



“They’d Better Really Treat Her Nice”: Gendered Dynamics of Care and Control in Filipina Migrant-Broker Relations in Chile

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Abstract

Critical scholarship on migrant brokers and brokerage have problematized the popular dichotomy of brokers as either altruistic or exploitative. Current research seeks instead to understand the diverse relationships and power dynamics between such migration intermediaries and migrants, and the strategies that both parties employ to reduce the risks inherent in long-distance international migration journeys. Drawing from a broader ethnographic project on Southeast Asian migration to Chile, this article presents the narratives of two Filipina women who facilitated the migration of Filipina domestic workers to Chile. Analysis of their experiences contributes to problematizing the category of “broker” and to understanding the complex and gendered dynamics of care and control that some intermediaries establish with migrants. I emphasize how these brokers’ gendered migrant subjectivities shape their processes and strategies of mediation. In the specific context of Southeast Asian migration, focusing on these intermediaries sheds light on more individualized forms of migrant brokerage, in contrast to the predominant research on migration policies and commercial migrant recruitment and placement agencies. Attending to the complexity of who “brokers” are and their roles is important in apprehending migration and border policies that depend on defining their roles in the migration process.

Keywords Brokers · Migration · Gender · The Philippines · Chile

Introduction

During my research on Filipino migration to Chile, when I asked a young Filipina woman how she arrived in the country, she replied that her mother’s Chilean employer had helped her to apply for a visa to come to Chile, along with her sister,

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stepfather, and several other relatives. In response, I asked how her mother, Flor, arrived in Chile. She said vaguely, “Through the help of *tia* (aunt) Marbeth, who is like a *madrina* (godmother).” Only later did I realize that Marbeth was not part of the family in a conventional way. The women did not even belong to the same social background in the Philippines. Flor worked as a janitor in a multinational company where Marbeth was an administrator. Marbeth began to trust Flor and hired her to run her personal errands outside of office hours. The women kept in touch even after Marbeth migrated to Chile with her foreign spouse. A few years later, after Flor lost her job because the company shut down, she asked Marbeth for help to migrate to Chile for work. Marbeth searched for an employer for Flor, personally interviewing them herself. She also arranged for Flor’s trip, and received her when she arrived in Chile. When I interviewed Marbeth, it became clear that their relationship was complex, and defied conventional categories of friendship, employer-employee, or broker-migrant.

This article presents and examines the stories of two Filipina women migrant intermediaries, Marbeth and Vivian, to problematize the category of “migrant broker” and illuminate the complex and gendered dynamics of care and control between brokers and migrants. While Marbeth facilitated the migration of others individually, Vivian is associated with a commercial agency that was established to recruit Filipina migrants. Focusing on both their experiences enables a recognition of the diversity of brokers and brokerage that takes place between the Philippines and destination countries such as Chile.

Migrant brokerage has been examined as part of “migration industries” (Cranston et al. 2018) or “migration infrastructures” (Xiang et al. 2014). In an era of increasingly restrictive migration policies globally, scholarship on the role of migrant brokers and intermediaries has moved beyond moralistic and binary perspectives of brokers as either “altruistic” or “exploitative” to emphasizing *who* they are and *what* they do. Consequently, current research has expanded definitions of “brokers” to include all persons who mediate between migrants, employers, and the State in order to facilitate the migration of others (Lindquist et al. 2012; Vogt 2016; Awumbila et al. 2019). Brokers can include those who work mainly with the state and those who work mainly with migrants. There are professional brokers, brokers who operate as part of a broader social network, or individuals who operate alone. This research has highlighted how migrant brokers must be contextualized within their broader socio-political contexts. Scholarship has emphasized that brokers facilitate migration not only by functionally mediating between state policies and labor market mechanisms. They also importantly contribute to shaping migrants’ aspirations and desires, producing specific migration corridors, and creating “gray zones” of irregular migration.

Following these perspectives, this article presents and examines the narratives of two women brokers who facilitated the migration journeys of other women from the Philippines to Chile. In doing so, I contribute to further problematizing the category of “broker” by emphasizing the ways that their relationships with migrants blur the boundaries of “commercial” and “social” relations (cf. Awumbila et al. 2019). Second, this article highlights the gendered migrant subjectivities of these brokers to understand how their positions shape their strategies and decisions of brokerage, as

well as their complex relationships with migrants. Finally, this article contributes to the special issue's aim to visibilize hidden stories of migrant brokers, particularly in a highly uncommon and relatively new migration route between the Philippines and Chile. The article is organized as follows. The next section situates this article's discussion within scholarship on migrant brokerage, with a focus on studies conducted in the Asia-Pacific. Following this, I describe and discuss my research methodology, before introducing Filipina migration to Chile. I then present and analyze the narratives of two women brokers, Marbeth and Vivian. Attending to these relationships illuminates the complex dynamics of care and control involved in migration processes (Constable 2022; Johnson & Lindquist 2020). A more nuanced understanding of who "brokers" are and their relationships to migrants is important to apprehending migration and border policies that depend on defining their roles in the migration process.

The Category and Role of Migrant Brokers

Migrant intermediaries and brokers often are former migrants themselves. On the one hand, many tend to represent themselves in altruistic ways such as helping their fellow villagers, co-ethnic, or co-national migrate for a better life (Alpes 2017; Kern & Müller-Böker 2015). On the other hand, NGOs and anti-trafficking activists tend to portray and view commercial migrant intermediaries in predatory and negative terms, as persons who seek to exploit migrants for profit (see McKeown 2012). Critical scholarship on forms of migrant brokerage have problematized this dichotomy, in seeking to understand the diverse relationships and power dynamics between intermediaries and migrants, or the strategies that they employ to reduce the risks inherent in long-distance international migration journeys (Lindquist et al. 2012; Shrestha & Yeoh 2018).

Historian Adam McKeown (2012) argued that migrant brokers were increasingly demonized as criminals and associated with illegality from the mid-nineteenth century. During this period, dichotomies and categories of "free" and "enslaved" people and migrants dominated discussions on migration, where migrant brokers were perceived as "a problem that undermined the potential of the free, self-determining immigrant" (McKeown 2012: 22). Exclusionary migration laws and border restrictions further drove most migrant brokers underground and left little room for them to participate legitimately in migration processes, other than those working with large companies that were authorized by states (ibid: 23). Nevertheless, restrictive migration policies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have created "new sources of power and profits for brokers who can navigate increasingly complex regulations" (ibid: 24). Research in global contexts have shown how brokers become important sources of knowledge and information in helping potential migrants navigate bureaucratic obstacles. Furthermore, since many brokers in fact enable documented or "legal" migration through corrupt practices such as bribing state actors, this challenges distinctions of "formal/informal" or "legal/illegal" migrations (cf. Alpes 2017a; Killias 2010; Lindquist et al. 2012).

Migrant brokers must be examined as part of and productive of broader political economies and migration infrastructures (Shrestha & Yeoh 2018; Xiang & Lindquist 2014). While brokers may be distrusted by states because they are perceived to undermine state legitimacy and authority, the profit-seeking and altruistic motivations of brokers may not be viewed as incompatible from the perspectives of migrants and potential migrants. Globally, while research on migrant brokerage acknowledges the increasing commercialization of migration, scholars also emphasize the complex and affective nature of migrant-broker relations that challenge analyses of migrant brokerage purely in terms of profit motivation or “business” or as part of an “industry” (Awumbila et al. 2019; Vogt 2016; Sanchez & Natividad 2017). Instead, migrants’ often view brokers as central to enabling forms of agency and accessing opportunities to fulfill their personal and migratory agendas (Deshingkar et al. 2019). In sum, recruitment agencies and brokers often both contribute to migrants and workers’ empowerment and exploitation simultaneously.

Scholars of Asian migration have highlighted the complex dynamics of care and control that emerge from migration processes. States, for example, may justify restrictive migration policies in terms of caring and protecting migrants from the risks of human trafficking and fraud, policies which often legitimate technologies and practices of control over migrants’ mobilities and choices (Lindquist 2018). As Nicole Constable (2022) has shown, rather than being considered as binary opposites, care and control should instead be viewed as intimately entangled with the other. Examining the practices and discourses of care and control in brokers can further illuminate these entanglements. Brokers play nuanced roles as linguistic and cultural translators, and can play crucial roles in determining the migration experiences of individuals in deciding which employers they work for (Wee et al. 2020). Brokers also shape migrant expectations and aspirations even prior to migrating, either through state-licensed training and skilling programs or informal advice given by individual brokers themselves (Belanger and Wang 2013; Guevarra 2010; Rodriguez 2010; Rudnycky 2004). Such individual advice serves to shape individual migration experiences— in being prepared for how to respond to particular situations, for example, in tolerating or rejecting forms of abuse and exploitation (Constable 2007 [1997]). Understanding (forms of) care as a necessary part of control, and (forms of) control as a fundamental element to care illuminates how migrant-broker relationships, as human relationships, can be simultaneously commercial, social, and affectively charged relationships. This perspective and focus on complex migrant-broker relations build on and contribute to ongoing efforts by migrant scholars to challenge related stereotypes of brokers as exploitative criminals and migrants as passive victims.

Empirical work on migrant brokerage in Southeast Asia has focused on the policies and programs of “migrant broker” states (Rodriguez 2010; Guevarra 2010) and the discourses and training programs of private commercialized recruitment and placement agencies (Killias 2018; Rudnycky 2004). Research in Indonesia has highlighted the social networks and individual strategies of village-level brokers who operate informally for private agencies (Lindquist 2012, 2018; Killias 2018). Men brokers have been the focus of research and analysis, since men tend to be migrants in many contexts. Men brokers additionally tend to leverage positions of leadership

and respect to gain trust from the community and potential migrants (Alpes 2017; Chan 2018; Lindquist 2012). In presenting “hidden stories” of two Filipina women brokers in Chile, this article thus contributes novel empirical research in Southeast Asian migration. Furthermore, I examine how their gendered and migrant subjectivities influence their strategies and relationships of brokerage with migrants. I show that their unique and complex relationships with migrants problematizes common understandings of who brokers are and what they do.

Research Methodology

This article draws on a broader and long-term research project on Filipina and Indonesian migration to Chile conducted between 2018 and 2022. This article, in focusing on Filipino migration specifically, draws on 31 interviews, which include those conducted with Filipina migrant brokers ($n = 2$), Filipina migrant women in Chile ($n = 20$), employers of Filipina domestic workers in Chile ($n = 6$), a representative of the Philippines Embassy in Chile ($n = 1$), and representatives of the Philippines Embassy in Singapore ($n = 2$). These interviews were semi-structured, lasted between 1 and 3 h each, and were conducted in English and Spanish, depending on the preference of the interviewee.

The interviews were complemented by long-term ethnographic and virtual fieldwork, which included participating in online Filipino communities and networks, such as relevant Facebook groups. My participation in one such group led me to make my first contacts with Filipina migrant women in Santiago de Chile in 2018, where I met them in public spaces such as plazas, malls, and parks. I also later participated in group activities such as picnics, dance rehearsals, and events organized by the Philippines Embassy in Chile (such as Christmas celebrations). During the strict lockdown period of the Covid-19 pandemic in Chile in 2020, I kept in touch with many Filipina women via Facebook and Whatsapp, especially in offering material support for mothers of infants and very young children. During this time, the research team conducted several video interviews online with Filipina women ($n = 4$) as well as Chilean employers of Filipina domestic workers ($n = 4$). By the second half of 2020 and in 2021, the research team began conducting interviews and fieldwork in other cities where Filipina women also worked and lived, such as Villa Alemana, Viña del Mar, Concon, and Iquique.

The Filipino community in Chile is relatively small, of approximately 800 persons, according to an Embassy representative. To my knowledge, at least three agencies in Chile and abroad have officially facilitated the migration of Filipina women to Chile. One that was based primarily in Singapore has since shut down its services, while another in Chile has stopped actively recruiting Filipina women since the pandemic. This article presents the narratives and experiences of the only two brokers I managed to interview in Chile: one is the founder of a Filipina “maid” agency in Santiago, while the other is what I refer to as an “ad hoc” intermediary. Interestingly, both are Filipina women who were also former labor migrants. Nevertheless, primarily through marriage to foreign nationals who have professional occupations, both women have experienced upward social and economic mobility.

This partially enabled them to facilitate the migration of Filipina low-wage migrant workers. While interviewing only two brokers appears to constitute a limited source of data, my analysis and understanding of migrant brokerage of Filipinos to Chile also draws on interviews with Filipina migrants who migrated through the Chile-based and Singapore-based recruitment agencies, as well as others who migrated via acquaintances or kin.

Filipina Migration to Chile

Nearly ten million Filipinos are international migrants today. Filipino labor migrations are highly gendered according to the kinds of work they perform while abroad, partly due to the complex history of US colonialism that transformed educational, socio-cultural, and family structures through promoting and creating a gendered and racialized (migrant) nursing workforce (Choy 2003). Between 2008 and 2018, 72% of Filipino temporary migrant workers were women (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2018). The majority are employed in the domestic service sector in countries in East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North America. Their presence and migrations to South America has been hardly noted by scholars partially due to the relative novelty of the phenomenon as well as because these are small populations compared to the abovementioned popular destinations.

Filipino labor migration is highly institutionalized, where scholars have characterized the Philippines state as a “migrant broker” state, in their active participation in promoting and regulating migration (Rodriguez 2010). The state’s attempt to regulate and control migration from the Philippines is evident from its general ban against “direct hiring,” which can be traced to its 1974 Labor Code. Article 18 states:

ART. 18. Ban on direct-hiring. - No employer may hire a Filipino worker for overseas employment except through the Boards and entities authorized by the Secretary of Labor. Direct-hiring by members of the diplomatic corps, international organizations and such other employers as may be allowed by the Secretary of Labor is exempted from this provision.

Over the years, to cope with the growing demand for Filipino migrant labor as well as Filipino citizens who wished to work abroad, the Philippines state began licensing private recruitment agencies that handled the recruitment and placement of Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs (IOM 2021). Thus, the ban on “direct hiring” (where employers overseas hire Filipino workers directly and individually) is accompanied by the institutionalization of migration processes in the country. The main government institutions that oversee issues concerning OFWs are POEA (Philippines Overseas Employment Agency), DOLE (Department of Labor and Employment), and the foreign-based POLOs (Philippines Overseas Labor Offices). Even “direct hires” have to undergo mandatory programs provided by the state before leaving the country, such as the Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS) and the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS). The Philippines state has long justified such intervention and control over labor

migration processes in terms of care and protection for its citizens abroad. However, critics of these interventions and bureaucratic requirements have argued that there is no evidence linking direct hiring practices to a higher risk of human trafficking or irregular migration (Parreñas 2022). Additionally, most OFWs themselves perceive government-sanctioned entities such as private recruitment agencies as exploitative due the high fees that they charge, and may even associate them with illegal recruitment and irregular migration practices (IOM 2021).

Filipino migration to Chile partially follows these patterns. The majority of Filipino migrants are women domestic workers. Interestingly, many of these women in Chile arrived from Singapore or a third destination country. While individual Filipina women have migrated to Chile before the establishment of commercial recruitment agencies for this purpose in the country, the significant arrival of Filipina women to Chile began around 2010 with the establishment of Proyecto Nanas (Project Maids) (Carranceja 2018). This is a Chilean-owned commercial recruitment and placement agency for Filipina domestic workers. Between 2010 and 2016, the agency claims to have facilitated the arrival of more than 300 Filipina women to Chile. There are at least two agencies offering similar services, including Nana Filipina. These tend to promote Filipina women as obedient, caring, and submissive, which, combined with their education and fluency in the English language, are ideal domestic workers for the Chilean elite. Such agencies are unprecedented and are the only ones in Chile offering such services for the recruitment and placement of migrant labor. While there are agencies for domestic work that offer to “match” employers with suitable workers and vice versa, none of these agencies include services such as processing visas, paperwork, and fees for an international migrant to arrive in Chile to work.

The establishment of Proyecto Nanas was likely born out of chance and opportunity. The founder(s) had contacts based in Singapore, and saw an opportunity in offering Filipina domestic workers there a new destination country where they could earn higher wages and eventually obtain permanent residency. They also strategically created a demand among Chilean employers for Filipina “elite maids,” due to the fact that they often had formal training in nursing or hospitality, and spoke English. More importantly, Proyecto Nanas also marketed Filipina women as more willing to tolerate flexible and long hours of live-in domestic work compared to their Chilean and Peruvian peers (Fernandez 2017). The agency charged both workers and employers high fees in return (up to USD 3,000).

Mainstream news coverage about Filipina migration to Chile often highlights the key role of Proyecto Nanas. In contrast, this article turns to the less visible form of brokerage and emphasizes the migrant and gendered subjectivity of two Filipina migrant brokers. Their strategies and relationships of brokerage reveal complex and unequal relationships of power with migrants whose journeys they have facilitated, where dynamics of care are bound with practices of control in their explicit acknowledgement of the vulnerabilities that Filipina women potentially face in Chile due to their unfamiliarity with the Spanish language, and the fact that Chile is located far from the Philippines.

The Ad hoc Intermediary, Marbeth

Marbeth is an educated Filipina woman in her late fifties who lived for about 8 years in Chile between the years 2008 and 2018. Largely due to her husband's job, the family is highly mobile and also lived in Hong Kong and the UK. Partly due to her marriage to a foreigner (non-Filipino) who works at a multinational corporation, Marbeth can be identified as upper middle class in the Philippines and in Chile. In Santiago de Chile, the family lived in a posh neighborhood and their daughter went to the most expensive international school in the country. As mentioned in this article's introduction, Marbeth was introduced to me as someone who helped Flor migrate to Chile. Marbeth can be considered a migrant broker due to her active participation in mediating many aspects of Flor's migration and her later involvement in the migration of Flor's families and relatives. Although she only actively facilitated the labor migration of one woman, this journey significantly "collectively expanded" the opportunities for the migrant's family and social networks (Jones and Sha 2020).

Prior to marriage and her significant upward social mobility, Marbeth embarked on her own labor migration journeys as a low-wage professional. After completing her undergraduate degree in secretarial education, she had left the Philippines in her early twenties to work in the Middle East and Malaysia as "assistant to the General Manager" in various companies, hotels and hospitals. Particularly during her first trips to the Middle East, Marbeth observed that she had little information about the migration process. She said, "It was my first time and nobody advised me what to do. It (was) actually the first time for Filipinos to work abroad (who are not) domestic helpers..." She was highly aware of her class and occupational privilege. For example, she was the only one out of four Filipina women on a flight from Manila to Dubai who was not traveling to be employed as a domestic worker. In the Middle East, when she worked in a hotel alongside another Filipina "executive housekeeper," Marbeth recounted how Filipina "girls" who worked as domestic workers in private households would often go to them to seek help when they had run away from their employers:

We don't know where other Filipinos got (our names), but sometimes somebody would just come to the hotel and they would ask for our help... I even asked my boss to help us to find this girl (once). She (had) wanted to work in our hotel but (her) employer didn't want to release her, and she was in hiding. We managed to trace her and she was in a building, (a room) smaller than my study room, smaller than this, with so many Filipinos there living. We couldn't do much (to help them) because it was the Middle East. But we would (tell) the Embassy. We would really take (the girls) to the Embassy and hand them over, and sometimes we would do some collections, you know, for money (to buy a flight home).

Reflecting on these experiences, Marbeth was critical of the Philippines government, whom she felt could do more to protect Filipina domestic workers from exploitation. Since her migration experiences began in the Middle East, Marbeth considers herself a "very tough" woman. She learnt to self-advocate and took responsibility for every aspect of her migration processes: "You have to, (in case)

something happens to you. I'm the one interviewing the employer, and I had to make sure that who I was talking to was my boss, not the agency."

According to Marbeth, "(The Embassy) is not really involved if there's a problem. Filipinos don't go to them." For example, she did not finish her contract in Dubai because she felt the working environment was "not safe." So she found her way to the nearest Embassy in Abu Dhabi, "in the desert." However, she was met with incompetence and indifference:

They are just useless. I said just give me the typewriter and I'll type my own complaint and I did, and I filed the complaint, and the labor attache (told me) to go to work as normal... After two days, the labor attaché came... (But during these two days) the agent was there, he was threatening me, "She can never leave Dubai..." Because we don't hold our passports, we only had our work permit, the employers had our passports.

Marbeth eventually returned to the Philippines, and she met her husband in the 1990s while working in "administration" in a multinational company where he worked as an engineer. When I asked if she had ever hired domestic workers herself as a working mother, she said that the only person she had ever trusted her daughter with was a Filipina woman called Flor. She was a janitor in the office building. Marbeth took a liking to her and eventually Flor "worked for me very closely, she was my assistant... She worked as a messenger, and did everything for everyone in the office." When Marbeth moved to another company, she negotiated a position and higher salary for Flor. Despite their class differences, Marbeth clearly was critical of broader structures of exploitation, and helped Flor get a work contract directly with the company rather than work for an agency that subcontracted her labor.

When I asked why Marbeth took such care of Flor, she highlighted Flor's dedication and qualities as a remarkable *worker*:

She is a very lovely girl. You can trust her, money and everything. (In the company), Flor would be asked to change currency, and she would be carrying lots of money I'm telling you. Never a problem. Honestly, I could have trusted her with my life... She is the type of person... She will never lie to you, and once we work (together) she is really dedicated to her job. She worked above and beyond, she will be first in the office and last you know (to leave)... She never complains. Whatever you ask (of) her, whatever task you give her, consider it done.

Thus, Marbeth and Flor's relationship can be characterized partially in terms of employer-employee. Outside of the office, Marbeth also often hired Flor to run errands for her. Eventually, Marbeth migrated abroad to the UK, Hong Kong, and Chile. While overseas, she would hire Flor's services to mail her important items such as medicine from the Philippines. Whenever Marbeth returned to visit the Philippines, she would also hire Flor for childcare and other tasks. Eventually, Flor lost her job at the multinational company where Marbeth worked; the company folded. During this time, Flor called Marbeth in Chile and asked for help to migrate to Chile.

As Marbeth described it:

She wanted my help, she wanted to go abroad. I said, are you sure? Because working abroad means you have to leave your family, your children. Are you ready? It's a big sacrifice. The only consolation you would get is that I'm here, you won't feel alone, like when I was working before I was on my own... And she said, she's ready. And she didn't go through an agency.

Effectively, Marbeth was Flor's migration intermediary and broker, in terms of brokering all information and the migration process. She said:

I looked for a sponsor because I had a connection with the Embassy. Every now and then there would be a Chilean who would request for domestic helpers, for a nanny. So I was the one who interviewed (Flor's) boss. *I told them, they better really treat her nice, because I would be their worst nightmare.* I had to tell them straight. I said she's *family* and I know her and I can guarantee, that you would never let her go, you would really like her... She came around 2012. I managed to get her. They promised that they will really look after her, so me and Flor, we did the process of her documents. I asked for help from my friend in the Embassy (for information).

Marbeth also prepared Flor psychologically for the realities of being a migrant worker:

I had to tell her what to expect, what not to expect, and like I said, there's some difference when you have someone there, that somebody will look after you, unlike if you are on your own... I assured her, I said, if you are only looking for a job, or you want money, I think you will be alright here. But maybe I said, maybe you can bring your family here a year later, I don't know, we will see...

When Flor finally arrived in Chile, Marbeth picked her up at the airport and Flor stayed at her home for the first week. Marbeth and her husband brought her personally to the employers' household. After a few years, Flor wanted to bring her family to Chile. Since by that time, Proyecto Nanas had been recently established, Flor decided to use their services. However, Marbeth aided in the process, helping Flor draft the letters of invitation for her family to come to Chile, or letters to the Embassy: "Whatever she needs I would do it, and she would do the rest."

Marbeth's relationship with Flor defies or challenges conventional relationship categories. They may be friends, or like "family," but Marbeth was also Flor's employer at two companies in the Philippines, and also actively facilitated her migration to and employment in Chile. On the one hand, the aspects of care in this relationship and the facilitation of Flor's migration are evident: Marbeth made sure Flor's employers were decent, and that they understood that Flor was not alone in the country and had elite networks. She also assured Flor that she would be supported and could turn to Marbeth for help. She provided Flor with a place to stay during the weekends when she was not working or living with her employers. Her own gendered migrant experience as a woman that experienced

"unsafe" masculine workplaces in the Middle East, and a professional who observed the risky and vulnerable situations that Filipina migrant domestic workers experienced abroad, arguably shaped her sense of responsibility and specific forms of care towards Flor during the latter's migration process.

On the other hand, her extreme care towards Flor arguably drew from and created a relationship of gratitude and indebtedness that was shaped by their different socioeconomic statuses. Marbeth allowed Flor to stay at her place on weekends, emphasizing that "I don't ask her to (work), she is not going to stay with me to work, no, I would let her rest, just chill, or sometimes we would go somewhere the two of us..." Yet Marbeth also said, particularly after she had undergone a medical surgery, she "would ask Flor, do you know someone who could come and clean... and then when she comes on Saturdays she would help me because ... I (couldn't) work, you know, but I never obliged her."

Marbeth's role in Flor's migration challenges conventional categories of migrant broker or intermediary, and their relationship challenges conventional ideas of what "broker-migrant" relationships constitute. While many of Marbeth's discourses and actions towards Flor can be said to be "altruistic," I argue that their relationship is highly complex due to the unequal power relations embedded in their historical labor relationship as employer-employee, and Marbeth's high level of trust *and* dependency on Flor as a "girl Friday," who would tend to many of her needs in the Philippines. Their relationship is arguably inter-dependent, infused with mutual feelings of reciprocity and obligation. With Flor's arrival, Marbeth had another friend, confidant, and occasional help with domestic duties. However, she also spent a lot of time and energy ensuring that Flor would find decent employers and eventually be able to help her relatives join her in Chile.

Migrant intermediaries like Marbeth are often overlooked in research and discussions about migrant brokerage because what they do may appear too individual, rather than structural or institutional. However, in the case of an uncommon migrant destination for Filipinos, such as Chile, Marbeth played a significant role in the migration not only of Flor but in providing the opportunity and eventually migration of dozens more relatives and peers to Chile, all of whom trace their presence in Chile to Marbeth, the person who enabled Flor to migrate.

Additionally, their relationship challenges typologies of migration infrastructure. Migration infrastructure, as conceived by Xiang and Lindquist (2014), consists of five dimensions: commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian, and social. The authors acknowledge "deep entanglement" and "interplay" between these dimensions, however, "in each dimension, the leading actors, driving forces, the central strategies and rationalities, and the defining modus operandi differ" (Xiang and Lindquist 2014: S124). In this typology, Marbeth's role as a broker would sit uncomfortably either in the commercial or social dimension of migration infrastructure. While she forms part of Flor's social networks, the logics of her relationship and brokerage of Flor's migration do not conform to conventional descriptions and analyses of migrants who utilize transnational social networks of peers and kin to migrate. Yet, no evident economic exchange or financial transaction formed part of Marbeth's facilitation of Flor's migration,

although Marbeth clearly benefited in intangible and tangible ways from the process and relationship.

The Small Agency Owner, Vivian

Vivian is a Filipina woman in her forties who arrived in Chile around 2013. She runs a small private agency facilitating the migration of Filipina migrant domestic workers to Chile. Unlike Marbeth, she was herself a migrant domestic worker in the Middle East before arriving in Chile. She had arrived as a “direct hire,” which meant she did not pay an agency or third party for the journey. She had been working in Saudi Arabia at the time for 11 years, before she heard about a job opportunity from a Filipina friend in Chile. Her friend had wanted to quit her job as a domestic employee in Chile and was looking for someone to replace her. When she offered Vivian the opportunity, she also cautioned that “the employers are not easy.” Vivian, however, responded that she could “deal with any difficult situation after working in Saudi.” She accepted the job offer and her future Chilean employers arranged for her flight and visa.

Her employers lived in an elite neighborhood and had three young children. The work was hard: Vivian woke daily at 5.30 a.m. to start working at 6 a.m., and finished only at 10 p.m. at night. She earned around 850 USD, which was higher than the average salary commanded by domestic workers at the time, and Vivian said it was “better than Saudi.” She also worked on Saturdays without extra pay, which violated Chilean labor laws. As she described:

The contract said 12 hours a day and I worked 14. But I just kept quiet about it. They thought they could fool me since I had worked in Saudi. Most women in Chile just want to abuse nannies.

After 7 months, she confronted her employer. She brought up the issue of the maximum number of hours she was legally allowed to work daily. The employer relented. However, a month later, Vivian quit. During this time, she had also met a man in church, who was to be her future husband. She had confided in him about her work situation and he had told her that the employers were working her too hard and paying her too little. He did his own research and found out that her employers were not paying her pension and for her medical benefits, which they were legally required to do. This information convinced Vivian that she should leave.

With his help, she started up a small online business, and later, she established her agency. Vivian saw an opportunity because Filipina peers and relatives in the Philippines and abroad had started asking her for help to search for work in Chile. Vivian’s brokering process involved an interview with the employee and the employers, which she conducted herself personally. She only sourced Filipina employees from her friends and family networks, which is how she would know “they’re reliable... That’s why I never have problems with my Filipinas.” This decision to only facilitate the migration of women who come with a personal or close recommendation is arguably a strategy for Vivian to gain some measure of control over the migration process and hope that the labor arrangement ends well. In this sense, Vivian’s brokering practices straddle both commercial and social

dimensions of migration infrastructure. This is not uncommon; extensive research has also shown that informal and individual brokers often draw on social networks and reputation to establish themselves as ideal, effective, and trustworthy brokers. However, as the owner of a licensed recruitment agency, Vivian's brokering practices are arguably exceptional in terms of the affective and personal relationships she establishes with migrants.

In contrast to existing research on migrant agencies in the context of Filipino migration that focuses on "small" and "major agencies" in the Philippines and destination countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong (Wee et al. 2020; Constable 2007 [1997]), Vivian's agency is almost entirely run by herself. She oversees almost all aspects of the recruitment and placement of Filipina workers in Chile-based households. Given that there are not many agencies catering to Filipina migrants and Chilean employers who seek Filipina workers, Vivian plays a central role in mediating and shaping this migration flow as well as the migration experiences of Filipina women. In this sense, Vivian defies conventional categories of migrant brokers, who are usually analyzed in terms of formal and licensed recruitment agencies, semi-licensed or semi-formal agencies, or informal individual brokers. While she runs a formal and licensed recruitment agency—with a legal status in Chile and the Philippines—in reality she operates in ways similar to informal individual brokers, in utilizing her informal social networks to recruit migrants.

As an intermediary between primarily Chilean employers and Filipina workers, much of Vivian's work is to ensure that both workers and employers are "happy" with one another. According to her, employers prefer Filipina women because "they are hard workers, and they are clean, they do not steal, they love children, they speak English, they are trustworthy, and they will finish the two year contract. Most (women) stay with their employers for five or six years." However, employers can be quite demanding. They have demanded for "three month warranties" to have access to a "free replacement." Vivian's agency allows for this if the women have been brought from the Philippines or overseas; but not if the women were already in Chile and simply "relocated" or transferred to another employer. As research in larger recruitment agencies in Singapore has shown, major agencies have resources to meet clients' preferences. They have a wider range of workers to offer potential employers, and can be more flexible in terms of reducing or waiving the fees charged for replacing workers (Wee et al. 2020). Vivian's agency, however, does not have such resources. While most commercial agencies, particularly big agencies, tend to cater mainly to employers' preferences and needs since they provide the capital, Vivian instead avoids potentially problematic employers in order to reduce the extra resources (time and effort) it would require to appease such persons if the labor relationship does not work out. For Vivian, like other migrant brokers, a "successful match" is when Filipina workers "stay as long as they can" with their employers. This would mean not only that employers and workers are relatively satisfied, but also that for the same base fee, Vivian would not be doing extra work to look for a new employer or worker when the initial match does not work out. Nevertheless, when there is a conflict between employers and workers, she admits that she "cannot meddle" and talk to employers directly, because they are "clients." Instead, she tells

the worker what to say and do, and generally they trust her advice on topics such as how to negotiate a salary raise.

Thus, Vivian selects not only potential migrant women, but also selects potential employers. If she senses that employers are “complicated” and are potentially not good employers, instead of rejecting them, she says diplomatically that “I don’t have anyone available at the moment.” or “The worker I have does not want to work in this neighborhood, or these hours.” A sign of a potentially conflictive employer is when they call her too often and ask questions such as, “Are you sure (the worker will be good)?” For Vivian, it is impossible to “be sure,” because whether a worker is “good” depends on her dynamics with the employer. She explained, “A good nanny and a bad employer does not work well, and neither does a bad nanny and a good employer. I work with humans. Workers are not a product. You cannot guarantee such things.”

When asked how she selects workers, Vivian said that she looks mainly for women who seem like they are “patient, respectful, and can be hard workers.” Vivian added that she prefers to hire women who are in the Philippines and with family needs, as opposed to Filipinas who are working in Singapore and looking for a job in Chile. This is because the women in the Philippines “need” the job and money more and will work harder. Thus, ideal migrant workers are those who are more “exploitable” due to their personal and financial obligations. This resonates with the extensive literature on low-wage migrant brokerage, where employers and agents generally select workers based on their desirable traits rather than labor experience or specific skills required by the job (Guevarra 2006; Rodriguez 2010; Shrestha 2018).

While Vivian watches out for workers in being selective of employers, on the flipside, she expressed frustration at how “good workers” can eventually change over time in Chile. For Vivian, this is a problem, because such women tend to leave their employers before their stipulated contract is finished. Since the Filipina women have “a lot of weekends and holidays off, they meet other people and they engage in *tsismis* (gossip). Their friends will share details about their jobs and pay, and encourage one another to change employers.” However, she also claimed that while “most” Filipina workers are like that, “her” workers do not conform to this stereotype. The difference between women who come via her agency and competing agencies is that Vivian negotiates for a higher starting salary for Filipina women. Women can negotiate a higher salary if the job requires them to take care of more young children or more people in the family. In her agency, the employer often pays for the flight ticket of the worker. She claims that Filipina women looking for work often approach her via the recommendation of other women, and appears proud that this signals she has treated the workers well and made good “matches.”

Since Vivian’s work is so individualized and personal, many migrant women turn to her for advice not only when they have labor conflicts, but also when they have relationship or family problems. Vivian often listens and offers advice, partly because it benefits her if they stayed with their employers and remained in Chile. She said, “It is complicated if workers want to change employers, because they have to change visas and find new employers.” A major challenge for her is when Filipina women have boyfriends in Chile. She elaborates: “their performance is not as good, and they become *floja* (lazy) and *reclamadora* (complaining).” She said:

Out of 100 Filipinas, about 30% will be problematic or stubborn. They want more pay for less work and they make up their own rules. They want to work ten hours when the law says twelve... (When they get into problems), I tell them, remember why you came to Chile, to work, not for a boyfriend. You came for your kids. Remember that.

Vivian thus tries to exert some control over Filipina women through discursive means: through pep talks about their "main reason" for migration. Such discourses are remarkably similar to state discourses encouraging Filipina women to be good workers as well as good wives and mothers (Rodriguez 2010; Guevarra 2010). Nevertheless, as Nicole Constable (2022) has highlighted, control is often entangled with care. Vivian's strategies as a broker reveal practices and discourses of care as a fellow migrant and woman and former domestic worker, alongside practices and discourses of control as a migrant broker. Despite her unique position as a former migrant domestic worker, Vivian and her agency nonetheless reproduces racialized and gendered ideas about Filipina women as "ideal workers," while previously she participated in reinforcing or resisting the stereotype as a worker (who demanded better working conditions and then quit her job before her contract was finished), now she participated in reproducing and mediating these ideas, women's aspirations, and migration flows between the Philippines and Chile.

Conclusion

This article has presented less common stories of Filipina women migrant brokers that problematize conventional understandings and categories of "migrant intermediaries." On the one hand, as an ad-hoc intermediary, Marbeth's facilitation of Flor's migration did not evidently include economic or financial exchange. Yet, she is not part of Flor's social networks in a conventional way that would position her role in Flor's migration as a kin, peer, or friend. Marbeth thus challenges categorization as a "social" or "commercial" part of migration infrastructure and processes. On the other hand, as the owner of a recruitment agency, Vivian also challenges typologies of brokers. As practically the only person running the agency, she established her licensed recruitment agency based on social networks she had generated as a former migrant domestic worker. Despite being a licensed agency owner, she operates like an informal broker, in claiming to only recruit women through personal networks and recommendations. Attending to the ways that migrant brokers, in practice, exceed and defy conventional and bureaucratic definitions of migrant brokers and intermediaries is important in apprehending migration policies that aim to regulate migration and control borders, particularly since such policies often depend on precisely defining who brokers are in order to restrict or expand their role in the regulation and governance of migration.

Additionally, Flor and Marbeth's trajectories illuminate how their paths to brokerage and brokerage practices are strongly shaped by their gendered experiences as migrant women who anticipate the potential risks and needs of fellow migrant women. In this article I have emphasized their complex dynamics of care and control with migrant women that are relational and situational. Additionally, these practices of brokerage, and relations of care and control must be contextualized within the broader structures

of migration and socio-economic and political inequality under which such labor migrations take place. While Marbeth and Vivian clearly attempt to facilitate migrations and employment situations that benefit Filipina migrant women and their families, their risk-avoiding strategies (such as advising workers or selecting employers) ultimately do not change the fundamentally exploitative situation in which Filipina women find themselves. Flor ended up working for ten years with minimal salary increments with the same family. Despite intending to leave the job for years due to the excessive work hours, she found it psychologically difficult to do so. A young Filipina woman who found employment through Vivian's agency said that while Vivian helped her get out of an abusive labor situation, in the end the employer "got away" with what he did.

Indeed, Constable has forcefully argued that "global capitalist-fueled labor migration is profit-driven, and exploitative, regardless of the worker's consent, the employer's best intentions, or the agency's and (brokers') desires to 'help'" (Constable 2022: 74). Analysis of dynamics of care and control in migrant-broker relationships must thus consider the multidimensional and multiscale logics that condition the nature of these relationships, which are reproduced at distinct scales between migrant women and agencies, employers, and states. Nonetheless, intermediaries such as Marbeth and Vivian play a crucial role in shaping migration experiences and contributing to reproducing broader migration infrastructures. As Wee et al. (2020) have argued, their roles are powerful because they are able to "translate" between employers and workers' understandings of the labor law and of each other. Brokers' ability to translate affords them considerable discretionary power in shaping migrant women's everyday lives. As the same authors ask, what kinds of legal frameworks should be in place to prevent the abuse of brokers' positions? In the context of Chile, migration research has largely focused on migrants' precarious labor situations, experiences of discrimination, transnational family arrangements, and multidimensional consequences of changing migration policies. Attending to the role of other, less visible actors, such as migrant brokers and intermediaries, can contribute to clarifying how migration journeys and experiences are further powerfully shaped both by other individuals who mediate between them, other actors (state and employers) and broader institutional structures on a transnational and inter-cultural scale.

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