal) domestic and service sector just as the "marriage market" demands loyal and caring wives who share "traditional" values of home, family and relationship with their (German) husbands. The structural affinity between a paid domestic worker and an unpaid housewife, both socially defined as appropriate positions for women, may blur the boundaries between these two different migration patterns.

Unpaid household labour (being the madam and not the maid, cf. Pei-Chia Lan 2003), offers a higher moral value and social recognition. Thus, Filipina migrants may find more non material benefits in a transnational marriage than in domestic wage work. Because marriage, and the status of a wife – a housewife (*maybahay*) – is "traditionally" considered an emotionally and morally highly valued position in the Philippines, transnational marriage migration may be interpreted as a current form of an "old-fashioned" tradition: of "marrying up" (hypergamy).

However, this kind of "global hypergamy" (Constable 2004) entails a number of paradoxes. We need to investigate precisely how, for whom and in what sense such marriages represent upward mobility. The fact that social mobility in a transnational marriage is based on the economic disparities between the countries of the bride and groom and do not always correspond to the social position or education of the individuals involved, patterns of marital mobility entail many dynamic relations between different categories including those of nationality, ethnicity, gender, geography and class. In Germany, for example, a middle-class household with only one (male) breadwinner normally cannot afford a housekeeper whereas in the Philippines, the corresponding situation is unthinkable without several domestic helpers. Assuming that such marriages are simply upward mobility for the Filipina means overlooking all kinds of contradictory social and economic patterns.

Hence, women in distinct social positions have uneven resources for organising their "care work" and renegotiating their respective position. The position of housewife, for example, is differently valued in the Philippines and in Germany. In the Philippines, the housewife is the manager of the family budget, whereas in Germany, the budget is managed by the – conventionally male – breadwinner.

Women have to “bargain” with the interchange between the monetary value and the moral and emotional value associated with their multiform labour. Some marriage migrants seek social mobility for themselves and their family in the Philippines by becoming unpaid housewives in transnational marriages. The remittances they send to the Philippines are reserved for the “unpaid labour of love”. Others seek transnational marriages to escape the lower status of an old maid (*matandang dalaga*), a single mother or an aged widow. Abandoned wives and mothers use marriage migration to achieve a respectable status as well as a convenient possibility to migrate and acquire a work permit. (Since German migration policy is fairly restrictive, legal permanent residence and work permits are tied to the marriage and are otherwise hard to get.) “Selling” their caring work as both unpaid (house)wife and paid care provider in the service sector (in Germany) enables them to care for their family in the Philippines – their children and the familial caregivers of their children.

Again, migrant women leave their families in the Philippines and go abroad both to work and to escape bad relationships. Economic improvement serves as an argument in a situation where in fact, lack of the possibility to get divorced motivates women to go abroad. While Philippine law prohibits divorce in order to keep families together, it also has the undesired potential of encouraging women to become mobile transnational subjects who may even initiate and recommend following migration to kith and kin.

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