



Women Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Hungary: A Feminist Global Political Economy (GPE) Analysis

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In partial fulfillment for the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in
Women's and Gender Studies (GEMMA)

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Approval by main supervisor: _____



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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploratory study about women Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) that poses the main questions: What factors contributed to the women's decision to migrate to Hungary? What were the migration-related issues encountered by the women in dealing with the Philippine and Hungarian governments? What are the challenges of living and working in Hungary, and how do Filipina migrant workers address them? How does identity figure in these challenges and the women's responses to them?

In making the above inquiries, the thesis not only broadens the discussion on Filipinas employed abroad in terms of occupation and geographical location, but also challenges essentialist narratives in existing literature on women OFWs. The research was enriched by drawing on the accounts of ten women OFWs in Hungary of different ages, civil status, occupations, and socio-economic backgrounds, with a view to find out as much as possible about their motivations and aspirations. This is important because studies or articles on women OFWs need to account for diverse jobs, personalities, individual circumstances leading to migration, and lived experiences that go beyond abuse, exploitation, or violence to have a fuller view of the women's complexities.

In order to analyze the information gathered from the women interviewees, a Feminist Global Political Economy (GPE) framework was used. This framework utilizes the feminist perspective to examine the situation of the women OFWs within the global political economy, which involves different actors and elaborate domestic-international, private-public, local-global, and south-north interactions. Concepts from intersectional and post-colonial theories were also incorporated to account for intersecting gender, race, and class identities of Filipinas as women of color, Asians, and "Third World women."

The thesis will show that "Filipinas" and "overseas Filipina workers" are not homogeneous categories and they have various reasons for leaving the Philippines and residing in Hungary, as well as various ways of responding to challenges posed by transnational labor migration. The women OFWs contend with restrictive state power in the form of regulated entry, residence, and exit, along with the discourse of the Philippine government that constructs them as objects that are naturally meant to be marketed as overseas labor. Filipinas in Hungary deal with gendered and racialized notions of who they are as women, workers, and partners. They also encounter racism and issues with migration and employment. However, In the milieu of neoliberal globalization where state and transnational business interests prevail, the women have had to rely on themselves and their informal networks for survival and development given the lack of support or services offered by the Philippine and Hungarian governments.

Keywords: Filipina; Asian; feminism; global political economy; globalization; transnational migration; re/productive labor

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference. I further declare that the following word count for this thesis is accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, bibliography, appendices): 25,335 words

Entire manuscript: 29,104 words

Signed: Jona Marie P. Ang

ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFO	Commission on Filipinos Overseas
DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment
EU	European Union
GCC	Global Care Chain
GPE	Global Political Economy
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund (IMF)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPE	International Political Economy
NGO	Non-government Organization
OEC	Overseas Employment Certificate
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
OWWA	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
PEA	Private Employment Agencies
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
POLO	Philippine Overseas Labor Office
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
RPV	Reproductive, Productive, Virtual (Economy)
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policies
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression
TMC	Technomuscular Capitalism
RLI	Regime of Labor Intimacy
VAW	Violence Against Women
WMW	Women Migrant Worker

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I. Introduction

“Yun ang story ko kung bakit ako andito. Masayang-masaya.... na minsan nakakapagod din. Pero masaya kasi maraming experiences.”

That’s the story of why I’m here. It’s makes me very happy, but sometimes it’s also exhausting. But still happy because of the many experiences.
– Csilla, 2019

It is quite typical for a Filipino family to have a mother, an aunt, or sister working abroad. My own aunt went to the Netherlands as a caregiver and my female cousins found jobs in Singapore, Taiwan, and California as architects and engineers. I have seen first-hand the sacrifices they made in order to improve the quality of life of their loved ones back home: the loneliness, the struggle to adapt to a different culture and lifestyle, and the fear (of not being able to pay off debts, of not providing enough, of being caught if staying abroad illegally). I have also witnessed how travel expanded their ways of thinking and how their jobs enabled them to pay for the tuition of their children and other relatives, buy a house, or put up their own businesses.

Back in the 1980s when long-distance communication was still difficult, my sisters and I recorded “voice tapes” on cassette and sent them overseas, waited for our relatives to reply with their own tapes detailing their lives as migrants, and so the cycle continued. With the advent of the Internet and many platforms for staying in touch, communications have become easier and faster. However, globalization and technology have brought distinct challenges to international migrant labor. The increasing demand for women workers and rising inequalities within and among countries mean that more poor women from developing countries are leaving their families behind to work in cities within their homeland or migrate to developed countries for work. This transnational migration is

aided by government policies that aim to export labor, more often than not at the expense of the well-being of the workers themselves.

As a researcher, I was intrigued by the elaborate workings and motivations involved in overseas migration, particularly of Filipinas seeking employment. This was the main reason why I decided to have my thesis focus on women Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Undertaking the research meant a constant struggle with my positionality as an insider and outsider. On the one hand, I am an insider because I can relate to what it is like being a Filipina in a strange land where the food, language, weather, customs, and people are different; where homesickness strikes now and then; where I have to navigate people's expectations and attitudes towards me as a foreign woman of color from a developing country known for sending domestic workers abroad. On the other hand, as a graduate student, I am an outsider since I went to Hungary not to work but to study, with the help of an Erasmus Mundus scholarship from the European Union (EU). I kept in mind these dual and unequal insider-outsider dynamics throughout the research process, endeavoring as much as possible to address the issues it brought about.

This thesis is relevant in the context of transnationalization of labor markets and the ongoing debates around why people migrate and decide to stay in particular countries or regions. Since literature on women OFWs primarily tackles the concerns of domestic workers – typically in Eastern Asia and the Middle East, and in the last decade, Southern Europe – this thesis will broaden the discussion on Filipinas employed abroad in terms of occupation and geographical location. The main questions were posed: What factors contributed to the Filipino women's decision to migrate to Hungary? What were the migration-related issues encountered by the women in dealing with the Philippine and Hungarian governments? What are the challenges of living and working in Hungary, and how do Filipina migrant workers address them? In doing so, the research challenges essentialist narratives in literature on women OFWs, such as those that point to poverty as the key driver of migration and dwell on the women's experiences of abuse, exploitation, and violence.

The following questions were also asked: How does identity figure in these challenges and their responses to them? What are the resources and support networks available to them and which avenues have they utilized to resist racism and sexism? To what extent do women OFWs engage with migration or employment laws both in the Philippines and Hungary? What are the women's plans for the future?

The thesis will show that the Filipina workers have differing motivations for leaving the Philippines and residing in Hungary. Although Filipina workers in Hungary deal with problems associated with being a foreigner, they do not necessarily share the same gender-, race-, and class-based issues as their counterparts in other countries. All the research questions contributed to surfacing a more complex picture of women OFWs, particularly because the thesis examined not just the individual reasons for leaving and the global/institutional conditions – including issues of race, gender, and class – that affected the women's (im)migration. It also accounted for who or where they eventually wanted to be, something which many academic inquiries overlook altogether in their exploration of the migration cycle.

The next section provides an overview of migration and employment in the Filipinas' countries of origin (Philippines) and destination (Hungary). The labor export of OFWs and gender-blind laws on migrant workers of the Philippines are discussed, along with the labor shortage and anti-migrant policies of Hungary.

Chapter 2 comprises the review of literature, which explains globalization and the ways it impacts international women migrant workers. Topics such as the global care chain and feminization of migration are covered to provide the context in which women OFWs can be found.

Chapter 3 shows the components of the Feminist Global Political Economy (GPE) framework used in this research, which incorporates concepts of feminist, intersectionality, and post-colonial theories. The other half of this chapter goes over the methodology and the guiding principles used in conducting the research. Utilizing this

framework, the subsequent chapters analyze the data obtained from the women interviewees.

Chapter 4 delves into the women's diverse motivations for migrating to Hungary, such as employment, career or knowledge development, love, travel, adventure-seeking, and “better” lives. It shows that the kind of employment opportunities available to the women is affected by their class and educational backgrounds, and that colonial mentality contributed to most of the women's migration decisions. The profile of women OFWs in Hungary is described, along with the network of support that they have in the form of family and friends that may have contributed to their decision to migrate.

Chapter 5 talks about the Filipino migrant women’s pre-departure struggles, the difficulties of obtaining state services through the Philippine Embassy in the destination country, and the immigration challenges once in Hungary. This section looks at state mechanisms that both ease and deter labor migration and the overall inadequacy of protection for women OFWs. Moreover, it situates women OFWs within the discursive constructions made by the Philippine government that both naturalize its role in “managing” labor migration and the commodification of women as overseas workers for consumption of primarily developed countries that have the resources to afford them.

Finally, chapter 6 focuses on the experiences of the Filipinas living and working in Hungary. It discusses the gendered and racialized notions of Filipinas in Hungary, as well as the women’s experiences of racism, challenges, forms of coping and support, and reasons for staying in the country.

Background on migration and employment in the Philippines and Hungary

1.1. Labor export of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) and gender-blind legal frameworks on migrant workers’ rights

The Philippines is presently one of the world’s top origin countries of migrants, along with Mexico, China, India, and Puerto Rico (“Origins and Destinations of the World’s Migrants,

1990-2017,” 2018). Based on the most recent UN estimates, the current population of the Philippines is 108,327,840 (approximately 1.4% of the total world population) as of 23 August 2019 (“Philippines Population,” n.d.). The last stock estimate released by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas was back in December 2013, pegging the number of Filipinos abroad at 10,238,614 (“Stock Estimates of Overseas Filipinos,” n.d.). With a median citizen age of 24.3 years (“Quickstat,” n.d.),¹ a population projected by the national statistics authority to increase to 142 million by 2045, and largely university-educated and English-speaking populace, the Philippines can be considered a good provider of labor.

Capitalize on human resources was exactly what the Philippine government did, when it undertook a labor export policy – facilitating “overseas labor migration for temporary or contractual work” – in the middle of the 1970s to handle the debt caused by structural adjustment policies (SAP) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and worsening unemployment in the country (Lindio-McGovern, 2012, p. 23). Rather than address the crisis by generating local jobs and providing support to community industries and the agricultural sector, the Philippine government enabled the export of Filipino labor by creating specialized government agencies² and allowing private employment or recruitment agencies to flourish. The national jobs crisis under President Duterte’s administration continues to worsen with an estimated 4.5 million unemployed (IBON, 2019) as current labor policies, surging prices of commodities and privatized social services, and the devalued peso push Filipinos to search for work elsewhere.

In response to the exponentially growing need for labor in the international market, the Philippines has been sending more workers abroad and has become largely reliant on their remittances to boost the economy. Yearly remittances sent by migrant workers amount to eight to ten per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) (UN Women, 2016, p. 1), making the Philippines a country with the third largest remittances received (USD29.7 billion) in 2015 after India and China (World Bank, 2016, p. 29). During the second to third quarter of 2017 alone, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) sent an

¹ From “National QuickStat - August 2019 (Phase 1)”

² Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)

approximate total of PHP205.2 billion in remittances (“2017 Survey on Overseas Filipinos (Results from the 2017 Survey on Overseas Filipinos),” 2018). Because of their crucial role in helping keep the economy afloat, OFWs have been heralded as *bagong bayani* (new heroes) by successive Philippine governments from the time of President Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino (1986-1992) to the present, applauding them for their sacrifices even as they struggle abroad. Franco problematizes this “heroic discourse” for the following reasons:

[W]hile it seemingly elevates migrants, it makes natural the risks and sufferings of going abroad. It likewise downplays the very reasons why migrants are in the first place displaced by the Philippine economy. To a certain extent, it explains why labor export has persisted over the years and why this has become such an acceptable “fact” of life in the Philippines. (2015, p. 72)

The Philippine government has consistently denied brokering labor, but the language it uses in speeches, campaigns, and laws or policies both implicitly and explicitly support the national project of regulating overseas Filipino labor for capital accumulation. Tyner (2004) uses the poststructural feminist perspective to argue that migrants and migrations are social and political productions, made possible by governments’ framing of discourses and meanings.

By way of protecting their citizens overseas, migrant-origin countries like the Philippines ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW),³ which is a comprehensive multilateral treaty between 54 State Parties. Interestingly, none of the major migrant-destination countries in Western Europe or North America have adopted the Convention. The same holds true for other major receiving nations, like Australia, Canada, Arab states of the Persian Gulf, India, South Africa, and Switzerland. Rights claims of migrant workers in migrant-receiving states thus remain primarily based on state legislation. Furthermore, while the

³ The ICRMW is the lengthiest human rights convention and upholds rights applicable to all migrant workers (regular or irregular) and specific ones that apply only to regular migrant workers or residence permit holders.

Convention is careful not to use solely masculine pronouns generalizing migrant workers, it fails to elaborate on gender-specific issues and needs of women migrant workers.

The Philippine Republic Act (RA) No. 10022,⁴ passed in 2009, seemingly utilizes a gender perspective. It provides that the “State shall apply gender sensitive criteria in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs”⁵ and provide “[g]ender-sensitive programs and activities to assist particular needs of migrant workers.”⁶ However, these policies, programs, and activities are not further specified beyond the pre-employment seminars on gender-sensitivity,⁷ inter-agency “tracking system of past and present gender disaggregated cases involving male and female migrant workers,” and databases of OFWs classified according to different factors including gender and occupation. Closer scrutiny of the RA 10022 reveals that the law fails to highlight the unique needs and challenges of women working overseas. This makes it difficult for migrant women to access services such as those related to sexual and reproductive health, as well as legal assistance in cases of sexual abuse and violence.

While there are no laws designated to specifically protect migrant women, there are international treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)⁸ that subsume the advancement of this group’s interests and

⁴ “An Act Amending Republic Act No. 8042, Otherwise Known As The Migrant Workers And Overseas Filipinos Act Of 1995, As Amended, Further Improving The Standard Of Protection And Promotion Of The Welfare Of Migrant Workers, Their Families And Overseas Filipinos In Distress, And For Other Purposes”

<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/98914/117850/F586226360/PHL98914.pdf>;

Republic Act No. 8042 http://www.poea.gov.ph/mandates/files/ra_8042.pdf;

Omnibus Rules and Regulations Implementing The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995

<https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1996/02/29/irr-republic-act-no-8042/>

⁵ Omnibus Rules and Regulations (covers all subsequent mentioned Rules under RA 10022)

Rule I. General Provisions – Section 1. Declaration of Policies – (d) The State affirms the fundamental equality before the law of women and men and the significant role of women in nation building. Recognizing the contribution of **overseas migrant women workers** and their particular vulnerabilities, the State shall apply **gender sensitive criteria** in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs affecting migrant workers and the composition of bodies tasked for the welfare of migrant workers.

⁶ Rule X. Role of DOLE – D. Migrant Workers and Other Overseas Filipinos Resource Center – Section 18. Services (g) **Gender-sensitive** programs and activities to assist particular needs of migrant workers

⁷ Section 14: “...the POEA [Philippine Overseas Employment Administration] shall provide comprehensive Pre-Employment Orientation Seminars (PEOS) that will discuss topics such as prevention of illegal recruitment and **gender-sensitivity**.”

⁸ More information at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

well-being under the wider umbrella of women’s rights. Republic Act No. 9710 or the “Magna Carta of Women” – a comprehensive women’s human rights law considered to be the equivalent of the CEDAW in the Philippines – also has provisions for the protection of Filipina migrant workers.⁹ In the absence of laws or policies that focus on the welfare of women migrant workers, the ICRMW, CEDAW, and RA 9710 can be used in the meantime to hold the Philippine government accountable for respecting, protecting, and promoting the human rights of this vital sector of society.

1.2. The paradox of local labor shortage and anti-migrant policies in Hungary

Hungary is a “transit, source, and destination country of both regular and irregular migration” which attracts migrants based on its “geographic location, European Union (EU) membership, and relative prosperity” (“Migration Issues in Hungary,” 2018). According to the IOM, 42% of foreigners living in Hungary in 2017 came for employment purposes, “making labour the most popular entitlement of residence” (2018). While foreigners are coming to Hungary for work, Hungarian nationals have been steadily moving abroad in increasing numbers, thus leading to a demographic crisis. The UN “World Population Prospects 2017 Revision” report estimates that a mere 6,388 people would be living in Hungary by 2100 (2017, p. 375).

Due to the labor shortage created by Hungarians leaving for overseas employment, foreign workers are becoming necessary in particular economic sectors. Hungary has a “serious demand for manual labour workers” and “more than 50% of Hungarian firms have significant difficulties filling jobs, especially in the field of information technology and health care” (“Migration Issues in Hungary,” 2018). While the Hungarian Migration Strategy adopted in 2013 highlights the importance of protecting the national labor

⁹ From the IRR of RA 9710: SECTION 25. Right to Decent Work – The State shall progressively realize and ensure decent work standards for women that involve the creation of jobs of acceptable quality in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity.

D. DFA, DOLE, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), and Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration (OWWA) shall be responsible in protecting the rights and promoting the welfare of **women migrant workers** especially those classified under the vulnerable skills categories. More information at https://library.pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/ra-9710-magna-carta-women-irr_0.pdf

market, it also recognizes the necessity of added migrant labor (“Migration Issues in Hungary,” 2018).

However, this need is not evident in the policies and statements being issued by the Hungarian government. Employment policies may allow non-EU citizens to apply for work permits as employees, “but first the employer must document that they had already tried to fill the position with a Hungarian citizen with the help of the employment centre” (“Labour Law,” n.d.). The process of securing work permits can be arduous in Hungary, with extensive paperwork and lack of English-speaking staff in government offices to assist foreigners. Non-EU citizens can only start working in Hungary after getting their work permits, which are typically valid for a maximum of two years only (or shorter, depending on employment contract), subject to extension for two additional years.

The Hungarian government’s stance on migration makes employment even more difficult for prospective foreign workers, as the former balks at granting migrants legal status in the country. This is demonstrated by the withdrawal of Hungary from the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration¹⁰ on 18 July 2018. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó announced the exit, citing the security of Hungary and its people as the main concern. He called the accord “dangerous, extremist, biased, and an encouragement to migration” and deemed it “in conflict with common sense and also with the intent to restore European security” (“Hungary is exiting the adoption process of the Global Compact for Migration,” 2018).

The minister’s statements reflect the rising anti-migrant sentiments in Hungary, which has been arguing for more stringent European migration policies. In a bid to “protect its citizens” and “national culture” – as well as Hungarian and EU borders – (The Hungarian Helsinki Committee, n.d., p. 2) Hungary imposed stricter border laws, built a 175-kilometer fence along the Hungarian-Serbian border, and passed the 2018 “Stop Soros”¹¹ laws, which criminalize assistance to migrants who are of illegal status or not entitled to asylum.

¹⁰ This United Nations compact is the first agreement negotiated among countries to set global standards for addressing all dimensions of international migration. More information at <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact>

¹¹ The law is named after Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros, who has been demonized by Orbán’s right-wing Fidesz party and accused of facilitating mass immigration to Europe.

Despite the decrease in foreigners in Hungary, the public remains concerned about immigrants. As indicated in the Standard Eurobarometer 90, 54% of Hungarians consider immigration as the most important issue facing the EU (2018, p. 15). This way of thinking is fueled by the government itself, as evidenced in public statements. During his state address on 10 February 2019, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán announced the government's "Family Protection Action Plan"¹² which incentivizes couples who have children (Ellyatt, 2019). Orbán disputed immigration as the answer to low birth rates in Europe; unlike the West, where "[f]or every missing child there should be one coming in and then the numbers will be fine," Hungary does not need numbers but Hungarian children (Szakacs, 2019).

The above rhetoric reinforces the idea that migrants are not welcome in Hungary. There are also racist, nationalist, and cis-normative values being emphasized in these statements, as seen in the expressed preference for Hungarian children (presumably from cisgender Hungarian parents) over immigrant ones (no matter how plentiful).

Despite keeping immigrants out for the "security" of Hungarians, the government's current changes in employment policies do not reflect concern for citizen welfare. The "Slave Law" which entered into force on January 2019 allows employers to demand up to 400 (from the previous 250) annual overtime hours and could potentially lead to worker exploitation. This points to a neoliberal economic model that boosts the growth of Hungarian economy by imposing increased labor, low corporate taxes, and high value-added tax (VAT). In other words, labor and tax policies are skewed towards the advantage of multi-national companies while the masses struggle with unemployment, commodity prices, and other living costs. Since the government of Hungary is adamantly against migration, the burden falls upon the Hungarian people, most of whom cope by leaving to work overseas where salaries are more competitive.

¹² To boost marriage and birth rates, measures were introduced such as: lifetime waivers on personal income tax for women with a minimum of four children, subsidies for big families to purchase bigger vehicles, housing loans for families with at least two children, and preferential loans for women below 40 getting married for the first time. (from <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/11/have-four-or-more-babies-in-hungary-and-youll-pay-no-income-tax-for-life.html>)

Ironically, while foreign labor is needed to fill in the gaps left by emigrating Hungarians and meet the demands of an investment economy, the government insists on keeping immigration at a minimum. This has an impact on both prospective and current workers coming from such countries as the Philippines. For Filipinas wanting to immigrate to Hungary, strict administrative and visa procedures are already in place for going to the EU, even without added requirements from receiving countries. For those who are applying for jobs and work permits, or who are already employed in Hungary, such anti-migrant state propaganda – translated into policies and cultural practices – can make both working and living in the country riddled with challenges like racism, discrimination, and inequality. Further questions could be raised on the extent to which the Hungarian government respects migrant worker rights, given its current policies concerning its own citizen workers, and how migrant women with different life priorities or non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE) fit the state's sexist, heteronormative policies on family.

II. Review of Literature

*“Pagka gusto mong umasenso,
kailangan magpa-internasyonal ka,
'di ba?”*

If you want to progress, you need to go international, right? – Bulak, 2019

2.1. Globalization and its impact on international women migrant workers

2.1.1. The debates surrounding globalization: inequalities and roles of nation states

Globalization is the “increased interconnectedness and interdependence of peoples and countries” that include “two inter-related elements: the opening of international borders to increasingly fast flows of goods, services, finance, people and ideas; and the changes in institutions and policies at national and international levels that facilitate or promote such flows” (World Health Organization, n.d.).

This definition makes out globalization to be a neutral phenomenon, but not all of these global exchanges are as collaborative and mutually beneficial as described above. The word “globalization” comprises not just economic changes, but also a range of social, cultural, economic, and political ones.

Earlier scholarly literature pointed out that rampant economic disparity and social instability across the world indicate that global integration does not necessarily mean equal opportunities for all. The effects of the “uneven process” of globalization vary according to the categories of countries; majority of developing nations suffer exclusion or deterioration, while the benefits from investments and economic growth are mainly reaped by a few developed countries in Europe, North America, and East Asia (Khor, 2001, p. 16). Globalization is “demonstrably creating increased inequalities both within and across societies, spiraling processes of ecological degradation and crisis, and unviable relations between...goods and the wealth required to purchase them”

(Appadurai, 2001, p. 17). Though some question if globalization worsens or lessens inequality between countries, “on many accounts it impinges on the pursuit of social justice *within* each country” because it drives governments to create policies that might safeguard the welfare of the least disadvantaged but also increase incentives for more advantaged members of society, like capitalists and high-skilled workers (Held & Koenig-Archibugi, 2003, p. 6). Furthermore, transnational business interests prevail over state sovereignty, human rights, and environmental protection.

It is not just an issue of global north versus south, for in developing countries there are elites who could afford to live extravagantly. There is also a “‘South in the North,’ represented by the waves of migrants in search of better-earning opportunities” (Pineda-Ofreneo, 2004, p. 237). In reality, the “free” flows of goods means industrialized countries have more bargaining power and richer sectors of society have more buying power; the “free” circulation of ideas means that some voices have greater sway and silence others, especially those of marginalized sectors like women migrant workers.

Debates on globalization center not only on its impact, but also on the role of the nation state in international economic integration. According to Lindio-McGovern (2012), the “hyperglobalist thesis” (p. 14) agrees with deregulators that the state has a reduced role, whereas proponents of the “transformationalist thesis” (p. 7) regard the state as flexible and able to adjust to globalization, which they view as “creating a world that blurs the boundaries between the international and domestic, external and internal affairs” (p. 14). Taking this premise several steps further, nation states may be viewed not as “helpless victims of the rise of global markets” but instead as “active participants in shaping these markets”; states have in fact exercised political choice and social agency in “the ways new technologies were used and new markets were created” (Panitch, 2006, p. 4). A more nuanced argument, however, underscores the differing state capacities for adjusting to global economic pressures based on the strength of its domestic institutions (Weiss, 1998). Developing countries are at a disadvantage because of their economic weakness (frail social infrastructure, lack of technology, and political struggles like corruption and dictatorships), inadequate “negotiating strength in international relations” due to indebtedness, lack of internal organization in terms of data gathering/analysis and policy

formulation/advocacy on globalization, and lack of “sophisticated” regional and international cooperation among developing countries (Khor, 2001, pp. 20–23).

Recent treatment of the phenomenon in academic work has focused on certain issue areas like transnational labor and feminization of migration, which will be discussed in a subsequent section.

2.1.2. Gender in neoliberal globalization

The term “globalization” by itself is met with numerous contentions. But globalization, particularly neoliberal¹³ globalization, is conceived by some academics as a non-neutral process (Harvey, 2007; Lindio-McGovern, 2012; Moghadam, 2005; Smith & Johnston, 2002).

Neoliberal globalization dangled the promise of progress to developing countries, but policies facilitating deregulation, economic liberalization, privatization, and labor flexibilization only served to accelerate and aggravate the global economic crisis (Lindio-McGovern, 2012, p. 11). Policies that reduce or remove state regulation of the market led to a free-for-all system that allowed transnational corporations to do as they wished with commodity prices, environmental resources, wages, and labor practices. Economic liberalization facilitated the entry of transnational businesses (with minimal barriers to imports and tariffs) into poorer nations, effectively destroying local industries because the local people could not compete with the imported products. Social services, once owned or subsidized by the government, became privatized or controlled by private companies for profit. Aside from the transnational corporations manipulating the international economy, there are also the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank (WB), and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which instituted neoliberal policies that devastated the

¹³ Neoliberalism is both a policy model (Smith, n.d.) (Kenton, 2019) and ideology that emphasizes continued economic growth with minimal government intervention in socio-economic affairs. In the 1980s, neoliberalism prospered through the British and American economic policies of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations. Frequently linked with laissez-faire economics, neoliberalism underlines the importance of free-market competition or capitalism and limited state ownership, spending, and regulation. Since neoliberalism is more concerned with economic efficiency and the policies that enable businesses to flourish, other vital aspects – such as human rights and national sovereignty – are neglected and even endangered. This prioritization of corporate interests over people has made neoliberalism a model against social justice, democracy, and self-determination of nation states. With the increased interdependence of various national economies over the past decades, policies to promote free trade and movement of global capital have been put in place.

economies of developing countries.¹⁴ With neoliberal globalization comes the need for abundant “cheap, flexible and disposable labor” created through contractualization, setting low minimum wages, displacement of peasants from their lands by acquisition, and labor export of developing countries (Lindio-McGovern, 2012, p. 12). Recognizing that laborers are of crucial importance in the global capitalist thrust towards increasing productivity and profits, governments also act as labor exporters. By highlighting overseas migration as the answer to its citizens’ economic woes, instead of providing local jobs and making systemic changes to address poverty and discrimination, governments thus perpetuate the existing inequalities.

The abovementioned neoliberal policies have enabled governments, powerful regulatory institutions like the WTO, and transnational corporations to create flexible markets where people are dehumanized and reduced to mere machines or products. Neoliberalization “has transformed the positionality of labour, of women, and of indigenous groups in the social order by emphasizing that labour is a commodity” (Harvey, 2007, p. 171). Expanded trade may have created new work opportunities, but it also ensured that wealth disproportionately remained with the already-rich land-owners and business capitalists. While globalization generated new markets, it also entrenched poverty, caused environmental damage, and led to human rights violations and greater marginalization of women.

Due to the massive impact of globalization on women, theorists called for the inclusion of gender in the study of globalization. The feminist perspective is crucial in viewing globalization and the “ways that gender discrimination and occupational segregation contribute to the unfavorable labor market outcomes of women compared to men” (Benería, Floro, Grown, & MacDonald, 2000, p. xvi). Using a feminist approach helps give women-centered insights into issues – like migration, SAPs, and citizenship rights – and enhance understanding of the effects of globalization on social institutions and international politics (Zimmerman, Litt, & Bose, 2006, pp. 2–3). Desai and Rinaldo argue that scholarship on gender and globalization can be improved by overcoming limitations

¹⁴ WTO regulates international trade between countries through policies that benefit the global north, while the IMF provides development loans conditional on the adoption of structural adjustment policies (SAP) detrimental to struggling economies.

such as: “understanding of gender that still tends to reflect the binary sex/gender arrangements common to Western societies, while failing to address the influence of colonial histories and postcolonial states”; “gender asymmetry” or “a disproportionate focus on women”; and “narrow set of issues” for analysis (2016, p. 337).

2.1.3. *Women erased: the global care chain and feminization of migration*

In most of the discussions on globalization, women are conspicuously absent despite the fact that they are profoundly affected by economic integration world-wide. Feminist economists argue that mainstream economics does not factor in people, let alone women, and this is reflected in male bias when it comes to economic models, theories, and policies that aggravate gender inequality (Elson, 1993; Ferber & Nelson, 2003; Illo, 1992). It is important to understand that economic globalization is a highly gendered process. The international economic restructuring of production and the demand for reproductive labor or care work have thus far dictated women’s labor migration flows (Yeates, 2009).

Feminization of migration generally refers to the global trend of women moving locally or abroad, typically for work. This description is further complicated by Piper, who accounts for “stratification” that highlights the “combined effects of gender, ethnicity, legal status, skill level and mode of entry or exit” on women’s migration (2008, p. 1288). Feminized or gendered migration may be seen in both productive and reproductive economies.

There is evident “growth of export-oriented industrial production, especially in textiles, agriculture and electronics where ‘production [is] often based on labour-intensive non-automated production’ undertaken by a predominantly female labour force” (Pearson, 2000, p. 221 as cited in Yeates, 2009, p. 14). Along with the requirement for laborers in the so-called “productive” sphere, there is the often-overlooked but just as significant need for workers in the “reproductive” arena, which drives women to migrate for paid care work within and outside their countries. Available occupations for women tend to be associated with traditional gender roles; this usually means care or domestic work, which involves taking care of children or the elderly, and household chores like cleaning and cooking (UN Women, n.d.). This reproductive labor – viewed as naturally part of women’s responsibilities – often lacks adequate recognition, compensation, and regulation.

The transfer of reproductive labor is articulated through the term “global care chain” (GCC), coined by Hochschild to refer to “a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring” (2000, p. 131). Yeates explains the GCC as involving a woman in a developed country paying a woman with a poor background locally or from abroad to perform the “domestic duties” she can no longer manage, who in turn sources the labor of her relative or a woman poorer than her who lives in her home country; the farther down the chain one goes, the lesser the value of the labor, until the care work is eventually being done without pay (2009, p. 40). GCCs rely on care labor supply through informal (kin) and formal (market) channels and entail both intra-country (rural to urban) and international migration on a cross-border or trans-regional basis (2009, p. 41).

Through all of these processes of keeping the industries and households running, women migrant workers remain key players. However, these women often end up devalued and oppressed in low-paying jobs in “global cities,” burdened with “survival circuits” that maintain the economies of both their receiving and sending countries (Sassen, 2004). Women migrant workers often find themselves facing low salaries, discriminatory working practices, and dismal working conditions and social protection. In undertaking overseas employment, women face more risks based on their gender, such as: limited number or types of jobs available (dirty, dangerous, or demeaning “3D” jobs; informal jobs not covered by labor laws; work not aligned with skills and qualifications), reintegration difficulties, and non-recognition of women migrant worker’s rights in destination countries like Asian and Middle Eastern nations (Kawar, 2004, pp. 73–75). Furthermore, they are also considered “disposable domestics” who face economic and cultural exploitation (G. Chang, 2006).

Laws and policies that are in place to protect migrant worker rights are often gender-blind or lacking gender perspective. Most of the existing migration policies at national and international levels share the weakness of viewing migrants “as being one homogenous group void of gender and sexual identity, disability and race” (von Hase, 2017). This view towards migrants is detrimental because gender-responsive governance is crucial to

address women's specific issues, vulnerabilities, and needs in the context of international migration work.

For migrant women, the struggles are compounded by hardships in gaining legal status without relying on an employer or spouse. In Europe, for example, migrant women "exposed to violence or exploitation are highly susceptible to becoming undocumented, a position in which they face significant legal and practical barriers to access social services, report to the authorities and seek protection from women's shelters or labour unions" (UN, n.d., p. 2).

According to Rosa Logar, Coordinator of Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE)¹⁵, "gender-neutral" laws developed by many countries have "systematically failed to address the inequalities at the root of violence against women." She thus recommends, when dealing with undocumented migrant women, the urgent use of an intersectional approach that factors in other forms of discrimination (like race, religion, color, and class) and is "best applied by examining 'who' is excluded from policies and practice and 'why'" (UN, n.d., p. 29)

2.2. Women OFWs: contending with feminized labor, lack of legal protection, and limited representations

The most recent figures published in 2018 by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) show an estimated total of 2.3 million OFWs employed abroad within the period April-September 2017, of which there were more Filipino women (53.7% or 1.26 million) than men working mainly in "elementary occupations" like house or office cleaning (59% or 740,000) ("2017 Survey on Overseas Filipinos (Results from the 2017 Survey on Overseas Filipinos)," 2018). According to the PSA, women were primarily employed in Asia (92.7%), particularly Eastern and Western Asia where working conditions are notoriously difficult especially for domestic workers. Filipina working professionals comprised 9% (113,000) while those with managerial positions made up .9% (11,000) of

¹⁵ The WAVE Network is a "formal network NGO composed of European women's NGOs" and "the only European network focusing solely on the elimination of violence against women and children." (<https://www.wave-network.org/wave-network/>)

the total number of Filipino women documented to be working abroad (“By the Numbers: Overseas Filipino Workers,” 2018). This means that the situation of Filipinas in feminized labor entails not only increased numbers of women migrating for work, but also engagement in occupations that are considered part of the feminine domain, requiring low skill, and meriting little to no compensation.

Majority of women OFWs are in domestic work and entertainment (Boquet, 2017, p. 374), wherein they are exposed to high risks of physical, psychological, and sexual violence due to the lack or absence of legal protection in these industries. In the face of all these reported cases of violence against women OFWs, the Philippine state maintains an “ambivalent attitude regarding migration:” it deregulates labor migration to drive profits higher, thus sacrificing migrant security while aiming to “preserve the country’s honor and reputation abroad that appear to be particularly embodied in its women citizens” (Fresnoza-Flot, 2012, p. 97).

There are studies that look into Filipino women’s migration processes and working conditions, and the effects thereof on their health and well-being. One study done in the Philippines investigated the dynamics of stress and coping of Filipina domestic workers in the pre-, during, and post-migration phases (van der Ham, Ujano-Batangan, Ignacio, & Wolffers, 2015). Its findings indicate that the women’s stress levels were “significantly higher abroad than in the Philippines” and that “[s]tress and coping in the Philippines was primarily related to financial issues, while stress and coping abroad related more strongly [to] loneliness, working conditions and employers” (2015, p. 14). A research in Norway that used postcolonial feminist analysis revealed that all Filipina respondents experienced some level of stress or distress, caused by “sense of belonging” and “securing a future” factors linked to living abroad as immigrant women and their multiple, transnational roles as workers, mothers, wage earners, and others (Straiton, Ledesma, & Donnelly, 2017). This same study identified religion and informal support from family and friends as coping strategies used by the women (2017). Hall, Garabiles, and Latkin (2019) argue that adverse working conditions of temporary Filipina domestic workers in Macao, China lead to addictive behaviors and physical and mental health problems. While all the

abovementioned studies talk about the problems encountered by Filipina migrants abroad, they also highlight the agency, strengths, coping abilities, and resourcefulness of the women; more importantly, they recommend interventions in the form of health services, social networks/support, and legislation.

Although many articles and researches have been devoted to women OFWs, most of them focus on domestic workers in inter-regional (within Asia) and trans-regional (from Asia to other regions) migration. An example of inter-regional research is Boersma's discussion on "permanence" and "temporariness" and how these are simultaneously experienced daily (in "permanently...temporary labour") by Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, informing their life decisions (2019, p. 273). Articles have also been written on migration governance or labor market policies impacting overseas domestic workers in Asia or Southeast Asia (Elias, 2018; Islam & Cojocaru, 2016). Comparisons of these migration policies have also been done between and among Asian countries, such as in Philippines and Indonesia (Herrera, 2015).

There is a dearth of literature on skilled Filipina professionals working abroad. However, this is true for skilled female migration in general, as Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, and Sales recommend addressing the "omission of skilled female migrants in the literature on international migration and the general silence on the degree of de-skilling" involved in the migration process (2000, p. 130). By far, studies that have been conducted on Filipina professionals are primarily related to those in the medical field, like doctors and nurses, which are occupations that are still strongly associated with feminine caretaking responsibilities.

Despite the diversity of the women's backgrounds and their motivations for (and consequences of) migration, they are represented in very limited ways. Scholarly work on women OFWs criticize a range of representations that are usually myopic, serving the interests of the powerful few, or ignorant of the complexities that correspond with the women's circumstances amidst the issues of international migration. There is the representation of "heroes" of national development or 'victims' of a global capitalist economy," which overlooks "multiple class processes engendered by transnational labour

migration” (Gibson, Law, & McKay, 2001, p. 365). As Chang and Ling assert, transnational ideology uses racism and sexism to institutionalize a “globalized service economy” where Filipinas and other Asian women embody “service” (2010, p. 40). In this representation, Filipinas are cast into a “stereotype” of sexual subservience “rooted in a history of colonialism, sexism, and poverty” (2010, p. 40). Apart from racialized sexualities, migrant Filipina identities as “temporary others,” “major breadwinners in the family (Hilsdon 2003),” and “successful mothers (Sobritchea 2007)” were also mentioned (Hilsdon & Giridharan, 2008, p. 611). In restricting the types and breadth of representation of women OFWs, limits are also imposed on understanding of them as individuals and members of society, as well as policies that would adequately address their issues and needs.

Given this, it would be worth exploring alternative representations, such as presented by Odine de Guzman in her article discussing letters written by overseas domestic workers as a form of testimonial narrative. In her analysis of the letters, she looks at “how collective memory of the workers interrogates public information and representations of overseas women workers” (2004, p. 201). The women’s self-representations show them as “hardworking, persevering and patient” (not to be equated with “passivity or meekness”) (217), “pragmatic” or rational (218), “fun-loving” and “humorist” (223), having “creativity” and resilience” (224), and displaying “burgeoning assertiveness...regarding their welfare and justice/fairness in their work relationship with employers,” and a “rising sense of solidarity” (220).

III. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

“Kaya nga ako ganito parang mas matanda tignan kasi alam mo naman yung busy, stress sa buhay (laugh)...problema, laging problema na karugtong everyday.”

This is why I look older, because you know how it is when busy, stressed with life (laugh)...problems, always problems connected to everyday. – Endeavor, 2019

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The intersectional identities of women of color, affected by both patriarchy and racism, are often disregarded in feminist and anti-racist discourses and practices which lean towards examining gender and race separately (Crenshaw, 1991). Western feminist scholars tend to universalize a large group of women in non-Western countries as “Third World women,” depicting them as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.” (Mohanty, 1991, p. 56). This action of lumping all women together in one category and focusing only on the issues of middle- to upper-class white women rejects the very principles on which feminism was founded. For black feminists, the issues of poor and non-white women must be addressed to avoid reinforcing classism, racism, and sexism; feminism is inadequate when it ignores the systemic structures of power in society that keep black women oppressed (hooks, 1981; Davis, 1983). Hence, the homogeneity of women must not be taken for granted and emphasis ought to be placed on their diverse gender, racial, ethnic, and class contexts, as well as multiple voices and experiences.

Moreover, colonial history needs to be considered since colonial rule has enduring, negative effects on colonized people and their ways of thinking and behaving long after the occupation itself. Colonial mentality,¹⁶ or the “resulting perceptions of ethnic or cultural

¹⁶ David and Okazaki chose to use the term “colonial mentality” instead of “internalized oppression” – which is already used in minority psychology literature – to discuss Filipino Americans because the former term is “already widely used within the Filipino American community movements and in Filipino American scholarship” (2006, p. 2). I also opted for this term because it is commonly used and well-understood in the same sense within the Philippines, even outside academic circles.

inferiority of historically oppressed groups” (David & Okazaki, 2006, p. 2) is one of the legacies of colonization. Postcolonial theory has thus been used to “force...alternative knowledges into the power structure of the west as well as the non-west” and change people’s perspectives and behavior, with the aim of producing “a more just and equitable relation between different peoples of the world” (Young, 2003, p. 7). Among the aspects examined in postcolonial studies are the interactions between West and East (referring to Asian people) and the ways by which an exotic, inferior, and primitive concept of the Orient – or “Other,” not from the West – was formed and sustained by European colonialism (Said, 1979).

Examining the situation of Filipinas who relocate to Hungary for employment requires accounting for gender, racial, economic, political, social, cultural, and other intersecting factors facilitating or affecting their migration. Close attention should be given to the positionality of Filipinas as former “colonial subjects” and as “Other” in the current economic world order, wherein they could also be portrayed as generic “Third World women.” Accordingly, this thesis uses a feminist framework based on Global Political Economy (GPE) that incorporates crucial concepts from intersectionality, black feminist, and post-colonial theories.

3.1.1. Global Political Economy

The phrases “Global Political Economy (GPE)” and “International Political Economy (IPE)” have been used interchangeably, though they have also been differentiated from each other. Some define IPE as a distinct field of inquiry, area of study, or academic discipline (Broome, 2014; Lim, 2014; O’Brien & Williams, 2016), while some problematize if it is a sub-field (of International Relations) or “inter-discipline” (Underhill, 2001). Dominant schools of thought that have shaped IPE are economic nationalism, liberalism, and Marxism, with early works concentrating on the relationship between state and market or economic activities. Until now, most IPE scholars view the state and market as separate and in tension (Gilpin & Gilpin, 2001, p. 80; Lim, 2014, p. 11; Underhill, 2001, p. 3) , when they should be regarded as an integrated whole.

IPE is a known field of study dealing with political and economic occurrences across states, as well as globalization. There are those that criticize IPE for ignoring social

relations, to the extent that it has been called a “vulgar, fraudulent discipline” (Burnham, 1994, p. 221) for largely failing to study the interactions of political, social, and economic elements in society.

In view of this gap, the distinctions made between GPE and IPE primarily have to do with highlighting the participation of diverse actors in world events:

The term, “international political economy” (IPE) began to appear in the scholarly literature in the mid-1960s as problems of the world economy and lagging development in the third world gained scholarly attention. Although the term “global political economy” (GPE) came into sporadic use at about the same time, it was not until later that GPE became the more common term. The shift signaled a recognition that what happens in the world is not just about interactions between states, and that the global political economy includes many different kinds of actors. Rule making for the global order happens in private as well as public settings. In all, the messy set of relations captured by the term “global political economy” better suits the reality of a globalizing world. (Marlin-Bennett, 2017, p. 2)

This variety of actors refers to transcending merely state-to-state relations (in IPE) to feature transnational politics and affairs (in GPE), which involve domestic-international, private-public, local-global, and south-north relations. I opted for the term GPE since its inclusion of other actors, specifically people, also allows me to focus the discussion on women and the role they play in the global political economy.

It is one thing to include the words “women” or “gender” in political economy scholarship and another to study it in a meaningful way. While V. Spike Peterson recognizes the successes of feminist research, knowledge- and association-building, teaching, and academic activism in the last decade, she is surprised by the “limited – arguably superficial – engagement from the perspective of feminist claims and achievements” (2005, p. 500). She further asserts that “the most productive and transformative gendered political economy entails systemic engagement with *analytical* gender¹⁷ and its

¹⁷ “Analytical gender” involves not just shifts in methodologies and theoretical frameworks, but also possibilities for transforming how people understand gender and the interdependence of culture and economy.

hierarchical implications (privileging that which is masculinised and devalorising that which is feminised)” (p. 500).

Clearly, it is not enough to simply insert women into socio-economic constructions or paradigms, particularly if these are male-biased. There need to be “reconstruction of theory” and movement “beyond the dichotomy of men and women to the hierarchy of masculinity over femininity” (Peterson, 2005, p. 502). These account for the devaluation that happens to women in both “productive” and “reproductive” labor – more so in the latter – and even to men who are in jobs that are traditionally considered feminine, like cleaning and childcare.

In light of the above, Peterson calls for a “critical rewriting” of the global political economy and develops an alternative triad analytical framing of reproductive, productive, and virtual (RPV) economies. The RPV mode of analysis changes how globalization is viewed and, consequently, interpretations and responses to it. Key to this analytics are problematizing of the category of “women” and accounting for the complexities of gender, race, class, nationality, sexuality, age, religion, and economic class, as well as the hierarchies and intersecting oppressions that result from these (Peterson, 2005).

3.1.2. RPV Triad Analysis

While Peterson’s triad analytical framing is not used as a main framework in the analysis, its three elements recur throughout the thesis and are therefore explained further below:

Productive Economy

According to Peterson, the “productive economy” (PrE) is understood as “formal” economic activities identified with production (2005, p. 508). She explains how globalization has affected these economic activities, resulting in six trends or occurrences: (1) the destruction of Third World economies dependent on primary production, caused by the drastic drop in prices and demand for (non-oil) primary

products worldwide; (2) deindustrialization¹⁸ in advanced industrialized countries and major cities, which leads to downsizing, increase of low-paying, semi- and non-skilled jobs, and flexibilization;¹⁹ (3) change of available job types from being manufacturing-related to being based on information and communication technology (ICT), creating “income polarisation” which rewards skilled workers with high wages; (4) *feminization*²⁰ of employment, which increases the proportion of women in labor markets, demonstrates deteriorated and unsafe labour conditions, and reconfigures worker identities (like “feminised managers and female breadwinners”); (5) increased flows²¹ of people – notably women from developing countries – to urban or touristic areas, export-processing zones, and seasonal agricultural locations; and (6) harmful effects on gender, class, race, and ethnicity brought about by structural adjustment policies (SAP) – such as privatization and trade liberalization²² – imposed on developing countries (pp. 509-510).

Reproductive Economy

Peterson presents the “reproductive economy” (RE) as the *feminized and marginalized* “family/private sphere of emotional maintenance, leisure and caring (unpaid) labour,” which is in direct contrast with the *masculinized and valorized*²³ “public sphere of power and formal (paid) work” (2005, pp. 510–511).²⁴ She asserts that the neglect of the

¹⁸ Deindustrialization happens when a country undergoes “structural transformation,” first by industrializing (economic focus goes from agriculture to manufacturing) and then deindustrializing (moving away from manufacturing to services).

¹⁹ Flexibilization in the economics context means making labor “flexible,” cheap, and insecure. Flexibilized jobs become increasingly temporary, part-time, and non-unionized, which intensifies un- or under-employment and insecurity of work and income. Check Peterson’s exact words

²⁰ “material, embodied transformation of labour markets (increasing proportion of women), a conceptual characterisation of deteriorated and devalorised labour conditions (less desirable, meaningful, safe or secure), and a reconfiguration of worker identities (feminised managers, female breadwinners)” (Peterson, 2005, p. 509)

²¹ Migrations are shaped by many factors like colonial histories, immigration policies, geopolitics, labour markets, kinship networks, and identity markers. Since the typically available jobs are “unskilled” (domestic service, sex work, harvesting), people who migrate for work are usually women from developing countries.

²² Privatization harms women because reduced state spending means they have less access to secure government jobs, support for reproductive labor, and health services. Trade liberalization is also damaging to women because it maintains unequal wages and job availability between women and men.

²³ To “valorize” is to maintain a price or value (of a product) through actions of the government like buying at fixed price. Another interpretation of the word could be to assign worth or validity to something, such as the work of an IT engineer or accountant.

²⁴ Emphasis in italics mine

reproductive economy is an example of the “masculinist and modernist bias in political economy” (2005, p. 510) and provides three reasons for taking RE seriously: “the significance of subject formation and socialisation, the devalorisation of ‘women’s work’ and the increasing role of informalisation in the GPE” (2005, p. 511).

Socialization or the formation of individuals/subjects happens within the context of a certain cultural environment: where, with whom, and how people are raised, what kind of values and beliefs they observe, learn, or are taught regarding gender, race, class, and other aspects. This includes ideas about gender identities and divisions of labor: who does which types of work, what work is considered essential, and others.

The labor of caring and even socialization itself, necessary to keep families and cultures intact, have historically been considered all over the world as women’s work. Despite the importance of this work, it has been devalorized to the extent that states diminish the required material, emotional, and cultural resources for sustaining women’s wellbeing and those of their families. Women are hence burdened not just by the demands of contributing to household finances, but also by the provision of carework and emotional support to their families. In some cases, especially for those who do not qualify for formal employment, women have to resort to informal work which is usually low-paid without benefits and can be insecure and risky (like domestic services and sex work).

Due to informalization, transnational corporations get increased profits while workers (except elite, high-skilled professionals) get decreased formal wages and bargaining power. In these circumstances, many workers – with women making up the majority – are left with few options for survival. “Women, the poor, migrants and recent immigrants are the prototypical (feminised) workers of the informal economy” (Peterson, 2005, p. 512) and they are disproportionately affected by informalization in a globalizing world.

Virtual Economy

Peterson addresses the “unprecedented fusion of symbols/culture and commodities/economy in today’s GPE” in the rapid, large-scale, and borderless flows of information in the “virtual economy” (VE), which has three interactive modes: financial, informational, and cultural (2005, p. 512). The financial mode is related to the complex global financial transactions that create “virtual/symbolic money” (like prices set through interest and exchange rates, stock market values) which is no less powerful than “real/commodity money” because of its gendered effects in crises – such as job loss, longer working hours, and worsening health of women – and long-term consequences for society (Peterson, p. 513-514). The informational mode involves “politics of cultural coding” in how information or knowledge is being selectively transmitted (particularly by the media) to favor, grant authority, and give voice to individuals or groups based on gender, racial, economic, and national hierarchies (Peterson, p. 515). The cultural mode is tied to the previous mode in the sense that the exchange of cultural symbols in the highly regulated global information flows serves to reinforce consumerism, not just as the ability or desire to buy goods, but also as a “way of life” or viewing the world; examples are sexualized or domesticated female bodies as depicted in advertising, music, and videos (Peterson, p. 516).

3.1.3. Issues surrounding productive and reproductive labor

General distinctions have been made regarding productive and reproductive labor; while the former is associated with formal, paid (male-dominated) work in the public sphere, the latter is linked to informal, unpaid (female-dominated) work in the private or domestic sphere. Various academics have discussed the complex relations between the two kinds of economies and how these are necessarily intertwined.

Chang and Ling’s description of “two processes of globalization or global restructuring” in the current world political economy can be likened to the productive/reproductive binary, where the aggressive, technologically-driven “technomuscular” capitalism (TMC) reflects the productive economy through its involvement in trade, finance, and

telecommunications chiefly headed by men (2010, p. 30). Serving as an “intimate other” to TMC, the “regime of labor intimacy” (RLI) – which offers “sexualized, racialized, and class-based” service – can be compared to the reproductive economy due to its focus on “low-wage, low-skilled menial service provided by mostly female migrant workers” (ibid). In order to survive and fulfill the conditions of production, TMC relies on the RLI for “continual reproduction of the household, labor, and the family” (Rupert & Solomon, 2006, p. 91).

Debates have also been raised about what constitutes labor and whether or not care work should be paid. Feminist scholars like Sue Himmelweit have thus analyzed the relations and motivations involved in care work and proposed solutions which entail both changes in social perspectives and policies:

Himmelweit suggests that the relational aspects of caring work (whether it is paid or unpaid) signal a whole class of occupations in which workers are not purely motivated by money and care about the results of their work. Her goal is to challenge the dualism between home and work, reproduction and production, to allow for care to be part of paid labour and work to be recognised in the caring activities that go on in the home.... Most important, Himmelweit argues for identifying policy changes that would weaken the pressure of inequality which results in people holding contradictory aspirations (care and self-fulfilment vs. material possessions and need), as well as forcing people to struggle for survival, preventing them from using time for creative (and not necessarily just caring) work and leisure. In large part, the struggle for progressive social reproduction is a struggle for both resources and for control over time. Institutions like public education and child care are crucial to the realisation of such possibilities. (Bakker, 2007, p. 548)

Bakker goes beyond the production/reproduction binary to talk about “social reproduction,” which she defines as not just biological reproduction of the species or reproduction of the labor force, but also the “reproduction and provisioning of caring needs that may be wholly privatised within families and kinship networks or socialised to some degree through state supports” (2007, p. 541). By tracing important events that shaped the capitalist system into what it is now, Bakker examines the historical separation of production from reproduction and argues that the current global political economy needs to be analyzed with social reproduction in mind. Specifically, she highlights how decreased state spending and increased privatization of social services have burdened

primarily women, who sustain the daily tasks of survival and reproduction through paid and unpaid labor (ibid). Janine Brodie similarly talks about the simultaneous “detachment of individuals from social networks and supports” and shifting of responsibility to these individuals (2003, p. 63). Along with these gaps in social provision, the absence of gender in policy-making – which fosters the view that “women’s reproductive labour is, at best, an ‘externality’” – have led to “increased demands on transnational flows of domestic and service workers who are largely women” (Bakker, 2007, p. 551).

3.1.4. Feminist GPE in data gathering and analysis

Given the limited coverage of a Master thesis, the research was conducted using a Feminist Global Political Economy (GPE) framework. Below are the topics of research interest loosely organized under the three types of economy in Peterson’s RPV analytics, which the women respondents were in a relevant position to discuss due to their first-hand experience of migrating to and residing in Hungary.

Productive Economy

Migration and employment laws are linked to question of economics: who are allowed to move to another country and work there, how long can they stay and who are entitled to citizenship, and what kinds of jobs are available, for whom, and for how much compensation. All these questions affect women’s lives. The research also aimed to reveal whether or not the interviewees are aware of the protections and services offered by said laws specific to them as women and international migrant workers, given that processes involved in globalization (like deregulation and informalization) tend towards exploitation of women in the global economy.

Reproductive Economy

The research does not give ascendancy to reproductive labor or the stereotypical meanings associated with it. Rather, it also looks at the reproduction of cultural norms,

beliefs, and values that is usually considered part of the domain of women's responsibilities in society. Since it was not possible to go in-depth into family history to find out how socialization took place for each respondent and how they carried it into their adulthood, the research trained its focus on the jobs that the women had in Hungary and the expectations of them at work. This included ideas on what a Filipina worker is like, what kinds of tasks they should do, and how they are supposed to interact with colleagues and perform their jobs. Regarding work typically not viewed as reproductive in nature, efforts were exerted to elicit the gendered aspects from the interviewees. Inquiries were also made about other people's attitudes towards the respondents as Filipinas and general opinions about the Filipino people.

Virtual Economy

The informational and cultural modes of this economy were addressed by the women talking about their experiences of living and working in Hungary. Attempts to find out experiences of racism or sexism were made by asking questions on challenges related to daily transactions (availing of social services/benefits/facilities, transacting at commercial establishments, social situations) and work-related matters (such as job hunting, dealing with colleagues and supervisors, work benefits, and office harassment).

Determining the structural and personal motivations that led the women respondents to emigrate from the Philippines, as well as their living and working conditions and relationships in Hungary and their plans for the future, all made for a research that tackles the multiple facets of Filipina OFW lives.

3.2. Methodology

I set out to find respondents for the research without imposing limits in terms of the women's age, civil status, educational background, and occupation. The only requirement was that they had to be Filipinas living and working in Hungary for at least one year. The rationale for these criteria was to maintain openness to diversity of respondent

backgrounds and possible research outcomes, particularly in keeping with my resolve not to deliberately focus on domestic workers and their issues, which already have been the subject of many academic works on Filipino migrant women workers.

The research used snowball sampling, starting with requests for interviews through Facebook, which is the most popular social media platform among Filipinos in the Philippines and abroad. After a few women were interviewed through this method, the rest of the respondents were recruited by referral or personal networks. Unfortunately, more participants were not possible due to lack of responses to invitations for interview or inability to participate because of respective schedules.

Ten Filipino women were interviewed in person for this research over a two-month period. The women were between 27 to 65 years old, hailing from different cities in the Philippines and from lower- to middle-class backgrounds. They were primarily based in Budapest, with three living in other Hungarian cities. Five respondents were single and the rest of the women were married, with children, except for one respondent. Half of them were university graduates, while the other half finished high school or technical college (less than four years). Eight respondents held full-time paid jobs and one engaged in freelance work. One respondent did not fit the typical profile of a “worker” as she did not receive economic compensation for being a homemaker. However, her inclusion in this research was part of challenging the meaning of “work” and what constitutes it. Not all of the women’s occupations matched their qualifications, since there were two university graduates in domestic work and a non-profit professional in sales. Majority of the respondents gathered were care workers in households in Budapest, with only three women working as office employees.

I used a semi-structured interview method to allow for the women to share their experiences more thoroughly and give space for more self-expression in topics which they considered important. In order to highlight the full participatory nature of the research, the women were informed of their rights to disclose only the information which they were comfortable sharing, to discontinue the interview process at any stage, and to

withdraw participation from the research without negative consequences. For purposes of confidentiality and security, the research used pseudonyms which I asked the women to select for themselves. Names of organizations and places have also been withheld.

Interviewing women of the same nationality as me had both its advantages and disadvantages. Linguistically and culturally speaking, it was easier to establish connections with one another. There was good rapport with all the interviewees, possibly facilitated by the language used. We were able to converse in Tagalog²⁵ with a sense of ease and familiarity in a way that, while not as free-flowing compared to using the regional languages in the Philippine provinces from where the women originated, was less likely using a foreign language such as English. Tagalog or “Taglish” (a combination of Tagalog and English) was the most practical option for communicating. Apart from convenience, there was power and resistance in expressing one’s self in the native tongue.

The Philippines, having been colonized by the United States of America from 1898 to 1946, has had English taught by American teachers sent in the thousands starting from 1901. According to Steinbock-Pratt, these teachers hired by the US government were part of the imperial project of “providing education and civilization” and tasked with work that was “intimately linked with notions of manly duty, masculine endeavor, and the innate superiority of whiteness” (2012, p. 372). She further states that teachers – particularly the women – deployed to illustrate American “benevolence” (p. 377) through education in English were expected to emphasize “virile masculinity and racial supremacy;” however, they also inadvertently infused “discourses of domesticity and maternalism” into public life (p. 374). This means that from as early as the 1900s, Filipino women were being socialized into fulfilling gender-based roles related to caring and motherhood. In the post-colonial context of the Philippines, poor or non-standard English is considered to be a mark of low literacy and sub-standard education, often subjecting its speakers to humiliation or rejection. English has become not only an official language but also the language of the elite in the Philippines; it is used in the academe, mass media, business,

²⁵ Tagalog is spoken as a first language by a fourth of the Philippine population; its standard form is officially called *Filipino*, the national language of the Philippines, commonly used along with English.

law, and politics. hooks stated that in order to disrupt standard English as the “language of conquest and domination” (1994, p. 168), critical feminist writings have called for the recognition and celebration of “the primacy of voices that are often silenced, censored, or marginalized” and the diversity of language (1994, p. 173). As suggested by hooks, “we may learn from spaces of silence as well as spaces of speech, that in the patient act of listening to another tongue...we may disrupt that cultural imperialism that suggests one is worthy of being heard only if one speaks in standard English” (1994, p. 174). Thus, speaking in and listening to Tagalog or Taglish within an academic research undertaking can be viewed as a defiant act. In the same way, Tagalog used by the women respondents in this research to respond to racist people on the streets or to problematic employers or co-workers can also be a form of resistance.

Understanding of cultural nuances was also crucial. I knew how to interpret linguistic fillers like “*ano*” (literally, “what”), which usually stood in for other words that I could determine based on the context of the conversation. At times, there was a need to go beyond what was being said by the women respondents. Sangster emphasized the “need to unearth the underlying assumptions or 'problematic' of the interview, and to analyse the subtexts and silences, as well as the explicit descriptions in the interview” (1994, p. 7). According to her, “(r)evelations may also come from silences and omissions in women’s stories” (1994, p. 9). For this reason, I regarded pauses and silences with importance because these could mean hesitation, introspection, or inability to express something.

While cultural familiarity had its pluses, it also had its drawbacks. Filipinos tend to project happiness, and to a certain extent, contentment or success in their lives. This meant that, at the same time that we freely talked in our own language, there were also other things (ruining the positive narrative) that might not have been disclosed. Follow-up visits would have been ideal for building closer relationships with the interviewees and for deepening some of the insights obtained from them.

Regarding positionality, several authors have served well to remind me of the issues surrounding the conduct of research, particularly the unequal relations between the researcher and interviewee. Ruth Behar highlights continuous self-reflexivity on the part

of the researcher, as well as the ability to “draw deeper connections between one’s personal experience and the subject under study” (1996, p. 13). She also points out the responsibility of researchers to the people whom they interview. In a similar vein, Joan Sangster discusses Judith Stacey’s view of feminist research as “inevitably enmeshed in unequal, intrusive and potentially exploitative relationships, simply by virtue of our position as researchers and that of other women, with less control over the finished product, as ‘subjects’ of study” (1994, p. 11). I thus agree with Sangster when she emphasizes the “need to continually analyse the interview as an interactive process, examine the context of the interview, especially inherent power imbalances, and always evaluate our own ethical obligations as feminists to the women we interview” (1994, p. 13). As a feminist researcher, I had to strike a balance in both subjectivity and objectivity to accurately represent the women respondents. This entailed using their own words whenever possible to let them speak in their own voices. Knowing what I did about Filipino culture, I also had to be wary of asking leading questions particularly when it came to issues of racism and sexism. To address this, I had my interview questions approved by my supervisor and avoided using the terms “racism” and “sexism” unless the respondents themselves used them.

This research has several limitations regarding the number and background of participants. Given the size of the research sample, this thesis claims to neither be representative of all Filipina migrant workers’ lived experiences in Hungary, nor to be generalizable to those in other European countries. However, it gives a glimpse into the motivations of some Filipinas for migrating to Hungary and their experiences once there. I consider it a limitation of my research that I was unable to interview more women of varied backgrounds, particularly from lower socio-economic classes and with academic qualifications lower than the secondary level. I had also aimed to find women in blue-collar jobs, but ended up recruiting mostly those in pink- and white-collar²⁶ industries. One transgender woman participated in the research.

²⁶ Blue-collar work involves manual or physical labor, such as in manufacturing, sanitation, construction, food processing, power plant operations, farming, commercial fishing, plumbing, and facility maintenance. Pink-collar work is often related to sales, entertainment, and customer-service, as well as jobs typically associated with women. White-collar jobs involve working in offices or using computers. Some occupations and industries combine two or all categories together.

For future research on transnational women migrant workers (WMWs) from the Philippines (or other countries), it would be interesting to focus on women from marginalized sectors like gender non-conforming women,²⁷ women with disability, women living with HIV/AIDS, and indigenous women, to bring to the fore their distinct issues and needs in overseas migration work. In-depth studies could be done on migrant types that are not as prominent in academic literature, like marriage migrants, skilled WMWs, WMWs in “productive” economies like information and communications technology (ICT) and manufacturing, and women students who stay in the host country to find employment. Apart from engaging in sector-specific work, further studies could also examine female transnational labor migration motivated by certain situations like natural disasters, religious persecution, and war or conflict. Other research topics to consider are: longitudinal studies on women migrant workers, to determine changes in motivations for migration and the factors for said changes; intra-EU comparative studies on WMWs, such as in Southern Europe and Central Europe; and multi-phase analysis of the WMW’s experience before, during, and after (im)migration.

²⁷ women of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) like lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women

IV. Leaving the Philippines for the European Dream: in Pursuit of Love, Employment, and a Better Life

“Wala akong alam noon sa pag-aasawa, lalo na sa foreigner. Siyempre sa simula exciting.”

I did not know anything then about marriage, particularly with a foreigner. Of course, in the beginning it was exciting.
– Ashley, 2019

This chapter is part of a temporal way of presenting the migrant’s journey, beginning with her decision to leave her home country. By drawing on the women respondents’ accounts, this chapter shows that they had several reasons for leaving the Philippines. Some wanted to be with the Hungarian men with whom they had a romantic relationship, some desired to find a job (or were going to start working for employers who had already hired them) or to advance their career, and some craved adventure, travel, and a new or improved life. These motivations were neither solitary, nor mutually exclusive; for some of the women, most or all of the above were valid considerations for relocating to Hungary.

There is a multitude of factors contributing to women’s decision to migrate. Ioanna Laliotou talks about the rigidity of immigration policies and classifications, and how these are not always applicable to women’s experience of mobility (2007, p. 52). From the narratives of both refugees and traditional migrant women, she identifies “personal dissidence” that is “associated with an enacted desire and a will to ‘move’” (p. 51). She further argues that this “desire to move” is the “core element around which a plurality of other key referents are articulated which shape the migration story: love, relationships, nostalgia, professional pride, personal achievement, family obligations, the lure of the West, etc.” (pp. 52-53).

Maria, a graduate from one of the premier universities in the Philippines, is an example of someone who wanted it all: love, work, adventure, and travel. She had a relationship with a Hungarian man whom she met in Manila and they made plans for Maria to follow

him afterwards. Having been to Europe before as part of a sponsored tour and liking the region thoroughly, Maria had other purposes for moving to Hungary aside from being with her boyfriend:

I won't just come here for him. I was thinking *na makakakuha ako ng work doon* (that I can find work there) and I can travel also. So you know, why not? I've been thinking of it before, so *alam ko na*, ok, *maganda talaga dito* (I know that, ok, it really is beautiful here) and I wanna try living here. For experience *din* (too). (personal communication, April 28, 2019)

Globalization has given rise to “new opportunities for the formation of intimate relationships across ethnic and national borders that were not available prior to the twentieth century” (Dragojlovic, 2018, p. 2). While Dragojlovic discusses relationship formation in terms of women’s physical travel and intimate encounters with locals in “romance tourism” (2018, p. 2), relationships also emerge from online transactions through technological platforms like dating websites. Through these media, women like Endeavor and Ashley can find romance in other parts of the world and eventually migrate to be with their loved ones.

Endeavor came to Budapest to be reunited with a Hungarian man whom she met on a dating website in 2007, had a long-distance relationship with, and married in the Philippines in 2013. One of her other reasons for migrating to Hungary was the difficulty of finding a steady, well-paying job as a high school graduate in the Philippines. Like Endeavor, Ashley fell in love online with a man who lived in Hungary, married him, and joined him several months afterwards. She also found that, as someone with no university degree, she had very little job prospects in the Philippines. Another similarity between Endeavor and Ashley was the fact that even though they had enrolled in college for a few years and wanted to finish their program, they had to stop schooling because their families were financially incapable of supporting them.

Dating foreigners, especially Filipinas dating foreign men, can be a source of social disapproval in the Philippines particularly if the relationship is seen as an instrument for

economic advancement. The driving perception behind this is that of the Filipina, as the poor “Third World woman,” using a white man from the West to improve her status in life. This scenario is captured very well by Nadejda Alexandrova in her explanation of the “social stigma attached to transnational intimacies, which are often perceived as being based on economic and pragmatic grounds,” hence needing ‘true love’ to legitimize the migrant’s marriage (2007, p. 139). Alexandrova discusses the “regime of romantic love” as the preferred “way of proving the existence of ‘true emotional attachment’ in a transnational heterosexual relationship between an East European woman and a Western male partner” (2007, p. 139). However, similarities could also be drawn between Eastern European women and Filipinas, Asian women, or women from the “East” and the often unequal power relations they have with Western men.

Filipino women have different motivations for leaving the country, although most of the reasons enumerated in existing literature are related to poverty or finding more reliable sources of income. According to the UN, “[t]he lack of decent job opportunities pushes WMWs (women migrant workers) to migrate for work” (UN Women, 2016, p. 1). The “absence of fulfilling and wage-competitive jobs in the domestic economy,” which is related to the structure of Philippine industries being “dependent on trading partners’ demands,” is seen as one of the “factors that allow the labor export industry to flourish” (Institute for Migration and Development Issues, as cited in Opiniano, 2004, p. 52).

Lack of education, stemming from poverty, is a main hindrance to finding well-paying employment in the Philippines. An illustration of this is Endeavor, who tried to put herself through university but had to stop because she found it very challenging:

“Hindi ko talaga natapos kasi...sa hirap ng buhay. Kasi wala na rin papa ko so ako din ‘yung nagsusupport ng sarili ko sa pag-aaral hanggang hindi ko na s’ya naituloy kasi, ‘yun nga, nagkaroon na kami ng financial problem. Ang nanay ko, wala s’yang trabaho. Nasa bahay lang talaga.”

(I didn’t finish college because...life is difficult. Because my father was gone and I had to support my own studies until I couldn’t continue because, that’s it, we had financial problems. My mother didn’t have a job. She really just stayed at home.) (Endeavor, personal communication, April 24, 2019)

As a result, she got whatever odd jobs she could find; she worked as an attendant at an Internet café, fax operator, and office assistant to a lawyer. She acknowledged that the limitations to the type of jobs one could hold are related to academic background: “*Kung hindi ka nakapagtapos ng degree sa college, mahirap.*” (If you didn’t graduate with a college degree, it’s difficult.) Ashley’s parents, while also unable to provide for her education, sent her older brother to school. When asked why she didn’t push them to do the same for her, she said with a shrug that she was fully aware of how poor they were and that if only one person could have tuition, she would sacrifice so that her brother gets it. Both Endeavor and Ashley wanted to get out of their dire financial situation. While they did not initially set out to use online dating sites to find foreigners to marry, they ultimately found love with Hungarian men and, consequently, the opportunity to join them in Hungary and find employment.

This is an example of the crucial intersection between marriage migration and labor migration, which Piper and Lee argue should be studied together because of the “link between marriage migrants and the unpaid and underpaid labor of women” (2016, p. 476). Furthermore, they place

special attention on the patriarchal family as the locus of the reproduction of labor power, characterized under neoliberalism by the inadequacy of public service provisioning, which, in turn, results in a preponderance of women working in precarious sectors such as care work or housework. (p. 476)

Piper and Lee state that marriage migrants “experience precarity not only in economic and labor terms but also in a social and legal sense” (2016, p. 476). This multiple, intersecting precarity could not be overemphasized, particularly in the case of women like Endeavor and Ashley who are uprooted from their home country and support networks to live with partners in a land with different cultures and norms. Since they initially had no professional qualifications with which to get hired, they mostly stayed at home to do housework until they could apply for jobs like housekeeping and baby-sitting, which were extensions of their tasks in their own homes. Furthermore, childcare was difficult for Ashley because she had no nearby family or friends to help her after she gave birth.

The women who came to Hungary specifically for employment, through family referrals, are Flora, Laya, and Virág. Flora and Laya were from complicated family situations where their parents re-married but had no financial capacity for child-rearing, so the children had to be separately cared for by relatives in different cities. Their siblings who found work as housekeeping staff of embassies in Budapest were the ones who paved the way for their employment in Hungary. Virág was first hired in a West European country, where she worked for a year then returned to the Philippines. She was very apprehensive when a cousin asked her if she wanted to work in Hungary because she got sick around that time and she was uncomfortable about the fact that she didn't speak Hungarian. However, Virág found work as kitchen staff in a restaurant and as a nanny in a private home and managed well despite the language barrier.

Even higher academic qualifications do not guarantee that the women would hold jobs that give them enough satisfaction to remain in the Philippines. This is because economic factors are not always the main consideration; sometimes, the women are after novelty, progress, and career advancement.

Maria had a higher-paying job in the Philippines, but she wanted to move to Hungary for all the opportunities to meet new people and see new places. Csilla, though unable to finish her Bachelor degree program, graduated from a secretarial course which gained her some leverage in the job market. After working for many years in multinational companies, she came to regard the work as a "grind." "Nothing's coming out of it, so *sabi ko stop na ako* (I said I'll just stop)" (Csilla, personal communication, April 25, 2019). Work had become boring and she wanted something new. Having studied caregiving, she was recommended by a friend from church to the latter's foreigner boss who was looking for a nanny. Later that same year, her employers had to go back to Europe and she came with them. That was how she found herself traveling abroad for the first time, shuttling back and forth several European countries until her employer's family settled in Hungary in the late 1990s.

Bulak got her Bachelor degree from a prestigious Philippine state university. She was assigned by an intergovernmental organization to Budapest in 2018. Prior to being hired by this organization, she did volunteer work with NGOs and worked in human resources. Bulak said that she previously only worked in the Philippines, but *“Pagka gusto mong umasenso, kailangan magpa-international ka ‘di ba?”* (If you want to progress, you need to go international, right?) (personal communication, April 25, 2019)

Venus was invited by a friend to apply for a Master’s program in the same university where the latter was an alumna. Venus was enticed by the prospect of supplementing her activist work with relevant theories learned in higher education. Finding a local job was incidental, because she had initially planned to return immediately to the Philippines after graduation but liked Budapest so much that she decided to stay.

Travel was another compelling reason to go to Hungary, which, due to its membership in the Schengen Area, allows greater mobility within Europe. This was an attractive idea for Venus, who had never been to countries outside Asia, and for Maria, who wanted to see more European countries. Alma, who had a long-cherished desire to see Venice, thought that being in Hungary would take her literally closer to fulfilling this dream.

Women may be “independent” or “associational” migrants, meaning they migrate alone or to establish relationships, as through marriage (Thapan, 2006, p. 10). Women may also migrate with their families or communities, and “may be driven by individual needs and aspirations which most often coincide with those of the family” (Thapan, 2006, p. 10). This was exemplified by Alma who went from a wealthy Western country with her husband to Hungary, where as a citizen he could get cheaper healthcare for his illness. At the same time, she wanted to live in a quieter town as she was burned out from the hectic pace of life in her previous city of residence and the stressful nature of her job.

All of the women respondents in this study were independent migrants, excluding Alma. The associational migrants in the group were Maria, who joined her boyfriend, as well as Endeavor and Ashley, who reunited with their respective husbands in Hungary. Despite

the diversity of the profiles of the women interviewed for this study, they all had something in common: they went to Hungary with existing contacts or support networks (in the form of a partner, relative, friend, or employer). None of them went to Hungary to start from zero, knowing nobody, and having no concrete job prospects. Endeavor, Ashley, Maria, and Alma had their Hungarian partners, who eased them into life in Hungary by securing accommodations for them and accompanying them to government offices and public facilities to process their papers. Flora, Laya, and Virág had relatives who found employers for them in Budapest. Csilla went to Hungary with employers she had already been working for and who treated her “like family,”²⁸ while Bulak arrived ready to start at her place of employment. Venus had a friend who showed her the ropes and who eventually helped her get hired in her company. Therefore, it may be said that having a contact in the destination country contributes to migration decision-making.

In the stories shared by the women regarding their reasons for leaving the Philippines, the continuously undervalued work of Filipino women in the domestic sphere is striking. For example, when Endeavor talked about her mother as not having a job and just staying at home, she did not mean to trivialize her mother. Rather, she was trying to describe the challenges of rearing children while needing an income source. However, her statement is very telling of the way Filipinos regard work as monetized; if one does not earn, then it follows that one does not have a job and cannot “support” one’s family – financially speaking, at least.

The irony here is that in order to find work, one must have the proper academic qualifications. However, the Philippine employment market is exceedingly competitive and predisposed towards hiring university graduates, even for service jobs that do not necessarily require advanced education. In other countries, though, Filipinos can perform care work which may yield a comparatively higher salary than a local job, or they can eye other positions which would not be open to them back home given their limited academic qualifications.

²⁸ Csilla. (2019, April 25). Personal Interview.

This is linked to the next point, which is the widespread propensity of women to engage in care work even despite being holders of university degrees and having experience in their respective fields of specialization. The adjective “*mahirap*” (difficult) was recurrently used by the women to describe life in the Philippines; so much so, that in the 1990s, skilled professionals (especially in the medical field, like doctors and nurses) studied to become caregivers due to the global demand for these workers.

When asked why she chose her pseudonym, Endeavor said that it is because she is hard-working and puts in a lot of effort to improve herself. She is “*madiskarte*,” which in Filipino means something akin to “resourceful” or someone who makes things work despite the odds; this is evident in the assorted jobs she took both in the Philippines and Hungary, and the technical course she is taking now in order to have professional qualifications. Hers is reflective of the current situation of many women who, in a neoliberal regime that emphasizes self-reliance and progress, have had to find ways to sustain themselves and their families with little to no support from the state. “When public provisioning declines, women are culturally expected to fill the gap, in spite of fewer available resources, more demands on their time and minimal increases in men’s caring labour” (Peterson, 2005, p. 510). Since the Philippine state has very limited mechanisms for providing education assistance and family support (none for female-headed households), women like Ashley have to work harder to make ends meet and sometimes prioritize the needs of the men in the household above their own. Ashley even had to work while her brother went to school, which speaks of patriarchal privileges historically afforded to men in families. If she wanted to improve her status in life, the neoliberal capitalist society dictates that she must be a good consumer; meaning, she should pay for her education to obtain the credentials necessary for skilled work that is relatively better compensated over the non-skilled variety.

Finally, it bears mentioning that the concepts of “adventure” and “progress” are tied to the imaginary of Europe/Europeans or the West/Western as exciting, full of opportunities, superior, and advanced. In this sense, Europe appears to be treated as a unitary whole, without geographic borders and racial, ethnic, socio-cultural, or linguistic differences.

Many of the women wanted to go to Europe for the “adventure” of being in a place where anything seemed possible: travel to multiple countries, rewarding work, acquisition of property, and others. Some of them who had Hungarian partners were delighted with the idea that they were with foreign, fair-skinned, blue-eyed, and sharp-nosed men, while one did not want to accommodate Filipino suitors in her town because she wanted a “better” life for herself, which she believed she would not have if she married one of the local men. There is also a common thinking among Filipinos equating “international” or “Western” with superiority or “progress,” which points to colonial mentality. This is the same mentality that has some Filipinos buying skin lightening creams, going for imported rather than local goods, sending children to international schools in the Philippines or schools abroad for “better” education, and teaching children to aspire for getting a job overseas someday because life is “better” there than at home.

Conclusions

Filipino women migrate for an assortment of reasons: lack of decent work (usually for people with limited education borne of poverty), search for (or start of) employment, love, marriage, career improvement, knowledge development, and pursuit of travel, adventure, or improved lives.

Networks comprising partners, relatives, friends, or employers already in place in Hungary, which may have inspired confidence to migrate, prove to be the commonality among the Filipina workers. However, it must be said that none of them expressly planned or intended to relocate to Hungary for employment from the beginning. Personal circumstances led them to choose to move to Hungary, such as: meeting and falling in love with Hungarian men, being recruited by contacts working in Hungary or people who know prospective employers in Hungary, being assigned on tour-of-duty to Budapest, and joining a Hungarian spouse in his repatriation for health care. The more prevalent narrative among the women was the dream of being in Europe, with its awe-inspiring people and destinations.

The profile of the Filipina OFW in Hungary is one of lower- to middle-class origin, with just enough resources to finance their migration (either by pooling savings, borrowing money, or relying on family, employer, or university scholarship). Among the Filipinas interviewed, those with university degrees had more leeway to choose the type of occupation. It is worth noting that the younger ones were more adventurous in terms of career path because of greater mobility and fewer financial responsibilities in the Philippines. The marriage migrants, lacking educational qualifications that are given such premium in increasingly technical industries, have opted for care work which is more readily available. This goes to show that there is an invisible hierarchy among OFWs influencing which jobs one can hold and which life decisions one can make.

Other aspects that need closer scrutiny are the constant undervalued work of Filipino women in the domestic sphere, scarcity of decent jobs in the Philippine labor market (both for the lacking in formal education and those with tertiary or advanced degrees), ever-worsening emphasis on autonomy by the neoliberal regime and the states withholding social provisioning, and the popular colonial mentality among Filipinos that international is “better,” as inculcated by centuries of foreign occupation.

Given the women’s myriad motivations for leaving the Philippines, as well as the profile of the woman OFW and her existing networks in Hungary, the next chapter then moves into an analysis of the migration-related challenges faced by the women workers.

V. Women's Migration-related Woes: Dealing with the Philippine and Hungarian Governments

"Kailangan alam mo kung ano iyong rights mo."

You must know what your rights are.
– Flora, 2019

This chapter locates the varying reasons of the women OFWs for migration within the greater context of Philippine and transnational governance that facilitate or hinder labor migration, particularly of women. Divided into three parts, this chapter shows the challenges faced by Filipinas in: 1) meeting requirements prior to leaving the Philippines; 2) immigrating to, or being legally permitted to stay in, Hungary; and 3) accessing state services through the Philippine Embassy in Hungary. Women's accounts about the government agencies and assorted migration policies they dealt with were used throughout this chapter as a means of concretizing the effects on women of globalization and the corresponding strategies deployed by governments of countries such as the Philippines and Hungary. In a show of power, states can dictate who leaves and who enters their territories, but it is usually labor-sending countries like the Philippines that are at a disadvantage because of their lack of economic influence in the hierarchical world order.

5.1. Meeting pre-departure requirements

The personal difficulties related to migration of Filipinos are compounded by the administrative and bureaucratic processes, not to mention corruption, involved in applying for work permits and obtaining formal status as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). One of the foremost state agencies that OFWs find issue with is the POEA.

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)²⁹ is a government agency tasked with industry regulation, employment facilitation, and worker protection. Prospective overseas workers must pay for the services of POEA-licensed recruitment agencies and comply with POEA requirements to secure jobs abroad and be able to “enjoy” the “privileges” of being OFWs. In 2002, the POEA made it more difficult to apply for jobs abroad when it first banned direct hiring of Filipinos by foreign employers, except members of diplomatic corps, international organizations, and top government officials. The regulations were then revised in 2016, making it possible for professionals and skilled workers to seek exemptions from the ban. However, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Secretary suspended these exemptions for several months after the POEA was charged with “anomalies” and extortion of fees from OFWs (“DOLE suspends exemptions of direct hire OFWs,” 2017). As of 2018,³⁰ the POEA has resumed processing of direct hiring but still with the same exemptions for employers privileged with political status. This can be seen as a move to maintain harmonious diplomatic relations with other governments, as well as organizations like the United Nations and the European Commission, which are responsible for proposing important legislation and upholding treaties among countries. The banning of direct overseas hiring, while being postured by the Philippine government as a protective measure against exploitation of Filipinos, is also an expression of state restrictive power. Besides controlling the outflow of migrant workers, the ban is classist because only skilled Filipinos with adequate resources can undertake the circuitous procedures of dealing directly with a prospective employer, applying for an overseas work permit, and waiting for the processing to finish.

Ironically, the Philippine government makes meeting pre-departure requirements difficult even as it conducts labor brokering – facilitating the production and provision of overseas Filipino workers – to cater to global demand for labor. Rodriguez explains below the dual functions of labor brokerage in serving the Philippine government’s domestic interests while controlling global labor flows, and in ushering OFWs out of and back into the country:

²⁹ More information at <http://www.poea.gov.ph/programs/programs&services.html>

³⁰ More information at <http://www.poea.gov.ph/memorandumcirculars/2018/MC-08-2018.pdf>

While brokering labor serves the Philippine state's neoliberal imperatives domestically, it also performs the function of regulating flows of workers globally. As neoliberal globalization engenders new kinds of racialized and gendered labor demands, the Philippine state's system of labor brokerage enables the controlled flows of temporary workers across national borders, mobilizing them out of the Philippines and then ensuring their return back home. (2010a, p. xxi)

In a focus group discussion with women OFWs in Hungary, the ban on direct hiring was raised along with the contentious topic of Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC).³¹ Flora talked about the case of a Filipina in Budapest whose cousin in the Philippines was given a Hungarian work visa, so she needed an OEC from the POEA. Since direct hiring for overseas employment, especially of low-skilled workers, is banned in the Philippines, the woman was asked by the POEA to find an agency to mediate in the hiring process. However, there was no Philippine agency handling employment in Hungary so the Filipina was unable to leave and use her work visa. Csilla underscored the lost opportunities for fellow Filipinos because of this mandatory requirement for OECs and use of employment agencies. Flora went on to lament:

Sayang, dahil sa mga sistema na 'yan...Ginagaya kasi nila dito na kagaya sa Middle East, na doon marami talaga (workers) siyempre. E dito dapat tinitignan din nila 'yung case ng country kung gaano ba kadami ang mga Pilipino dito, 'yung mga may hawak dito na agency na puwedeng maghandle dito ng mga employment, something na ganun. Kahit dito sa Philippine embassy, 'yun nga

³¹ The purpose of the OEC is to ensure that the traveler is an overseas worker with a visa and contract in the destination country. Besides ensuring documentation of workers, OECs exempt holders from paying travel tax and terminal fees at the airport. Overseas workers with work visas must go to the POEA to get an OEC or "Exit Permit" for each single exit from the Philippines (or re-entry to the country of employment). OECs have separate requirements from the work visa application and are valid for 60 days after issuance or for one day if issued at the airport's Labor Assistance Counter (LAC). OFWs can go for OEC appointments either at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) nearest to or in the country of employment before leaving, or at the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) office in the Philippines. These appointments at POLO or POEA are not required if a worker is qualified for exemption. That is, they had already registered to the online system www.bmonline.ph, has their last OEC number (the one used to travel to the country of employment), and is returning to the same employer and job site.

More information at <https://www.philippine-embassy.org.sg/labor/overseas-employment-certificate-oec/frequently-asked-questions-fags/>; <https://www.imoney.ph/articles/oec-exemption-requirements/>

ang sabi. Maghanap s'ya ng agency na may hawak dito sa Hungary. Which is, saan ka kukuha ng agency?!?

(Too bad, because of this kind of system...It's because they liken Hungary to the Middle East, where they have a lot of workers of course. But in Hungary's case, they must look at the country and how many Filipinos are here, agencies who can handle employment here, something like that. Even in the Philippine embassy here, that's what they say: she should find an agency handling employment in Hungary. But then, where do you find this agency?!?) (personal communication, April 25, 2019)

In labor provision, the Philippine government keeps an eye out for market profitability. Analyzing an earlier list of POEA's responsibilities, Tyner declares that “the POEA is actively producing migration through specific policies designed to exploit new labor markets, maintain existing markets, or to eliminate non-profitable markets” (2004, p. 45). In determining which markets can produce the highest profits from Filipino labor, it goes to follow that the government ensures the presence of recruitment agencies in countries that have the most demand for labor. So, while Filipinos have various reasons for searching for work opportunities abroad, “ultimately the countries they imagine as possible sites for temporary sojourns as well as the jobs they apply for are determined in large part by the Philippine state's labor brokerage strategy” (Rodriguez, 2010a, p. xiii). If indeed there are no recruitment agencies deploying Filipinos to Hungary, this says something about how the Philippine government views the prospective profitability of sending workers to this country.

Conversely, the Philippine government ensures that Filipinos get deployed to priority labor-receiving destinations. In the 1990s, Csilla said that she took a caregiving course because many women were studying it in the hopes of migrating to the United Kingdom, United States of America, or Canada, where there was a high demand for caregivers. During this time, the Philippine government allowed private employment agencies (PEA) to facilitate sending Filipinos abroad to these countries. Despite the fact that Filipinos had been working as caregivers since the 1990s, the Senate Bill No. 2261 Caregivers Welfare Act was introduced only in 2014. Furthermore, the bill essentialized Filipinos as excellent caregivers and, without mentioning “women” anywhere, managed to equate caregiving

with women's work by attributing stereotypically female qualities to it (thus also feminizing the migrant labor meeting the caregiving requirements). In the explanatory note for the law being proposed, it indicated that:

Care giving is one of the professions where Filipinos excel and are recognized the world over. Apart from their **passionate** and **caring** nature, their knowledge and skills are further enhanced by the various programs provided and required by both private institutions and the government, particularly the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). As a result, many countries such as the United States, Canada and those in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia prefer Filipino caregivers because of their **unconditional and genuine care** for their clients. In recognition of the role of caregivers in national development, this measure seeks to institute policies in the practice of this profession with the end in view of developing competent caregivers whose standard of professionals [sic] service shall be excellent and globally competitive. [emphasis mine] (Estrada, 2014, p. 1)

While the bill was drafted ostensibly for the caregivers' welfare, its gendered language implies that Filipinas are professionals renowned and sought after for their caring, knowledge, and skills; therefore, state resources need to be mobilized to enhance their global competitiveness so that they can support the Philippine economy. In doing so, the government propagates the continuity of the global care chain, wherein Filipinas migrate to developed countries to do care work while their own families source care from relatives or other women in the lower rungs of the economic ladder.

OFWs and migrant rights groups have been complaining for years about OECs and the tedious, expensive process of getting them. Many OFWs have called for "scrapping" the OEC since they already have their employment contracts and visas to prove legal status as overseas workers and they view the OEC as "just another reason to extract money from them" (Mandap, 2015). Some have endured such extreme conditions as queueing for "up to 9 hours for the \$20 (P950) document that they need to be able to exit the Philippines' airports after a vacation, and return to their work" (Mandap, 2015).

Aside from problems obtaining the OEC before departure from the Philippines as a newly-hired OFW, there were also OEC-related complaints upon returning to foreign employers after a trip in the Philippines. Having the proper work documents to go back to one's place

of employment abroad is not sufficient, as OFWs get told by immigration authorities in the Philippines even upon the departure itself to go to POEA if they do not have their OEC. As Flora talked about the OEC, she slammed her open hand against the table in intervals, both for emphasis and in frustration:

Sasabihin sa iyo, “Kailangan may clearance ka ng POEA.” Ikaw naman kung ‘di mo alam, you have no idea, or takot ka, susunod ka. Ganun kahirap talaga. Kaya ‘yung imaginein mo ‘yung nasa Middle East na mga Pilipino na hindi nila... ‘yung iba hindi nga alam kung ano ‘yung proseso ng pagbalik, nandodoon ka na sa gate na tatatakan ka na lang para lumabas ka dahil valid naman ‘yung iyong visa tsaka everything, ‘yung wala ka lang ng OEC nila, ihohold ka nila! Sasayangin nila ang ticket na binili mo na buti sana kung mura.

(They tell you, “You must have clearance from the POEA.” If you don't know, you have no idea, or you're afraid, you'll obey. It's that difficult. So imagine, those Filipinos in the Middle East who don't... those who don't even know the process of going back to the employer from vacation, *pounds* you're already there at the gate *pounds* and all you need is the stamp *pounds* to leave *pounds* because your visa is valid and everything, but if you don't have their OEC, *pounds* they'll keep you on hold! They'll waste the ticket *pounds* you bought, which would've been fine if it were cheap. *pounds*)³²

Apart from the standard requirements, there are ridiculous demands to meet beauty standards like what happened to Bulak's female acquaintance (personal communication, April 25, 2019):

Pumunta s'yang POEA, nagpaayos ng ngipin kasi ayaw s'ya bigyan ng clearance pag hindi daw maayos ang ngipin. Aalis na s'ya the next day, kailangan pa n'ya bumalik doon, magseminar, mag-kung ano-ano.

(She went to the POEA, had to get her teeth fixed because they're refusing to give her clearance as long as her teeth are not satisfactory. She was about to leave the next day [for Hungary], but she still had to go back to the POEA to have a seminar and do other sorts of things.)

While state authorities have the right to enforce the law indicating that overseas workers must present required documents upon exiting the country, they account for neither

³² Flora. (2019, April 25). Personal Interview.

extenuating circumstances nor the grim conditions that push some people to work abroad. In order for low- to middle-income individuals to get job placements, they have to sell or pawn property and other valuables, as well as borrow money for document processing fees and expenses for traveling from rural areas to urban centers (or from provinces or cities in Visayas and Mindanao to the capital of Manila in Luzon). Many returning workers do not have sufficient savings because their wages are too low and they incur debt just to be able to purchase flight tickets and leave the Philippines again. At this desperate juncture where OFWs are about to board the planes to take them back to work, and during the 60-day period when workers need to process all requirements prior to leaving the country, there are officials from Immigration and the POEA who engage in corrupt activities by receiving bribes or facilitating illegal recruitment.³³ OFWs are particularly lured by illegal recruiters because foreign job placement through them can be faster by two months as compared to that of legal channels (Bernal, 2015).

It is remarkable why Filipinos continue to migrate and how the POEA has firmly cemented its role in Filipino labor migration despite all its attached anomalies, yet also unsurprising given the Philippine government's restriction and construction of knowledge. Goss and Lindquist (1995, p. 344) conclude in their research on the Philippines that people continue to seek overseas jobs despite systemic corruption because "[i]nstitutional agents control knowledge about the risks and disappointments of international migration" and instead "promote the advantages of overseas labour." The Philippine government also uses discourse to legitimize its involvement in Filipinos' search for income opportunities. Tyner cites the POEA's 1994 policy statement (on overseas employment as "an inherent structural feature of the international economy") and the 1997 "White Paper"³⁴ on overseas employment to highlight how the POEA framed migration as a "natural process" of the global economy, which it only "manages" as a state institution (2004, pp. 44–45).

³³ Processing and issuance of overseas employment certificates (OECs) to outgoing overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) was suspended by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) on November 13 to December 1, 2017, on the grounds that the government will examine allegations of illegal recruitment.

³⁴ The "White Paper" is titled "Managing International Labor Migration and the Framework for the Deregulation of the POEA," edited by Ricardo R. Casco.

This discourse hides the active role of POEA as an agency created precisely for supplying labor according to global demand and gaining profits from it.

Contrary to what some scholars say about globalization making nation states passive victims, the Philippines actively chose to introduce economic measures and structural adjustments to make the country compliant with the demands of neoliberal globalization.

[U]nlike other states in the global South, the Philippines has crafted a strategy of labor brokerage by which it mobilizes and deploys labor for export to profit from migrants' remittances....The Philippine state remains committed to drawing direct investments from foreign capital through neoliberal economic reforms; however, it also heavily draws on 'investments' from its very own citizens. (Rodriguez, 2010a, pp. xvi–xvii).

This state profit-making from Filipino citizens happens at every stage of the process: from payment of fees for processing and membership (related to POEA, OWWA, and social services like PhilHealth³⁵ and Pag-ibig³⁶), obtaining requirements like documents (passport, red ribbon authentications, work permits, and others) and seminars (pre-employment and pre-departure orientation), to overseas remittances, to acquiring OECs for travel exit/re-entry clearance.

Apart from extracting “investments” from OFWs, the Philippine government plays on the distinct vulnerabilities of women migrant workers, especially from the lower economic classes. They use strategies of intimidation at the airport immigration counters, seemingly banking on the women’s timidity or ignorance and determined to catch irregularities to either fine the women for it or force them to miss their flights (and ultimately, their opportunities for earning income). This is evident in the words of Csilla (“If you don't know anything, they make you go home even if you have the right documents”) and Flora (“If you don't know, you have no idea, or you're afraid, you'll obey”).

³⁵ For health insurance coverage

³⁶ For housing loans

Moreover, production of knowledge (like overseas labor market conditions and classification of migrant types, occupations, placements, and manner of recruitment) by the “Philippine state migratory apparatus,” through the POEA and other government institutions, does not account for gender (Tyner, 2004, pp. 65–66). Limitation of available data to general information on overseas labor migration not only reinforces the idea that migrants are mere “bodies” or “objects” for state capital accumulation (Tyner, 2004, p. 67), but also hampers the generation of policies, research, and interventions for addressing the needs and challenges of women migrant workers.

5.2. Experiences of immigration to Hungary

The Filipino women who went as tourists, wives, and workers had different experiences getting legal permits to live in Hungary. For Maria, it was very easy since she had been previously issued a Schengen visa. She was relieved to get a 3-month visa, considering the only reasons she stated in her application were to visit her boyfriend and travel, but she was also apprehensive that it might not be enough time to secure a job in Hungary. Endeavor and her partner got married in the Philippines, then she applied for a spouse visa the year after. Upon arriving in Hungary, she got a residence permit valid for 5 years. Endeavor said that processing at the Immigration office was easy and fast, but it was also hard because nobody spoke or understood English.

Migration is shaped by geopolitics and changing demands of the labor market. The establishment in Europe of employment patterns for migrant (and ethnic minority) women was traced to the early 1970s, when women “eschew[ed] employment in domestic and servile jobs in preference for service occupations,” which left room for immigrant women to “tackle the ‘women’s work’” (Delacourt, as cited in Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, & Sales, 2000, pp. 107–108). It was around this time that Britain and France drew on “colonial and ex-colonial labour as well as labour from the European periphery,” with Britain setting “special quotas” for recruiting Filipina domestic workers along with women of other nationalities (Kofman et al., 2000, p. 108). By the 1990s, there were substantial numbers of migrant women coming to southern Europe and later on, to other parts of Europe.

The women who went to Hungary before 2000 – before it joined the European Union – had different experiences from those who arrived recently and had to contend with changing policies and public sentiments towards migration. For example, Csilla left the Philippines with a tourist visa, accompanied by her employer. They then applied for her residence permit in another European country before going to Hungary. Similarly, there were no obstacles back then for Laya and Flora; they did not even have a visa when they left because the note verbale³⁷ with dry seal from the embassy hiring them sufficed for their entry to Hungary.

Bulak was employed by an international organization with diplomatic privileges, exempting its employees from going through the standard procedures of applying for working permits. She did not encounter any problems because her employer arranged her permit upon her arrival in Hungary. Bulak is part of the influx of skilled women migrants, along with the “cosmopolitan population of intellectuals, students, artists and exiles” who are drawn to Europe and enter by various channels like “recruitment agencies, professional organizations, familial and social networks, and individual efforts” (Kofman et al., 2000, p. 131).

Venus is one such example of a student who entered Europe through her own efforts, with the encouragement of a friend. She is different from the other women because she came to Hungary with a student visa, although it was urgent for her to get a job to be able to stay in the country after graduation. Luckily, she got employed at her friend’s office and was able to start working without a job permit, but she waited in anxiety for the document as she could be discovered any time and deported from Hungary (Venus, personal communication, May 9, 2019). While Venus was somewhat confident that her employer would not turn her over to the immigration authorities, she was fully aware of the precarity of her situation because it involved unequal power relations with her employer:

What if I don't hit my targets? Like, they can just kick me out and I don't have a work permit so it's difficult. I have to find another job so it was like...there was a lot of insecurity at that time. But also, I felt that I was kinda protected because the company will not allow anything to happen to me because it will be a hit on them

³⁷ The note verbale is an unsigned diplomatic correspondence between states, written in the third person.

as well. They will be reported, then they will be fined heavily so I felt kind of protected at that time, but of course the insecurity, you cannot take that out.³⁸

Like the women pushed into dire situations by the Philippine immigration authorities denying them departure for employment, Venus' right to stay was dependent on the deliberation of Hungarian officials. As San Juan said, "the local and the global find a meeting ground in the transactions among nation-states and diverse nationalities" and hegemony is exercised by the global North, with its "[c]itizenship cards, passports, customs gatekeepers, and border patrols" acting as "powerful regulatory agencies" (2009, p. 111).

Deportation is a serious concern among workers who arrived without proper documents, and even those with employment permits. Maria detailed how the immigration authorities inspected a food chain (hereafter, "FC") and pronounced one Filipina an illegal worker for deportation within 24 hours. This Filipina had a contract and working permit from FC, but it placed her on rotating schedule in other branches and she did not know that one needed a separate contract per location. She was told to go back to the Philippines and FC will help her get a working permit, but she was afraid she would not be able to go back to Hungary so she asked her Hungarian boyfriend, a lawyer, to help her. Maria advised her:

I don't think mananalo ka sa court. Kalaban mo ang government...actually "FC" and immigration! Ano ang nakalagay sa law nila about [migrant worker rights]? Kahit naman sabihin nila na ito 'yung nasa law...if the president or the prime minister says no, hindi ka nila susuportahan, matatalo ka. Sabi ko sa kanya, ako susunod na lang ako. Kasi foreigners tayo dito e. Hindi natin ito teritoryo. Kasi inisip ko lang noon, hindi talaga pabor ang Hungary sa migrant workers. So pag kinalaban mo 'yan, talo ka pa rin. So magsasayang ka lang ng pera, ng energy...umuwi ka na lang. Try to be, ano, lumaban for your right...pero in abroad you have to be the safest. Kasi mag-isa ka tapos wala pang nag-e-English dito...saan ka kukuha ng tulong? Hindi ka naman namin matutulungan kasi foreigner din kami at wala naman kaming connections sa gobyerno. Dun ka na lang sa safe.

(I don't think you'll win in court. You are fighting against the government...actually, "FC" and immigration! What is written in their law about [migrant worker rights]? Even if it's written there, if the president or the prime minister says no, they won't support you, you'll lose. I told her, I'd simply obey because we're foreigners here. This is not our territory. Because I was just thinking then, Hungary really is not in favor of migrant workers. So if you fight [this decision], you lose. So you'll only

³⁸ Venus. (2019, May 9). Personal Interview.

waste money and energy...just go home. Try to be, uh, fight your right...but you have be at your safest abroad. Because you're alone and nobody speaks English here...where will you get help? We can't help you because we're also foreigners and have no connections in government. Be on the safe side.)³⁹

The words of Maria illustrate how foreignness, lack of resources and connections, and concern for safety can contribute to a migrant worker's decision not to fight for one's rights. Maria's instruction to the Filipina worker was grounded on what she knew about the government's stance on migration, from volunteering with an NGO that assists refugees. Azarova notes how Orbán made oppositions between migration laws and border protection in the following 2017 speech:

It is obvious that in immigration countries, the laws connected to, referring to, accepting migrants enjoy a priority over laws connected to protecting external state borders. We do not accept this tenet, we put the right to protect borders in the first place. (2018, p. 38)

While the context of the speech centered around refugees, Orbán might as well have been talking about migrants in general; it was a type of discourse that builds aversion to a certain sector of society and spreads, in this case, anti-migrant policies to sentiments among the population. Maria's voiced concerns were particularly relevant considerations within the current anti-migrant political environment in Hungary, as well as the lack of protection or support services for migrant workers from the Philippine government.

5.3. Accessing in-country services from the Philippine government

The Embassy of the Philippines in Hungary, as described by the respondents, is in charge of passport renewal, authentication of documents (contracts, police clearance, Special Power of Attorney), and issuance of documents like marriage certificates and legal capacity to contract marriage (LCCM).

Ang Philippine Embassy sa Budapest sa pagkakaalam ko, R & R duty station ito. Rest and recreation. Kasi kung titignan mo ha, 'yung mga profile ng Pilipino dito,

³⁹ Maria. (2019, April 28). Personal Interview.

kung hindi ka expat, matagal ka na dito o may asawa kang Hungarian. So hindi mo kailangan ng services ng embassy. Pag nandito ka, enjoy ka.

(The Philippine Embassy in Budapest, from what I know, is an R & R duty station. Because if you look at it, the profile of Filipinos here, if they aren't expats, they've been here for a long time or have Hungarian spouses. So they don't need the embassy's services. If you're here [as an embassy personnel], then you'll enjoy).⁴⁰

Not all of the Filipinas are aware of the functions of the embassy. Maria laughingly said, "I don't know what they do." She thought she needed to register her arrival at the embassy. But when she went to their office within her first few days in Hungary, expecting an orientation about her responsibilities as a Filipino in the host country, she had to be the one to initiate registration because the embassy staff was non-committal. She said she wrote down her details somewhere but it was not even an official document, just a "piece of paper." Maria compared this experience to what she knew of the Philippine Embassy in Germany and the United Kingdom, which were "very active"; unlike in Hungary, the embassy page has nothing except announcements of public holidays.⁴¹

All of the Filipinas who have been in Hungary for more than two years mentioned the *kapihan*,⁴² which used to be held at the embassy monthly during the time of the previous ambassador. They regret that the *kapihan* was no longer being done as it offered a venue for Filipinos to gather together, share updates, and air grievances.

Registration of Filipino migrants and provision of opportunities for community cohesion are basic but important functions for an institution such as the Philippine Embassy. Regrettably, these functions are currently overlooked along with those that distinctly impact women's lives, specifically interventions in cases of violence against women (VAW).

The respondents narrated the case of a Filipina domestic worker who fled from an employer at an honorary consulate because he was verbally abusing her and withholding her salary, passport, and rest days. The consulate contacted the Philippine Embassy,

⁴⁰ Bulak. (2019, April 25). Personal Interview.

⁴¹ Maria. (2019, April 28). Personal Interview.

⁴² From the word "kape" (coffee); a coffee session held at the Philippine Embassy for Filipinos in Hungary

threatening to have the worker caught and imprisoned or deported. This is reminiscent of the earlier-mentioned British quota for domestic workers, which was replaced in 1980 by a “concession that allowed employers to bring their domestic workers into the country as a type of ‘chattel,’” bonding workers to the employers and making the former subject to deportation if they left (Kofman et al., 2000, p. 108). Eventually, the woman sought the assistance of the embassy in obtaining a new passport. The embassy tried to influence the Filipina to return to her employer or risk being jailed, but she stood her ground and avowed that she was not coming back to be abused again. It was with the help of other Filipinas that the woman found refuge and a new employer, who secured a work permit for her.

The government’s glorifying discourse on OFWs as “heroes” does not translate to services, as exposed by Filipina domestic workers’ written accounts that they do not have anywhere to go when they get fired or “when they need to escape from abusive employers” since “Philippine embassies and consulates reason that they do not have adequate facilities and enough personnel to attend to these people’s needs” (de Guzman, 2004, p. 215). The inadequacy of the Philippine government in protecting women OFWs also stems from the unequal power relations among countries that renders the Philippines subservient to labor-receiving nations, especially those that are more affluent. San Juan (2009) describes the predicament of the Philippines as a “neocolonial dependency” (p. 109) below:

[G]iven the power of the U.S. nation-state, Japan, and the European nation-states to dictate the terms of migrant employment, and the global circulation of capital (including flows of human capital), the Philippines cannot rescue millions of its own citizens from being maltreated, persecuted, harassed, beaten up, raped, jailed, and murdered. Violence enacted by the rich nation-states and their citizens hiring workers prevail as the chief control mechanism in regulating the labor-market for OFWs. (p. 111)

Another respondent said that when she tried approaching the embassy for help in getting divorced from her cheating husband, she was simply given a list of lawyers to contact. This is symbolic of a highly impersonal, hands-off approach that separates the private from the public sphere of services. As some of the interviewees recounted, Filipinas they

knew who were beaten up or abandoned by their Hungarian partners were taken in by fellow Filipinas residing in Hungary.

Due to the absence of VAW-related services from the Philippine state, both for cases of violence perpetrated in the “public” and “private” arena, Filipino women were forced to rely on informal networks stemming from sisterhood and national solidarity. Kofman et al. discuss the role of (migrant) women in welfare provision for their families and community in the European context of shifting emphasis “from standardized public provision towards private provision and an increasing reliance on voluntary labour” (2000, p. 136). Issues on paid and unpaid work aside, these Filipinas who took fellow women under their wing were doing the work for their community that the Philippine government should have been doing. Filipina citizens who were unable to avail of assistance from their own government thus felt it even less of an option to approach the Hungarian authorities with which they were unfamiliar and unaffiliated.

Conclusions

Policing of migrant labor flows occurs both in the source and destination countries. The Philippine government has created institutions and policies – such as bans on direct hiring by overseas employers – to ensure that Filipinos aspiring to work abroad go through state scrutiny and approval first. Regulation extends beyond issuance of working permits and Overseas Employment Certificates, to include knowledge management that facilitates labor brokerage. Specifically, this means that the Philippine government, through the POEA, controls the kind of information disseminated about overseas labor employment. The POEA also frames the discourse that migrant workers are genderless bodies expected to help the government accumulate capital even as it profits from the myriad fees it charges them even before they could leave the country. While gender is hardly present in the policies, the state manages to depict caregiving as a woman’s job and facilitate the continued feminization of labor migration. All of these can be linked to concepts of “biopower” (Foucault, 1990) – where state “regulation of populations” inserts bodies or workers into overseas employment for expanding capital (Tyner, 2004, p. 63) – and “governmentality” – which aims to discipline Filipinos into becoming “global

economically competitive workers” who are “empowered” yet docile subjects (Guevarra, 2010, p. 85).

Hungary, as a destination for overseas migrant labor, also demonstrates control in the form of issuing employment permits and deportation orders. State restrictive power is exercised in deciding who should stay in Hungary and for how long. This is particularly true for Filipinas who arrive in the country with no technical skills and/or no proper employment documents. Precarity is created by the absence or waiting for work permits, as seen in the case of both the Filipina worker for deportation and Venus. However, not all the women OFWs’ situations are as fragile, since privileged professionals like Bulak are able to enter and stay in Hungary with ease and security. Among other things to consider are geopolitics, changes in the labor market, and the corresponding policy changes that make it easier or harder for women migrant workers to enter the country.

Women OFWs encounter challenges at different stages of migration, though the severity of these challenges tends to depend on their academic and occupational background, as well as type of employer. For those with marketable skills other than those that are considered “natural” caregiving functions of women, switching between resident categories (tourist to worker, or student to worker) is relatively easier. This then points to a class difference, if given that all available job opportunities are the same for Filipino women, only those with university degrees and corporate work experience get hired and given a work permit that allows them to stay for a longer term. The women’s varying experiences of immigration to Hungary illustrate the effect of one’s background and the regulatory power of governments on mobility.

Despite the emotional, physical, and financial resources required of women OFWs to migrate and their distinct needs once in the destination country, the Philippine government is not doing enough to protect and promote their welfare. State discourse keeps on depicting Filipinas as caring, globally competitive workers, thereby promoting their hiring and employment abroad, but the government falls woefully short in providing

services like legal representation for women OFWs in cases of deportation and violence against women (VAW).

The next chapter further explores the discursive constructions of Filipino women and how some of these constructions may lead to experiencing racism and sexism. The manifold aspects of being a woman OFW in Hungary will also be examined in terms of challenges the women faced and corresponding responses, their sources of support, reasons for staying, and plans for the future.

VI. The Multiple Facets of OFW Life: Being a Filipina, Foreigner, and Migrant Worker in Hungary

“Ang daming opportunities...syempre, andito ka na sa Europe eh. Bakit ka pa uuwi? Basta ano, kontento na ako sa buhay ko. Ang anak ko, may trabaho...pamilya ko, may bahay kaming tinitirhan. ‘Yun lang. Wala na akong hinahangad pa.”

There are many opportunities...of course, you're already in Europe. Why would you return home? Well, um, I'm contented now with my life. My child has work...my family, we have a house to live in. That's all. I don't desire anything else.
– Laya, 2019

Building up on the discussion from the two previous chapters about the women OFWs' motivations for migrating to Hungary and the challenges encountered in dealing with two governments, this chapter is about the women's experiences of living and working in Hungary. By no means should it be considered as reaching the end of the road, for migrant's journeys are not always linear paths that start from one point and end in another. Sometimes there are multiple comings and goings, consisting with leaving one's own country, then coming back, and then the cycle may continue.

Similarly, the lives of women OFWs have multiple facets, which will be discussed in five sections. The gendered and racialized notions of Filipinas in Hungary will be explained, followed by the women's varied experiences of racism; lack of knowledge on Hungarian migration or employment laws; different challenges and forms of coping and support; and reasons for staying and future plans.

6.1. Gendered and racialized notions of Filipinas as women, workers, and partners

Based on the statements of the women interviewed, Hungarians either know the Philippines for its excellent workers and beaches, or they don't know the country at all. For the Hungarians who had never been to the Philippines, their views of the country were shaped by the Filipinos they met or the shows they watched on television, in the cinema, or through the Internet. These media, as part of the informational and cultural modes of the virtual economy, are involved in forming ideas about the Philippines (an exotic country with magnificent bodies of water, ideal for vacations especially for the wealthy) and Filipinos (brown bodies that are professional yet submissive labor sources).

Filipinos are generally seen in Hungary as “hardworking,” “talented,” and “good in English.” The respondents stated that they had never heard of anything negative being said about Filipinos. Flora emphasized the kind of work ethics that Filipinos have: “*Hangga’t kaya natin gawin ‘yan, gagawin. Hangga’t maeextend yung oras, i-extend natin nang hanggang sa...*” (So long as we can do it, we will do it. So long as we can extend the time to do it, we will extend it until... [it’s finished]).⁴³ Filipinos are widely regarded as having an advantage in and “easy access” to the global job market because of their English skills, “developed through education and the continuing preeminence of the English language in social discourse within the country” (Asis & Baggio, 2008, p. vii). However, Asis and Baggio are wary as to how valuable this advantage is to the Philippines, considering that the massive emigration of “educated and skilled workers” might be connected to decreased capital productivity and development in the country (p. vii). As indicated by studies like those of Anna Romina Guevara (2010)⁴⁴ and James Tyner (2004),⁴⁵ the Philippine government is not the only culprit in “making” migrants since recruitment and employment agencies also strategically use language to market

⁴³ Flora. (2019, April 25). Personal Interview.

⁴⁴ “Marketing dreams, manufacturing heroes: the transnational labor brokering of Filipino workers”

⁴⁵ “Made in the Philippines: gendered discourses and the making of migrants”

migrant Filipino labor in an appealing way to foreign employers. English proficiency, along with “competence,” “productivity,” “international standard of performance excellence,” are highlighted in POEA brochures advertising Filipino workers like commodities (Tyner, 2004, p. 67). Like the government, recruitment agencies emphasize the Filipino’s facility with English communication, as well as loyalty, flexibility, docility, and subservience.

Filipinas, in particular, are regarded as having the same abovementioned qualities of Filipinos that are desirable in employees. However, they are also viewed to have positive attributes related to femininity and maternal or nurturing functions. Several enumerated characteristics for which Filipinas are known in Hungary were: “hardworking, caring, loving, patient, willing to do extra time (at work) without complaining, super kind.”⁴⁶ Alma’s adjectives for Filipinas were “wonderful, loving, *mabait* (kind), *mapagkumbaba* (humble);” she further described Filipinas as having a different culture (“*iba ang kultura*”) and who won’t get a divorce (personal communication, June 13, 2019).

Referring to care work, Csilla said that “in our line of work, *kilala nila na quality ang trabaho ng mga Pinay*.”⁴⁷ Actually, even ‘*yung mga locals, ano na rin, naghahanap na rin sila*” (The Pinay’s work is well-known for its quality. Even the locals, uh, they are now also looking [for Filipinas to employ]). Csilla said that if there are available Filipinas, they are more preferred by employers because they are known to be “*mas caring, lalo na sa mga bata*” (more caring, especially with children).⁴⁸ Csilla and Flora agreed that not only are Filipinas caring, they are also “flexible” and “*walang reklamo*” (uncomplaining) when it comes to work. Virág declared that due to these traits, “*gusto nila Asian, ayaw ng kalahi nila*” (Hungarians want to hire Asians, not local women) (personal communication, April 25, 2019).

The preceding examples show that Filipinas are regarded in a gendered (caring, loving, kind, and patient woman) and racialized (docile, subservient Asian) manner. One instance shows the intersection of gender, race, and class when Virág said “*pinahiram niya muna*

⁴⁶ Endeavor. (2019, April 24). Personal Interview.

⁴⁷ Colloquial term for Filipina or woman from the Philippines

⁴⁸ Csilla. (2019, April 25). Personal Interview.

ako sa kaibigan niya” to mean that her employer let his friend “borrow” her temporarily as an employee. At one point, the friend did not want to “return” her because she was such a good worker.⁴⁹ As a woman of color dependent on her Hungarian employer for income, Virág was not given much of a choice whom to work for. Furthermore, the use of the word “borrow” and “return” suggests that a person can be viewed as a commodity.

Perceptions of Filipinas as women and workers are carried over into notions of them as romantic and/or sexual partners. They are sought after for their caring and hard-working attitudes, as well as their “exotic” Asian-ness. Ehrenreich and Hochschild relate the desirability of immigrant women as sexual partners to the belief of employers from developed countries that these women are skilled “caregivers” who “embody the traditional feminine qualities of nurturance, docility, and eagerness to please;” longing for said qualities, some men “seek in the ‘exotic Orient’ or ‘hot-blooded tropics’ a woman from the imagined past” (Runyan & Peterson, 2014, p. 214).

Ashley (personal communication, May 15, 2019) said that the Filipina was considered as an “exotic beauty” and caring, while at the same time, someone you would serve (“*pagseserbisyuhan mo*”). According to Venus, Filipinas are seen as “very beautiful,” “exotic in looks and exotic in bed;” she had received these sexualized comments in online dating sites and places like clubs.⁵⁰ Such is the image of Filipinas that some of the women respondents complained that they had to limit access exclusively to group members of a Facebook page for Filipinos in Budapest, because many non-Filipino men were messaging to look for Filipinas to date even if the page was not designed for that purpose.

6.2. Experiences of racism

Most of the women respondents declared Hungarians to be *mabait* (nice or kind), friendly, quiet, or *magalang* (polite), and found no problems dealing with them. Endeavor confided that she had problems with her Hungarian colleagues because “okay *nila sa harapan mo, pero* in behind *hindi. Kasi mafifeel mo yun e*” (they are okay when in front of you, but

⁴⁹ Virág. (2019, April 25). Personal Interview.

⁵⁰ Venus. (2019, May 9). Personal Interview.

behind your back they're not. You can feel that sort of thing.) She was referring to unfairness in the division of tasks at a hotel where the management was stricter with Filipina staff than the Hungarian ones. "*Pinapalinis sa amin lahat samantalang sa Hungarian pinalalampas lang. Minsan pinapabalik pa kami sa room*" (They make us clean everything while with the Hungarians, they just let it slide. Sometimes they even make us go back to the room [to clean more]). The Filipinas were also arbitrarily made to deal with difficult clients or take over the cleaning of filthy rooms that were initially assigned to Hungarians. There were a few other Filipinas like Endeavor in housekeeping, but they quit during the training period because of how they were treated. Only she stayed because she did not want a bad record.⁵¹

Endeavor called the government "anti-migrant," saying in hushed tones that three months ago, she was asked on two separate occasions by the BKK⁵² inspector and police to produce her passport and resident permit at the same metro station⁵³ where she usually takes her ride home. She said that this was the first time it happened to her in all her years in Hungary and she found it puzzling that only foreigners like her were being approached. She then went on to say that if you're married to a Hungarian, the government checks your house every three years if you're still living with that person.

Venus talked about similar instances of Filipino friends in Budapest being singled out by BKK inspectors out of mainly white commuters at the metro station. She said that "you'll see people looking at you,"⁵⁴ an experience also shared by Endeavor who mentioned that Hungarians stare at her a lot.

Minsan macoconfuse ka bakit nakatitig ng ganun. Parang matutunaw ka kasi minsan halos lahat pag nasa MRT, bata matanda nakatingin lang sa 'yo. Pero it's like in a good way, hindi naman 'yung parang nakasimangot (laugh)...curious lang. Baka naisip Chinese. Oo kasi dito hindi nila alam ang Filipino, more on ang alam lang nila Chinese or Japanese.

⁵¹ Endeavor. (2019, April 24). Personal Interview.

⁵² Budapesti Közlekedési Központ (BKK) or Budapest Transport Center is the public transport service company of Budapest. Inspectors of BKK are stationed at key locations in metro stations to check people's transport passes.

⁵³ This station is a popular hub for travellers coming in and out of Hungary.

⁵⁴ Venus. (2019, May 9). Personal Interview.

(Sometimes you'd be confused why they are staring at you like that. It's like you're going to melt because sometimes, almost everyone on the metro, young or old, are just looking at you. But like in a good way, not while frowning... just curious. Maybe they thought I was Chinese. Yeah because here, they don't know Filipinos, they know more of Chinese or Japanese).⁵⁵

Maria said that she experienced someone saying “ching chong chong” to her just because she was Asian-looking, or something along the lines of “go back to your country,” but she didn't care.⁵⁶ Venus recounted that a man once yelled at her “Chinese whore” in Hungarian and stated that Filipinas are also lumped together with the Thais.⁵⁷ She drew this connection from both the Philippines and Thailand being located in Southeast Asia, which is a popular destination for sex tourism.

None of the women recalled any outright racist slurs directed towards them as Filipinos or Filipinas, but some attribute this to the fact that the Philippines is not well-known among many Hungarians. There are also not enough Filipinos⁵⁸ living in Hungary to make them a significant community, unlike the Chinese and Thais. Perhaps because these two Asian nationalities were the most familiar in Hungary, some of the interviewees have experienced being shouted at on the streets: “Go back to China!” or “Go back to Thailand!” The women have variously reacted to these situations with indifference, tolerance, amusement, annoyance, or with the aim to educate (on the racial differences).

6.3. Lack of knowledge on migration or employment laws

Overall, the women have little to null knowledge of laws regarding migration or employment in Hungary. The same is true for political events happening in the country. However, most of the women – especially those who have Hungarian partners – are aware of the government's family policies that give couples assorted benefits when they have more children.

⁵⁵ Endeavor. (2019, April 24). Personal Interview.

⁵⁶ Maria. (2019, April 28). Personal Interview.

⁵⁷ Venus. (2019, May 9). Personal Interview.

⁵⁸ As per the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines during the Independence Day celebration held in Budapest on 12 June 2019, there are currently 379 registered Filipinos in Hungary.

It is clear that the campaign of the Hungarian government on family reproduction is well-known and received favourably by some people, to the extent that it could even be influential. For example, Maria is considering having more than two children when she gets married to her boyfriend because it means that she could get a housing loan. Alma approves of this state incentive, in the same way that she supports other policies of the Fidesz party and joins their rallies.

The limited knowledge on laws, especially in relation to their status as migrant women workers, do not necessarily signal disinterest. Some women like Laya expressed that, despite the considerable length of their stay in the country, they have not even gained enough Hungarian language skills to “understand what is going on in politics, let alone the streets” (personal communication, June 14, 2019). Others like Endeavor have grown disillusioned with political affairs because it has all become “bad news” and “stressful.” There are also the women who have become so immersed in earning a living and coping with residency struggles that they could no longer bother with informing themselves about the country’s laws. Venus, for instance, was chagrined that as an activist she did not know the laws in place for migrants like her; but she had to admit that she was too busy with work and worried about her permit in the initial stages of her employment.

The Filipina migrant workers in Hungary are not like their more political counterparts who are part of unions and mobilizations in Asian countries like Hong Kong and Singapore. This is perhaps largely due in part to their relatively smaller numbers in Hungary and lack of unifying causes for protest action, given the diverse nature of their occupations. Even if the Filipinas in Hungary were in a position to do rights advocacies, Bagasao explains that migrants’ reluctance to engage in these activities can be out of fear of losing their jobs or “facing sanctions and deportation, especially in host countries where such actions are considered unlawful” (2008, p. 176). Rather:

...it might be more useful in the meantime to improve their skills, talents and literacy, in order to conserve and maximize the only resources over which they have effective control and moral and proprietary ownership – their earnings and remittances. (2008, p. 176)

6.4. Challenges and Forms of coping and support

Almost all the women found difficulties adjusting to life in Hungary because of their inability to speak and understand the Magyar (Hungarian) language, which made it hard to talk to people (such as colleagues and in-laws) and do daily transactions like buying groceries. While there were those who learned the language from constantly practicing it with the locals, there were those who relied on family or friends in Hungary to help them with important transactions. The younger women between their 20s to 30s were either relying on online translators or trying to converse anyway using English. There were those who lightheartedly talked about trying to get themselves understood through non-verbal cues, like purchasing chicken from the market by squawking and flapping their arms like wings.

Some of the women, especially those leaving the Philippines for the first time, lacked preparedness for life abroad. The cold weather was a problem, as well as the loneliness and feelings of isolation. Alma went through depression for several years, always staying indoors and sleeping. While her husband left her alone, it was her young son who insisted that they go sight-seeing and find women's associations for her to join. Alma said that if it were not for her son, she would have left her husband or gone back to the Philippines. He did not even let her take a vacation with her son anywhere for fear that she would not return. For Alma, it was a "sacrifice" of her happiness to stay in the marriage while she felt so alone in Hungary in her first few years there, particularly when she couldn't speak or understand Hungarian.⁵⁹ From the time she arrived, she has performed the emotional labor necessary to keep her family together, which is arguably as hard a task as anything else. Alma's story diverges somewhat from the "true love" legitimizing migrant marriage described in Chapter IV. In her case, love as a "driving force that controls the actions of the women and helps them to overcome language, bureaucratic and national barriers"

⁵⁹ Alma. (2019, June 13). Personal Interview.

(Alexandrova, 2007, p. 143) was in the form of her son, who also helped her beat depression.

The women usually dealt with loneliness by using technological platforms like Facebook and Skype to talk to family and friends in the Philippines or be updated on their lives through Facebook posts. In the case of Laya who, upon arrival, was left alone in her employers' house for a month while they travelled, she kept herself busy with work to bide the time.

The women were also unprepared for bi-racial marriage: the cultural differences, varying expectations, and dealing with foreign in-laws. One interviewee had to live with her husband in his mother's house so she constantly felt like she was being watched. She said that she was making plans to live somewhere else with her husband and that she was getting a house built in the Philippines. Another woman, assuming she was in a monogamous relationship, was dismayed to discover that her husband was seeing other women. She did not tell her family back home so they would not worry about her; instead, she kept herself strong by thinking about her children. The women did not want to be economically dependent on their husbands so they enrolled in learning programs that would enable them to work in Hungary. A woman studied a technical course to eventually become a freelance consultant; while she was daunted by the design software she had to use, she said she was enjoying the challenge as well as the company of her classmates. Another respondent took a course on giving hygiene services, where she learned about anatomy in Hungarian at a time when she barely understood the language. To cope, she used an online language translator and practiced speaking with Hungarians.

The interviewees talked about the plight of other Filipinas whose employment contracts or romantic relationships with Hungarian men did not turn out well. For instance, there was a Filipina who had only been in Hungary for a few days when her boyfriend demanded that she leave his house; she had nowhere to go and was still looking for a job at that time. The woman was helped by other Filipinas, who gave her shelter and a temporary job, then found a full-time employer for her. According to Maria, she knew of more than one woman who had been in this situation and she was happy to note that the

(Filipino) community in Hungary is “very helpful to each other,” particularly to those who are “*naaapi o kailangan ng tulong*” (oppressed or needing assistance).⁶⁰

6.5. Reasons for staying and Future plans

The women were mostly content to stay in Hungary, or at least in Europe, as they perceived the economy to be better than in the Philippines where life is hard (“*mahirap ang buhay*”) especially for those without university degrees.

Dito basta masikap ka, okay lang. Kahit high school diploma pwede na. Hindi tulad sa Pinas, kailangan college degree at 5 years experience, maglilinis ka lang sa hotel.

(If you're industrious here, it's okay. Even if you have only a high school diploma, it is possible. Unlike in the Philippines, you need a college degree and 5 years experience just for being a hotel cleaner.)⁶¹

They were satisfied with the quality of life they were experiencing: safe, quiet, with reliable transportation and decent social services and benefits. Most impressive for them were the benefits accorded to families with more children, mainly since there are no such things in the Philippines.

Maraming benefit eh, free na lahat! Kahit may tatlong anak ka lang may free pass ka na. Ang dalawa, parang half na ang ma-ano sa tax mo.... Sa maternity leave dito, makakuha rin ng sweldo mo around 70% pag nagleave ka.... as long as one year ka nang employed. Pati 'yung housing, 'yun ang bagong ano ni Orbán.

(There are many benefits, everything is free! If you have just three children, you get a free pass. With two children, it's like half will be [deducted] from your tax.... For maternity leaves here, you will get 70% of your salary if you go on leave.... as long as you've been employed for one year. Also for housing, that's the new [policy] of Orbán.)⁶²

Filipinas with their own families in Hungary had no desire to return to the Philippines because they believe that there are better opportunities for their children in terms of education and employment in the European Union. Aside from the married women (Endeavor, Ashley, Alma, and Laya), those who had been long-time residents and who

⁶⁰ Maria. (2019, April 28). Personal Interview.

⁶¹ Endeavor. (2019, April 24). Personal Interview.

⁶² Endeavor. (2019, April 24). Personal Interview.

had set down roots (like Flora, Csilla, and Virág) were in no hurry to leave Hungary. Venus and Maria were more open to relocating for employment opportunities, but existing personal ties in Hungary also made them somewhat hesitant. Only Bulak, who was in Hungary for a fixed tour-of-duty for work, had definite plans to leave the country.

For the women who had families in Hungary, future plans primarily centered around their children. While one interviewee expressed that she would like to put up her own business, the goal was not just to be independent from her husband but also to be able to provide well for her children. One mother wanted to see her son graduate and marry, but did not wish anything for herself. This family-centered narrative could also be found in the plans of some of the single women, though in a different form. Specifically, they desired to be able to take care of the financial needs (i.e. purchase property, provide for tuition, healthcare, or livelihood) of their parents, siblings, and other relatives back in the Philippines. Additionally, the women with university degrees and office jobs expressed wanting to do other things like travel and explore relationship and career opportunities in Hungary or elsewhere in Europe. While this could point to apparent greater mobility or wider scope of ambition of career women, this could also mean reticence on the part of the other women about their dreams for the future.

Conclusions

Filipinos are regarded in Hungary as having good worth ethics and English proficiency. This can be attributed to the government's packaging of Filipinos as professional yet docile labor, something that translates to how Filipinas are viewed as migrant workers. However, Filipinas are given additional gendered attributes that are positively co-related with femininity and maternal or nurturing functions. All of these characteristics combine together in Filipina domestic workers, who are seen by employers as caring, uncomplaining, and better with handling children. They are also racialized because, as Asians, they are seen as subservient and therefore more preferable to other races. On top of being gendered and racialized, Filipinas are also sexualized. As nurturing, caring, hard-working women, their "exotic" Asian-ness makes them great romantic and/or sexual partners. This is a fetishized manner of viewing women, enabled by patriarchal history,

mass media, and popular discourse that subjects women to both othering and devaluation.

Racism, in both subtle and blatant forms, was part of the women OFWs' experience in Hungary. While none of the women were insulted or attacked for being Filipino or Filipina, they were told to go away upon being mistaken for other Asians like the Chinese and Thais. Anti-migrant state and media propaganda is insidious in this sense, because it can incite some people to be hostile to foreign nationalities. Among the other government propaganda that seems to be working is the campaign on family reproduction, which is closely tied to ideology surrounding racial "others" that are not only unwelcome but also considered dangerous for their potential to change culture and society, as well as do harm as terrorists.

Political knowledge of the women OFWs are at a bare minimum, which is explained by lack of facility with the Hungarian language, different concerns related to residency (and fear of endangering it), and lack of pressing, unifying issues on labor and employment that could band together an otherwise larger Filipino population of migrant workers.

The women deal with various challenges related to their life as migrant workers in different ways, but what is striking is their solid sense of self and over-arching love for family, which is one of their main reasons for staying in Hungary and continued striving for better lives.

VII. Conclusions

Globalization has brought about the transnational flows of goods, services, money, ideas, and people; in the case of women Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Hungary, all of these are intimately linked. As the Filipinas provide services that generate money for themselves (to buy goods or services) and/or their employers – as well as remittances to the Philippines and taxes for the Hungarian government – the women also interact with and accept or reject ideas on being Filipino/Filipina, a foreigner, Asian, woman of color, and migrant worker.

As the thesis set out to do, the women's motivations for leaving the Philippines were examined and found to be some or all of the following: employment search or start of contract, career or knowledge development, and pursuit of love, travel, adventure, and improved lives. Interestingly, "improved" life was primarily seen as part of the European dream of greater access to education and income opportunities, which is partly validated by the women's difficulties in finding decent jobs in the Philippines regardless of their academic background. While familiar networks of partners, relatives, friends, or employers based in Hungary may have contributed to the women's decision to migrate there, none of them initially set out targeting Hungary as a place of employment. This, along with the small number of Filipinos in Hungary, show that unlike the countries with which the Philippines had historical colonial relations (namely, the United States, Japan, and Spain), Hungary was not a popular destination for Filipina workers.

After making the choice to migrate, the women encountered varying levels of difficulty in obtaining visas to be able to enter Hungary. Those who arrived as tourists or employees found it easier, but those who traveled as marriage migrants found it challenging due to the rigorous controls set in place by European nation-states on who gets to access citizenship and potentially join their gene pool through family reproduction. The women's experiences of emigration and immigration were respectively shaped by the regulatory power of the Philippine and Hungarian governments on human mobility. It is important to note, however, the unequal status of the two states; while citizens from both countries

migrate to find work abroad, the Philippines is a known source of “labor export” that is losing more and more skilled workers to transnational labor migration. Despite actively brokering this migration, the Philippine government is inadequate at protecting and promoting the welfare of women OFWs and addressing their distinct needs once in the destination country.

Just like their reasons for and experiences in immigration, the Filipinas’ experiences of life and work in Hungary were diverse and complex. Racism was encountered in both subtle (looks from strangers) and blatant (unfair division of labor) forms. There were gendered and racialized notions of women OFWs in Hungary, essentially connected to their presumed identities as Filipinas and Asians; ideas about their work ethics and caring attitudes merged with racial exoticism thus made them desirable both as workers and as romantic/sexual partners. Challenges centered on communication, isolation, and issues with bi-racial marriage, employment, and residency. The women dealt with these challenges by rallying their own strengths, drawing inspiration from family, and getting help from fellow Filipinas in Hungary, in the absence of state services and laws tailored specifically for international women migrant workers.

The women related staying in Hungary with family well-being, among other things, although the reason prevalently articulated was that life was better in Hungary (or Europe). For the women, “better” was located in the international context; it was equated with efficient social services, superior education, and improved income opportunities. This way of thinking is a legacy of the colonial rulers that kept the Philippines subjugated for centuries, as well as the ongoing imperialism of the global north which ensures that poorer nations remain at the bottom of the hierarchy accessing resources and power.

Accounting for all the abovementioned diversities and inequalities is crucial in the aim of this thesis to challenge the existing narratives about women OFWs. For that matter, it is important to emphasize that there is no singular, homogeneous Filipina or woman OFW. Even among the women interviewed for this research, the kind of employment or career opportunities available to them was affected by their class and educational backgrounds. Women with university degrees had more capacity to choose the type of occupation while

those lacking educational qualifications opted for care work in Hungary. While it is true that some of the Filipinas migrated to Hungary for financial reasons, their circumstances were not as dire as those who went to work in Hong Kong, for example. Since migration to Hungary is controlled by questions of resources (for visa and expenses related to travel and resettlement), the profile of a woman OFW seeking employment in this country would be that of someone from the lower-middle class upwards. Moreover, the absence of recruitment agencies mediating for employment of Filipinos in Hungary means that the women rely on their own networks, thereby decreasing the chances of exploitation. Filipina workers in Hungary deal with problems associated with being a foreigner, but they do not necessarily share the same gender-, race-, and class-based issues as their counterparts in other countries.

The women have all been resourceful in their own ways, adeptly adjusting to the demands of life and employment abroad. They relied on their intelligence, humor, and love for family to persevere in their respective occupations, despite or most probably because of limited protections and services for women migrant workers like them. They managed to be responsible not just for themselves, but also for fellow Filipinas in a neoliberal regime that shifts accountability for welfare from governments to individuals.

By delving into questions about women OFWs' motivations for leaving the Philippines and staying in Hungary, as well as their navigation of the corresponding challenges of overseas life, the thesis contributed to surfacing a multi-faceted image of women OFWs. This image is one that is inevitably made up of intertwining aspects of gender, race, and class, which should always form the basis of any research regarding women.

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Appendices

Appendix I.

Profile of Women Respondents

Pseudonym	Age Bracket	Civil Status	Educational Background	Occupation
Endeavor	25-30	Married	Bachelor degree - unfinished	Care worker
Ashley	25-30	Married	High school graduate	Hygiene services
Maria	25-30	Single	Bachelor degree	Office worker
Flora	35-40	Single	Technical course	Care worker
Virág	35-40	Single	High school graduate	Care worker
Venus	35-40	Single	Master degree	Office worker
Laya	45-50	Married	High school graduate	Care worker
Bulak	50-55	Married	Bachelor degree	Office worker
Csilla	55-60	Single	Technical and caregiving courses; Bachelor degree - unfinished	Care worker
Alma	60-65	Married	Bachelor degree	Homemaker

Appendix II.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to certify that I, _____, agree to participate in the research being conducted by **Jona Ang, Erasmus Mundus Master of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies** Candidate at the Central European University (CEU). My participation in this project is voluntary, and I may refuse to participate, withdraw at any time, and/or decline to answer any questions without negative consequences.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of women Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) living and working in Hungary. This research is being performed for a master's thesis under the supervision of Sarah Smith, Visiting Professor at CEU.

B. PROCEDURES

The interview(s) will last for approximately one hour and will be recorded; the audio from the interview(s) will remain in the private care of the researcher for transcription purposes. During the interview(s), I may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how I wish to respond to a question before proceeding. Excerpts of the written transcript will be included in the final research publication and all recorded audio files will be deleted at the conclusion of the research process.

C. BENEFITS AND RISKS

By participating, the interviewee will be contributing crucial information about the lived realities and situation of Filipina migrants in Hungary. There are very minimal risks to participation in this study. In the resulting thesis and publications, the interviewee will be identified with a pseudonym in place of her real name if so requested. All names will be changed to protect interviewee privacy and security.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION Please tick (✓) whichever is applicable:

_____ I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time without negative consequences.

_____ I agree to have my interview(s) recorded.

_____ I agree to the release of the transcript(s) of my interview(s) for the purpose of publication.

_____ I request copies of _____ all recorded interview(s), _____ the final publication of the research, to be sent to me at the following email address: _____

_____ I request to be informed of any future attempts to publish the research following submission of the master's thesis.

Signature: _____ Date: _____