

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*, Second Edition. Stanford University Press, 2015. 256 pp.

Review by Aizhamal MARAT

Servants or Agents of Globalization?

This book excellently illustrates the dynamics and politics of three elements such as gender, citizenship and migration in the context of globalization. It provides a critical analysis of how these elements interplayed and negotiated through the agency of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines in the countries of the Global North. Through this enquiry the author delicately accentuates our attention to inequalities that exist and are still perpetuated in terms of gender, age, citizenship, ethnicity and race, and how through all these the Filipino/a domestic workers in two cities, Los Angeles and Rome, negotiate their selves and power relations in the global capitalist economy.

“Indeed, our women have partially been liberated from the anguish of their day-to-day existence with their families and from economic problems, only to be enslaved again in the confines of another home, most of the time trampling their rights as human beings... We have to face the reality that many of our women will be compelled to leave the confines of their own tidy bedrooms and their spotless kitchens only to clean another household, to mend others’ torn clothes at the same time [that they] mend our tattered economy.” (Economy Menders cited in Parreñas 2015, p.41)

The quote above is a ‘destiny’ of thousands of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines, but not exclusively, in the Global North. The International Labour Organization estimated that there were more than 52 million domestic workers in 2013 worldwide; they reside in about 239 countries (IOM). As in other developing countries remittances became one of the important and primary sources of income, so are the Philippines. The *Servants of Globalization* is an interdisciplinary study that illustrates migrant Filipino/a domestic workers’, not only ‘survival’, but also experiences and their negotiation of value and labor power in the Global North. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas is a Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California. Her background¹ was an asset that helped provide a very well balanced outlook of the migration processes in the Philippines. The book is a “look back” both to the First Edition published in 2001, the research enquiry done from 1995-96 in two global cities: Los Angeles and

¹ Parreñas was born in the Philippines, and migrated to the United States in 1983.

Rome. Also it is a new research on the consequential processes and challenges that resulted from the migration of the Filipino/a domestic workers in the 1990s: 1) increase in the number of males entering domestic work (masculinization of migration), and 2) aging of domestic workers in host countries.

Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work, Second Edition presents a strong critical overview of the subject of migrant Filipino/a domestic workers and their positioning in the international division of reproductive labor, with the help of which we can draw our own conclusions about the position of reproductive labor in the global market both as a good or service and value of labor. The author analyzes migrant Filipino/a domestic workers' negotiation and maneuvering in and through the capitalist system in the context of globalization. This was accomplished with the help of over ninety interviews with migrant Filipino/a domestic workers and surveys, a detailed overview of immigration regulations in sending and receiving countries. The macro-level and micro-level lenses showed various dislocations or challenges such as maintaining transnational families and providing for them, contradictory employment mobility, partial citizenship, gender roles and positions the author projects the agency of migrant Filipino/a domestic workers. One of their tools to negotiate their situation are social networks in the migrant community, commodification of care for their own families, changing employers or countries of destination, and finally creation of interdependency among women in sending and receiving countries; these are one of the essential points presented in seven chapters of the book.

Second, the book provides a global perspective on the situation of migrant Filipino/a domestic workers in various locations such as Denmark, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, however with more focus on Rome, Italy and Los Angeles, the United States. The Chapter One, *The Global Migration of Filipino Domestic Workers*, gives a comparative and contrast analysis of immigration policies, and the role of the state of the Philippines in protecting and trying to advocate for its own citizens. It illustrates how Filipino/a domestic workers encounter and maneuver through immigration policies, state-initiated labor agreements and regulations in various countries. The comparative analysis and global perspective Parreñas excellently provided two parallel and interrelated pyramids: 1) regional and global hierarchies of destination countries domestic workers happen (based on their class-privilege, religion, economic and social status) to go to; 2) hierarchy of international inequalities of gender and between women. In the first pyramid, the United States, Canada and Italy are on the top of the pyramid for their better immigration regulations and rights for migrant laborers, whereas the countries from the Gulf Cooperation Council are at the bottom for their stringent immigration regulations, occupation mobility limitations, and working rights. The second pyramid stands for the hierarchy among women across the globe. Parreñas argues that macrostructural processes and hierarchies such as gender inequalities, gender ideologies, and political economy are in whole reasons for leaving home. Furthering and combining Glenn's "*racial division of reproductive labor*" and Sassen's discussion of "*international division of labor*" (cited in Parreñas 2015, p.28), Parreñas argues for an expanded analysis that will take into



consideration gender inequalities and ideologies in sending and in receiving countries, and their inter-and-correlation in transnational context, racial hierarchies, position of domestic work and its commercialization in global labor market, and familial responsibilities and obligations.

With the concept ‘*international division of reproductive labor*’– “the labor needed to sustain the productive labor force” (28) the author positions migrant Filipino/a domestic workers in the global capitalist system and market economy. This, as she argues, occurs because of a need for low-wage laborers who would clean houses, take care of children, elders, adults, do the maintenance of social ties for more privileged women, who freed themselves and entered labor market. The more privileged women create a pull factor for domestic workers and the causes that push them to leave home and families to the women and/or relatives in the Philippines who are less privileged. Parreñas names it *international transfer of caretaking* or “*the three-tier transfer of reproductive labor* among women in sending and receiving countries of migration” (28). Without demonizing structures and the imagined system, the author states that entering the reproductive labor force and employing domestic workers in the Philippines, migrant Filipino/a domestic workers in Italy and the United States, not exclusively, perpetuate the system of inequalities, freeing some, and putting others in less fair conditions.

Another point that has been well articulated by the author is the racialization, ageization and genderization (feminization) of domestic work in some countries of the Global North, from which mainly male migrants and female migrants who are over middle age face problems finding employment. Borrowing from other research done among men who do domestic work in Zambia, the author establishes a link between domestic work and males. Therefore, she argues that domestic work is not inherently feminine. Later in the discussion, she also presents the fact that migrant Filipino domestic workers are constraint by globalized gender constraints when looking for jobs. Their masculinity is not challenged by entering domestic work, but by not being able to be a breadwinner. One of the possible employment strategies for male domestic workers and females over age fifty turns to be elderly care. The hierarchy within domestic work, not only is designed according to genders and race, but also age.

One aspect that has received less attention was the social networks and migrant communities (pp. 11, 26). A sense of social networks were present while migrating, finding employment, however, it would have been very interesting to look at social networks, socialization (“pockets gathering in the community”), and settlement of migrants in cities. The essential part of the book concentrates on the employment and migrants’ negotiations in the imagined system. As it was mentioned above, there is a large number of migrants from the Philippines worldwide. They, no doubt, build communities, and they become naturalized citizens of some of the countries they reside, receive education, buy property etc. However, in this book particularly, the stringent immigration regulations in destination countries have been mentioned, which assumingly prevents migrant Filipino/a domestic workers receive citizenship. Throughout the book, the author interchangeably uses the word migrant community and diaspora. Despite the fact that there are more than 10 million

Filipino/a migrants working overseas (Salvosa, "Philippines remittances: under threat", 2015), which is, one would assume, to be enough to have a community, I would raise a few questions what constitutes a diaspora in this book? How do migrant Filipino/domestic workers worldwide and in receiving countries call themselves? Is it a migrant community spread across the globe that eventually will return to the Philippines or is it a community of migrants who settled in the host country and have "dreams" of going back to the "imagined" homeland?

To conclude, Rhacel Parreñas' excellent anthropological journey into the everyday lives and experiences of Filipino/domestic workers in the context of globalization of care chains and domestic work has added to the growing literature on domestic work and care and labor studies. This is an excellent example of a critical research study that encompasses and argues for a macro-meso-micro level analysis that can better project various degrees of how individual agency and structural processes operate and interlink with each other. This book may be very useful for students and researchers who are interested in migration, and international division of reproductive labor.