Why do some ‘mixed’ couples break up? Unequal power relations in the intimate sphere

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Introduction
The literature on ‘mixed’ couples, in which partners have different nationalities and/or ethnicities, brings to the fore their meetings, motivations, and marriage process (Constable, 2003; Dragojlovic, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Waldis & Byron, 2006). In recent years, migration and/or family scholars have increasingly examined marital break-up cases among these couples, shedding light on the causes and consequences of their dissolution (e.g. Dribe & Lundh, 2012; Furtado, Marcén, & Sevilla-Sanz, 2011; Kim, 2010; Kalmijn, de Graaf, & Janssen, 2005; Neyrand & M'sili, 1998; Sportel, 2016). One of the analytical tendencies in this emerging scholarship is the taking into account of what Drive and Lundh (2011) call the ‘cultural dissimilarity’ between partners, specifically in terms of language, religion, and values (Milewski & Kulu, 2014). This interest in the ‘cultural’ may reify negative stereotypes regarding mixed couples involving minority ethnic groups in society. It may also overlook the way power relations in the couple and their underlying mechanisms affect their well-being, expectations, and decisions whether to break up or not.

Departing from culturally informed tendency in the study of mixed couples, this paper adopts the ‘intersectionality’ (Crenshaw 1989, 1991) approach to rethink the causes of break-up, notably of couples involving migrant women.

This approach focuses on the dynamic crossing of what Crenshaw (1989) calls ‘axes of subordination’, which refers to categories of difference including ‘race’, gender, social class, and in rare cases migration status (Catarino & Morokvasic, 2005) in the life of women. The intersecting of these categories (re)creates and (re)fuels oppression of certain groups of women, particularly those of colour. Since family has been shown to act as a site of women’s subordination (Glenn, 1986; Hill-Collins, 2002), an intersectionality approach appears heuristic to uncover the mechanisms of inequalities within the family that put women in disadvantaged situations more often than men, possibly leading to conjugal dissolution. In this paper, I pay attention to as many axes of subordination (gender, economic situation, legal and educational statuses…) as possible to better unravel what triggers conjugal separation. As Lutz (2014) argues: ‘not all categories of difference are equally salient […]. It is, therefore, important to investigate diversity in the context of power relations and analyze in detail which of all possible differential facets makes the difference, creates unequal identities’ (p. 13).

To optimise this ‘analysis of diversity’, the temporal dimension of individual’s biography should not be neglected, as the intensity of crisscrossing among categories of difference may vary according to the changes in meaning or in form that each category undergoes as years pass by. For instance, marriages dubbed at the time of wedding as hypergamic—when the woman has a lower socio-economic status than her partner and/or comes from developing country (see Constable, 2005)—evolve through time because of changes in the socio-economic and legal statuses of the partners. If the woman moves up the social ladder a few years after her wedding, her hypergamic marriage may transform into an hypogamic (when she ends up having a higher socio-economic status than her partner) or homogamic one (when both partners have the same socio-economic status). Such transformation may modify the power relations in the couple, creating tensions between partners and leading afterwards to break-up. Therefore, in order to identify the root cause(s) of marital break-up among mixed couples, it is primordial to consider each partner’s mobility (in spatial, legal, education, and occupation terms) throughout the duration of their marriage life and its impact on the power dynamics in the couple.
Keeping in mind the subtle works of power through time, I examine in this paper the biographies of conjugal life and break-up of selected migrant Filipinas in the Netherlands, whose migration has been taking place in the country since the period 1960-1970 with the arrival of doctors, nurses, midwives, and seamstresses (Flores-Valenzuela, 2007). In the 1980s, the figure of the Filipino woman entertainer, sometimes ‘trafficked’ to work as a prostitute, became apparent in the literature (Padilla, 2007). From this period onwards, the dynamic migration of Filipino women *au pair* and marriage migrants has replenished the Filipino population in the Netherlands (ibid.). Nowadays, there are 20,073 Filipinos in the country (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016a) and the majority of them are women, mostly in couple with Dutch men. The binational marriages of these women form part of the larger Filipino international marriage phenomenon, which according to Philippine government statistics involved about 500,000 Filipino individuals, mainly women, between 1989 and 2015 (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2017).

Statistics concerning the number of these binational unions that end up in separation or divorce remain unavailable in the Philippines. This can be attributed to the fact that there is no divorce law in the country (except for the minority Muslim population) and to the fact that Filipino fiancé(e)s/spouses of foreign nationals usually migrate to the latter’s country of residence. In some immigration countries of Filipinos, we can find divorce statistics including them. In the Netherlands, Filipinos constitute 0.09 per cent of the total divorce in the country in 2016 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016a), which is small percentage compared to that of other migrant groups with comparable number of persons in their populations. However, it is interesting to note that in terms of average duration of marriage at the date of divorce, the Filipino women in the present study who had divorced their former Filipino or non-Filipino husbands had experienced a longer duration of conjugal life (18.5 years) than the Dutch national average of 14.8 years (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016b). Hence, investigating these women’s marital break-up may yield in-depth insights on why some mixed couples like theirs failed the test of time at the end.

Before analyzing their case, I will first review the literature on mixed couples to provide a general overview as well as a hypothesis of what causes these couples’ break-up. Following a brief description of my methodology and sample, I examine three respondents’ biographies while paying attention to the intersectionality of different axes of subordination as partners undergo (im)mobilities in spatial, legal, education, and occupation terms throughout the course of their conjugal lives.

**Studies of break-up among mixed couples**

Starting with scholarly works on mixed-religion couples in early 20th century (e.g. Monahan & Kephart, 1954), conjugal mixedness has most often been portrayed as problematic due to the partners’ differing socio-economic, demographic, and cultural backgrounds. This tendency has been particularly influenced by the heterogamy hypothesis, which emphasizes the vulnerability of mixed couples to break-up due to the social and/or cultural distances between the partners.

It has been shown in many quantitative studies that couples with varying religious beliefs and belongings (Chan, 2008; Kalmijn, de Graaf, & Janssen, 2005; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993), different ethnicities and nationalities (Gaspar, Ramos, & Ferreira, 2013; Milewski & Kulu, 2014; Smith, Maas, & van Tubergen, 2012), with big age gap (Neyrand & M’sili, 1998), and in linguistic heterogamy (Finnäs, 1997) are more prone to divorce than others. These scholarly works suggest that the more different the partners are from each other, the more vulnerable they are to marital breakdown, and that the higher the number of categories of difference the higher probability of divorce. These probabilities vary in terms of gender: for instance, Kim (2010) observes that mixed marriages between Korean women and foreign men last longer than those between Korean men

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1 For example, Thai migrants comprising 19,513 individuals registered 0.13 per cent of divorce in the same year (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016a, 2016b).
and foreign women. Although quantitative studies of marital break-up involving mixed couples provide a general overview of the divorce phenomenon and its characteristics, they cannot sufficiently account for the way social or cultural distance between partners leads concretely to divorce. It is in this aspect that qualitative works on mixed couples’ divorce appear particularly important, as they explore in detail the individual dimension of conjugal dissolution and in some cases the everyday lives of the partners that are often taken for granted.

One of the apparent causes of conjugal break-up in mixed couples is domestic violence, which has been documented in international marriage cases (Consalvo, 1998; Williams & Yu, 2006). Extra-marital affair and/or non-involvement in care work at home of one partner can also result in break-up (Sportel, 2016; Fan, 2017 forthcoming). In some cases, intrusion of in-laws in the life of mixed couples can trigger difficulties in the life of migrant spouses, who later on decide to end their couple (Faier, 2009). Women from developing countries who migrated to the developed country of their partners often find themselves in such challenging situation, which is exacerbated by their socio-legal precariousness linked to their status as spouses of insider citizens (see Kim 2012). Their decision to break up seems contingent on many factors such as the extent of their social support networks, the age of their children, and the possibility to continue residing legally in the receiving country after divorce (see Das, 2012; Faier, 2009). Detailed ethnography of conjugal lives of mixed couples sheds light to the power inequalities in the realm of home (Qureshi, 2016), which during the divorce process continue to exert influence on the partners (Sportel, 2016). These power inequalities are most often characterized by a legal and economic dependency of migrant spouses on their insider citizen partners (Strasser, Kraler, Bonjour, & Bilger, 2009). Migrant spouses’ lack of occupation and their legal, and spatial mobilities due to their difficulty to enter the labour market or to acquire a permanent residence status aggravate power inequalities in their couple. What we can learn from qualitative studies of mixed couples’ break-up is twofold: the importance of (spatial, legal, education, occupation) mobility for the migrant spouse to improve his/her position in the power hierarchy at home, and the processual or time aspect of rupture.

Based on this observation and on the findings of quantitative studies cited above, we can draw a hypothesis to explain the marital breakdown of mixed couples in the present study: partners break up because of the unequal power relations in their couple that produce conjugal tensions and conflicts as partners undergo spatial, legal, education, and/or occupation (im)mobility through time. Through an intersectionality approach and by focusing on migrant women’s perspectives, the present paper will verify this hypothesis to illuminate the un-making of mixed couples.

Methodology and sample
The qualitative data in this paper originate from a larger study of marital break-up among ‘mixed’ couples involving migrant Filipinas in the Netherlands and in Belgium. This study gathered data through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentary research. For this paper, I draw from my collected data in the Netherlands, mainly from my interviews with 15 migrant Filipinas who had experienced (or were undergoing) divorce from their non-Filipino husbands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym (case studies in grey)</th>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Ex-husband’s education level</th>
<th>Age gap with former husband</th>
<th>Social class belonging of natal family</th>
<th>Length of marriage (in years)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
<td>3 yrs. younger</td>
<td>middle class</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
<td>tertiary</td>
<td>3 yrs. younger</td>
<td>middle class</td>
<td>14</td>
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2 This is understood here in the Marxist and Bourdesian senses of the term.

3 The data in this column came not only from the recorded interviews with respondents and their ex-partners (in two cases), but also from informal conversations with them.
I met these migrant women through snowballing and with the help of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) founded by Filipino migrants. Most women respondents were in their forties and fifties at the time of their interview and had tertiary-level education. Table 1 above shows some categories of difference that we can find in the mixed couples of these women at the beginning of their marriage life. At the time of marriage, six respondents were in educational hypogamy in which they have higher educational attainment than their husbands. Only one respondent entered in educational hypergamic relations, in which her husband possessed a higher level of education achievement than her. The rest of the respondents were in homogamous marriages, as they had similar education background as their husbands. In terms of age, only one woman was older than her husband; the rest of the respondents were younger than their partners. In terms of social class origin, eight women had homogamous marriages and only few respondents found themselves in hypogamous or hypergamous marriages (Table 1). In brief, except age difference, a majority of the respondents possessed similar level of educational attainment and same social class backgrounds as their husbands, which coincides with the homogamy theory stating that ‘people marry persons close in status’ (see Kalmijn, 1998: p. 396). In addition, contrary to the stereotype belief that ‘mixed’ couples easily break-up due to the partners’ different socio-cultural and ethnic differences, the 15 migrant Filipinas interviewed and their non-Filipino husbands had lived in couple for an average of 16.4 years.

To find out why their ‘mixed’ couples ended up in divorce, I examine in the next sections the biographies of three migrant Filipinas (see Table 1, notably the rows in grey colour), who were respectively in hypogamous, hypergamous, and homogamous relationships at the beginning of their marriages. In one case, I also draw from my interview with one Dutch man who was a former husband of one respondent to provide additional information. To protect the privacy of these respondents, I used pseudonyms and modified some of their identifiable characteristics in this paper.

**Frustrated wives, unhappy husbands: power dynamics in the course of ‘mixed’ conjugal life**

The mechanism of power (in)equalities in the mixed couples of the migrant Filipinas interviewed evolved through time, and was mainly characterized by their intersecting gender, legal and educational statuses, as well as economic situation. The way these factors intersect through time were influenced by the (im)mobilities of each partner in the couple not only in space but also in legal, education, and occupation terms, which resulted most often in power asymmetry in the couple in terms of decision-making and/or division of labour.
From hypogamy to hypergamy: what one-sided occupational mobility brings to mixed couple

Marta grew up in an upper-middle class family in the Philippines and earned bachelor and master degrees in nursing. At the age of 25 in mid-1960s, she left the country to practice her profession in the Netherlands. During her stay in the country, she met Teo, a construction worker with a working-class background who was one year older than her. Unlike Marta who had a university degree, Teo had not pursued tertiary-level education. Despite their differing social class backgrounds, the two fell in love with each other and got married in 1969.

Shortly after their marriage, the couple had two children. Marta was the one who chose their names, which shows how her voice mattered in the couple’s decision-making, notably at the beginning of their conjugal life. Progressive changes in the couple’s power dynamics took place with the birth of their children and later on with Teo’s engagement in the construction business. Marta could not work full-time anymore and became absorbed by her family obligations. She described the division of labour at her home as ‘unequal’, confiding her husband’s conditional involvement in household chores: ‘he would tell me “you can go to work as long as I am not hindered by it, and then, I can help you with household chores if you earn more than I do”’. The demanding and high-earning job of Teo exacerbated this inequality at home, as Marta remarked ‘there is a lot of work to do, and always a lot of meetings, and then when he’s home, he’s sleeping’.

On top of it, Marta was unhappy that her bachelor and master’s degrees in nursing were less socially valorised in the Netherlands compared in the Philippines, saying that ‘the status of nurses here [in the Netherlands] is not on intellectual level’. Marta also pointed out what she called her ‘double handicap’: ‘You’re a woman. And the women here are second-class citizens. And you’re a nurse. That’s very low’. This remark may be due to Marta’s experience in the 1960s and 1970s during which many Dutch women worked part-time: ‘It is only in the, now, late seventies that they are beginning with the emancipation. People like hmm, no, just what I told you. Only 10 per cent of married women then were working’. While Marta was undergoing occupational immobility due to her reproductive role at home and to her social ‘double handicap’, her husband Teo moved up the social ladder as he became a successful businessman.

To confront her situation, Marta sought from time to time the assistance of a Dutch nanny to care for her children and from a Filipino au pair woman for a year while working part-time in a hospital. At her work place, she got actively involved in hospital’s programmes including furthering education of nurses. In a separate interview with her husband, I learned Marta’s other way of resisting the power asymmetry at her home, which was by emphasizing the difference of educational achievements in her couple. As Teo explained, ‘For me it felt that as if she was bringing me down a lot. I did not study. I’d never studied really in the university or so. […] She always let me [know] that, if that something is happening, “you cannot follow that because you did not study” or that kind of remark’. Teo heard ‘degrading’ remarks from Marta on a regular basis, which emotionally affected him. After 26 years living with Marta, Teo decided to separate from her. Four years after separation, Marta and Teo divorced ending their 30-year marriage. When asked separately what had been the main cause of their conjugal break-up, Marta mentioned conjugal ‘infidelity’, whereas Teo denied it and instead accentuated Marta’s ‘degrading’ treatment of him due to his low educational attainment.

What Teo was not aware of is that Marta’s ‘degrading’ treatment of him was partly rooted in their unequal division of labour at their home, in which Marta had the largest share of household chores and care responsibilities towards their children. Marta’s demanding mother/wife role provided her little room to work full-time and gain professional satisfaction, unlike her husband who mainly concentrated on his job. Like her, five other migrant respondents found themselves in this situation. Despite their initially hypogamous marriages, all of them experienced their husbands’ domination in the domestic sphere fuelled by these men’s occupational or in other cases spatial mobility. This mobility progressively triggers transformation of the social class belonging of the partners, which subsequently reinforces unequal, gendered division of labour at home. The
way the receiving society views women as ‘second-class citizens’ and their paid care work as ‘low’ further puts migrant women like Marta in disadvantaged position in the power hierarchy at their home. All this triggers power struggles in the couple, during which partners adopt strategies of resistance to counter their feeling of subordination, and one of such strategies include ending one’s marriage.

**From hypergamy to homogamy: social mobility by mastering the Dutch language and paid work**

Having a child from previous relationship in the Philippines, Lila did not expect anymore to get married until she met Tom, a computer programmer who was ten year older than her. Tom found Lila’s name in a Dutch pen-pal magazine and exchanged letters with her for almost a year. Unlike Tom who was of middle-class background and had a vocational degree, Lila came from an economically deprived family and had not been able to finish secondary education. She was working as a domestic helper at the time when she was corresponding with Tom. In 1992, she personally met Tom when the latter went to the Philippines to court her. She moved with him to the Netherlands in 1993, but only tied the knot with him in 1995.

As soon as she arrived in the country, Lila took Dutch language classes. Six months after she arrived, Tom made her four-year-old child from a previous relation immigrate to the Netherlands. At home, although Tom could cook, Lila voluntarily accepted to be in charge of cooking following the gendered roles in the Philippines: ‘in our way of doing things, for Filipinos, women are in the kitchen, and we accept that’. The gendered division of labour in her couple appeared also shaped by the fact that Lila was both legally and economically dependent on Tom. Her residence permit was tied to her legal relation with Tom, and she then obtained the Dutch nationality thanks to his encouragement and practical assistance. During five years that she had no job, Lila only received transportation allowance from Tom but did not ask anything from him: ‘we were already living together in one house. I did not expect him that he should give me [allowance]’. Appreciative of what Tom did for her and for her child of previous relation, Lila tried her best to return the favour to him by not demanding anything from him and by being a ‘good wife’ based on her country’s gendered norms. This shows how gender intersected with legal and economic statuses in the life of Lila.

In 1996, Lila obtained a certificate of Dutch as second language. On the same year, she gave birth to her child with Tom, which subsequently led to conjugal tensions: ‘He [Tom] did not know how to take care of the baby. He could not do things [getting up to change diaper, give milk to the baby] at night. That’s I think the source of our frictions. I became maybe tired. Okay, he could cook but the rest [of household chores and care work for the baby] is me’. Alone to care for her baby and do household chores, the weight of unequal division of labour at home turned heavy for her. At that time, her loneliness was aggravated by the fact that she could not maintain contacts with her natal family members, as Tom forbad her to make long-distance calls in the Philippines because it was expensive. Lila could also not send remittance to her parents back home, unless Tom took the initiative to do so. She explained that her husband did not like to be asked financial help and that he preferred to take the initiative.

In 1998 when her youngest child turned one year and half, Lila took specialized high-school courses. Six months after, she found a part-time cleaning job thanks to her social networks and good level of Dutch. Her job permitted her to be spatially mobile, and her life was not anymore confined to her house. Although her income was low, her salary allowed her to send occasionally financial support to her parents and call them from time to time. Despite her paid work, she remained the one responsible for the bulk of household chores. During this time, her husband started to have extramarital affairs travelling alone abroad and contacting women via Internet. Unlike respondents in the present study who ended up their marriage because of their husbands’ infidelity, Lila gave a second chance to her husband in 2005 for the sake of their children. The final blow to their relations came in 2006 when during a conversation Tom reproached Lila for sending all the time remittances to her parents in the Philippines. Having her own source of income
and not asking any financial support from her husband, Lila exploded with anger and immediately proposed divorce to Tom. Lila’s improved economic and legal status as well as her good proficiency in Dutch provided her the courage to do so, leading to the demise of her 20-year marriage.

**From homogamy to hypergamy: spatial mobility affecting a couple’s emotional bond**

Elizabeth was a government employee in Canada for several years and had no plan to get married until she met Johan, her senior by three years, during a vacation in the Netherlands. Johan had university education like her and was earning sufficiently from his job as bank employee. Unlike Elisabeth who had never been married, Johan was divorced from his first wife and had been living alone for quite a while. One year after their meeting, Elizabeth and Johan decided to get married in Canada. Already in her 50s, Elizabeth applied for early retirement from her job in Canada and moved to the Netherlands to live permanently with Johan.

Elizabeth was surprised when she arrived in Johan’s apartment, as it was ‘empty, no furniture, no plants’. Since Johan worked full-time and Elisabeth was not working, she became in charge of taking care of their apartment, decorating, and cleaning it. She was also the one cooking, because Johan ‘never cooked’ even before they met. Nonetheless, doing shopping was an activity they did together at the beginning of their relationship. Despite the unequal division of labour at home, Elisabeth did not complain about it to support her husband in his demanding productive work. She did not feel economically dependent on him either, as she was regularly receiving her retirement pension from Canada. During her free time, Elisabeth attended Dutch language courses and became active in a Filipino migrant association where she built friendships with other migrant Filipinas. Every Sunday, she and her husband attended a Filipino Catholic mass during which they met their Filipino friends and acquaintances.

Changes in their conjugal relationship occurred when Elisabeth went alone to Canada for half a year to look after her ailing sibling. Her husband who was already retired at that time decided to stay due to his weak heart. After many years living with Elisabeth who was taking care of almost everything in the house, Johan needed to re-learn how to live alone for a while. This temporary breakdown of the unequal division of labour at home unveiled Elisabeth’s capacity for spatial mobility and for taking important personal decision even if it would mean conjugal separation. This capacity stemmed from Elisabeth’s economic resource (her Canadian pension), her Canadian nationality, and her good health. Elisabeth’s departure to Canada put her back on the same position of power at home as her husband, who for many years had dominated the domestic sphere.

Probably feeling ‘left behind’ and lonely, Johan started an extra-marital affair with Linda, a Filipino woman many years younger than him. It was Linda who took care of Johan’s needs by providing him foods and company during Elisabeth’s absence at home, thereby reproducing the same unequal division of labour in which the woman is mainly in-charge of care work. Although Elisabeth maintained regular contacts with Johan, her physical separation from him progressively weakened their conjugal emotional bond. When she returned to the Netherlands and discovered her husband’s extramarital affair, Elisabeth got very angry and started not to do anymore the usual care work she fulfilled for her husband such as washing/ironing his clothes. By protesting her husband’s infidelity and the unequal division of labour at home, Elisabeth displayed to Johan her power to change her situation in their couple. This worsened the situation, as Johan decided to continue his relationship with Linda and to divorce Elisabeth. This decision did not end the power struggles between them but continued during the process of their ‘difficult’ divorce. Elisabeth felt ‘fooled’, as she said that Johan ‘hid’ his savings while claiming for half of her properties and savings in the Netherlands and abroad. In 2016, the two obtained their divorce papers, officially ending their 13-year marriage.
Discussion and conclusion
By paying attention to intersecting categories of difference in migrant Filipinas’ biographies, the present paper provides insights into the question of why ‘mixed’ couples break-up after a certain period of time. These insights can be found in the dynamics of power relations in the couple, which has time dimension, is mobility-sensitive, and appears linked to macro-societal forces.

Taking into consideration the temporal aspect of power relations in mixed couples unveils that relationships, whether unequal (hypogamy or hypergamy) or equal (homogamous) in terms of socio-economic and education criteria—are neither static nor impermeable through time. As the biographies of three migrant Filipinas presented here demonstrate, the realm of home is a site of unequal division of domestic labour. Regardless of their social class background and education, these migrants became the main responsible person in their couple for the fulfilment of household chores and, in two cases, for taking caring of their children. In this situation, one can well observe how gender, educational situation, legal status (dependent on their marriage with insider citizen), and economic condition (employed or not, working part time or full time, earning higher or lower than partner) intersect and dynamically interact with one another, producing inequalities in the couple. The birth of children further reinforces inequalities, notably in the division of labour at home, making it particularly gendered: the migrant spouses looking after their children’s everyday well-being, whereas their husbands continue to focus on their productive work. The gender norms in the society of origin also influence inequalities in mixed couples as observed in one case in which one woman interviewed assumed reproductive work at her home in reference to the way it works in her country.

In addition, the occupational, legal, and/or spatial mobility of one partner in the couple can aliment or provide avenues to contest inequalities at home. This is because mobility engenders changes in one or more categories of difference present in the couple, making the partners socially equal or in the contrary exacerbating the social distance between them. As Rosa (2016) remarks concerning the latter case, the changes ‘take the form of asymmetries in economic, educational and symbolic resources’ (p. 3). The difficulty for one or both partners to accommodate those changes and their intersecting effects lead to conjugal tensions and uncomfortable feelings such as loneliness and anger. These feelings worsen when migrant women do not obtain social recognition of their care work within and outside of home in their receiving country. Power inequalities at home do not therefore emerge by themselves; they are connected to larger social inequalities in which women most often occupy disadvantaged position. As gender, legal status, education situation, and economic condition intersect in their lives, these women and their partners reach a saturation point in which their expectations towards each other become unsatisfied, progressively leading to the dissolution of their couple. Hence, and in contrary to the initial hypothesis of this paper, power inequalities in mixed couple do not directly trigger marital breakdown when both partners internalise and embrace them as they are, as what we can see at the beginning of marriage life of migrant Filipinas interviewed. What power inequalities do is that they set the tone of the break-up by making the couple fragile to changes in the categories of difference that fashion their relations. It is the progressive disruptions of the power dynamics in the couple and the partners’ inability to accommodate mobility-induced changes that eventually stir up conjugal break-up. This observation may be limited, but provides insights to reflect on for further studies in the future of break-ups among mixed couples.

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References


