



## Manifesting shame in a Philippine migrant village



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### ABSTRACT

In this article, I examine how internal migrants in a Philippine village negotiate shame. Specifically, I analyse how shame is embodied and performed by internal migrants in “Little Italy”, a village in the Philippines populated by overseas Filipino workers (OFW), who largely work in Italy, and their families who remain resident in the village. Little Italy’s internal migrants are other Philippine nationals who have moved to the village for employment opportunities within OFW households. These intersecting flows of international and internal migration render Little Italy a ‘migrant village’. I interrogate internal migrants’ shame in two ways: first, as underpinning the subservience that is necessary for negotiating their nominal membership of the village; and second, in contesting and reframing Filipino stereotypes in relation to local social standing and place-based meanings of paid domestic work. I argue that as much as shame has been viewed as an element of social cohesion in the Philippines, its analysis is also a critical tool for troubling current understandings of social positions in migrant spaces such as Little Italy. My findings contribute to scholarship on migration and emotion by, first, demonstrating how emotion in general, and shame in particular, flows between international and internal migrations; and second, by underscoring the role of emotion in creating new dimensions of shame in spaces of migration.

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### 1. Introduction

There has been a recent surge in studies that deal with the emotional qualities of migration (Baldassar, 2015; Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015; Conradson and McKay, 2007; Ho, 2009; Svasek, 2008). Consequently, significant conceptual and methodological arguments have been advanced, covering a wide range of research topics, which include, *inter alia*, transnational family dynamics, identity formations and remittances (Baak, 2015; Katigbak, 2015a&b; McKay, 2007). I contribute to the growing literature on the intersections of migration and emotion by theorising shame in the context of migration. I employ shame as an analytical category that helps to understand the production and reproduction of migrants’ emotional geographies. I argue that emotions in general, and shame in particular, are important for thinking about how migrants resist or improve their positions on the social map. Indeed, shame is an important, although often glossed over, emotion that constitutes the relations of migrant subjects, particularly between those who move and the seemingly sedentary (i.e. migrants and non-migrants, who are interpersonally connected).

Shame pertains to an “uncomfortable feeling that accompanies

awareness of being in a socially unacceptable position” (Lynch in Aguilar, 1996:123). In this sense, shame is arguably felt and embodied by migrants who believe they are perceived to be at the bottom of the social ladder, toiling away from home and assuming a position of servitude towards others who they deem are better than themselves, at least financially. Shame is often viewed as an important element of social cohesion (Rosaldo, 2007), in that it sustains the shape and the boundaries of social relations in a community. While acknowledging this, I also suggest that the critical analysis of shame is an effective tool for troubling current understandings of migrant social positions. In this paper, I explain how different embodiments and performances of shame – manifested through the words that the research participants used to refer to their feelings, as well as the bodily expressions of their emotions – shape and reshape social spaces of migration. I follow Good (2004:529) in his assertion that “only through explicating the logic of key emotional constructs do major social dramas become intelligible”.

My study analyses shame as embodied and performed by internal migrants in “Little Italy”, a village located in the Philippines, but with social networks extending transnationally to Italy. Little Italy’s population can be divided into three groups: out-migrants, who are village residents who have become overseas Filipino workers (OFW), the majority working (and living) in Italy (hence

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the village's denotation as Little Italy); OFW's non-migrant families who reside in the village; and the in-migrants.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is the out-migration of villagers as OFWs to Italy that has attracted in-migrants, who take advantage of the employment opportunities generated by the improved economic conditions of OFW households in Little Italy. Hence, Little Italy can be characterised as a 'translocal' village – a site where migration flows and influences from at least two places coalesce, and an imagined community binds (emotionally) related subjects across extended spaces (McKay and Brady, 2005; Velayutham and Wise, 2005). The translocal subjects I am focusing on are caught up in the three-tier transfer of reproductive labour (Parreñas, 2000), where migrant villagers hire in-migrants to do for them reproductive labour that they perform for their employers overseas (see also Pratt, 2012). The in-migrants in Little Italy are from other provinces in the Philippines, and have settled in the village to work as construction labourers, agricultural workers and local domestic workers for transnational families there. The majority of them are non-Tagalog<sup>2</sup> speakers who come from a province often described by the villagers as, unlike theirs, "very poor". The villagers refer to them as *dayo* or (internal) migrants and they reside informally in a small area of land owned by transnational families located at the southeast fringes of the village. These *dayo* and their shame are the focus of this paper, and henceforth all references to in-migrants in the village point to this group of people.

Theorising shame in translocality brings together international and internal migrations – two interrelated strands of migration that have been rendered conceptually distinct in many studies (King and Skeldon, 2010; Skeldon, 2006). Bringing the conceptualisations of transnational and internal migrations into conversation underscores translocal geographies, or the confluence of multiple spatialities of migration networks in a particular (trans) locality, such as the out-migration of transnational migrants for better economic opportunities abroad and the often consequential inflow of internal migrants for basically the same reason. Translocalism indicates sustained interconnectedness in more than one locality. Such movements and interactions happen not only across transnational borders but they also incorporate those that transpire within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state (Brickell and Datta, 2011; Oakes and Schein, 2006). I argue, therefore, that the embodiments and management of shame by translocal subjects tie transnational and internal migration together and shape translocal spaces in a particular way. As I demonstrate in this paper, shame underscores the constitution and articulation of the simultaneous embeddedness of translocal subjects in multiple spaces.

In the following section, I conceptualise shame and elaborate on the paper's contribution to the scholarship on migration and emotion. I then contextualise the research by describing the study site and the methods used. Following this are the main analytical sections, which, drawing upon the empirical material, interrogate how shame underpins the attitudes and behaviour of internal migrants as they negotiate their membership of the migrant village. I focus on explaining the place of the in-migrants in village sociality and familyhood, after which I examine how in-migrants' shame can also be mobilised to contest Filipino stereotypes, and subsequently reframe their local social standing and place-based meanings of paid domestic work. Finally, I conclude by drawing out the implications of my findings for debates on emotion and migration.

## 2. Conceptualising shame

Shame has been a mainstay in the examination of migrant lives and experiences; yet there is much scope for more nuanced analysis. In the migration literature, shame has been analysed mostly from the perspectives of migrants. Specifically, shame is frequently mentioned in the contexts of: downward mobility of migrants in the labour structure in destination countries (e.g. Kelly and Lusia, 2006); failure to remit money from abroad and adhere to the social obligations of the moral economy of a translocal village (e.g. Baak, 2015; Katigbak, 2015a); and as a social gaze often employed to limit the borders of a moral translocal village (Velayutham and Wise, 2005).

An important contribution on the conceptualisation of shame in transmigration is Aguilar's (1996:101) insightful analysis on the "dialectics of transnational shame and national identity", which describes the affective responses of the Filipino nation (especially the "skilled" and professional migrants) when being "Filipino" becomes synonymous with paid domestic work. In his work, he showed how the stereotyping of OFWs as domestic helpers results in diminution and hence a sense of losing face at being regarded as not an equal but as an "other". Aguilar further highlights how the transnationalisation of shame in this context is borne more heavily by the country's elite, who want to disassociate themselves from the stigma of servanthood and domesticity, underscoring how domestic work is interlaced with shame.

Hence, in Aguilar's theorisation, as in other analyses, shame is viewed as a painful emotion (Bulatao, 1964; Probyn, 2004). The pain attached to shame is both felt and embodied. In other words, shame is an inward and cognitive feeling but may also be read through the affective state of one's body such as the lowering of one's eyes and/or head (Probyn, 2004). Lindquist's (2004), theorisation of shame – or *malu* – among internal migrants in Batam, Indonesia, for example, conceptualises shame as an emotion that describes the moral gap between the demands of migration and the everyday lives of migrants in the host society. Migrants use veils and drugs to negotiate *malu* in the space of migration while transforming them as central to the narratives of success displayed upon return home. This illustrates that the pain of shame lies in the exposure of one's shameful deed or action. Shame, therefore, has to be covered if not erased as it travels "home".

The meanings of shame evolve with the passage of time. Mirdal (2006), for example, shows that the shame of migrants, which is often related to having a lower social status, becomes emancipatory over time as it opens avenues for transcending traditional gender roles and spaces. While my findings echo her contention, I underscore that the transmutations of shame over time-space remain contentious because they are intertwined with class relations; and class as well as the privileges that come with it remain sticky. Moreover, what is understood as shameful or shameless varies across cultures, and even within cultures across time, underscoring that emotions are indeed foundationally social (Boellstorff and Lindquist, 2004; Good, 2004).

In concurrence with theories that treat emotion as culturally specific (Boellstorff and Lindquist, 2004), I now unpack the understanding of shame in the Philippine context. This framing is important in comprehending the everyday and translocal shame that is discussed in the empirical section of this paper. Shame is translated as *hiya* in Tagalog. Bulatao (1964:428) defines *hiya* as a "painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation perceived as dangerous to one's ego". In this conception of *hiya*, the presence of an authority figure whose opinion is important is vital. In this sense, *hiya* underscores conformity to the expectations that accompany belonging to a particular group in society. It therefore

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, I use out-migrants to refer to transnational migrants and in-migrants to internal migrants.

<sup>2</sup> Tagalog is the vernacular in the village; non-Tagalog speakers belong to other ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines.

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