

**FILIPINA MARRIAGE MIGRATION, HUMAN CAPITAL, AND THE  
“MAIL-ORDER-BRIDE” INDUSTRY**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Filipina Marriage Migration, Human Capital, and the “Mail-Order-Bride” Industry

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Through the frameworks of feminist and Marxist theory and the case study of Susana Remerata Blackwell, I aim to redefine the relationship of Filipina marriage migrants to capitalism by arguing that their skill of domesticity and sexual labor qualify as “surplus labor,” according to Marx’s own definition. I define “marriage migrant” using Nicole Constable’s definition, i.e., women who “move from poorer countries to wealthier ones, from the less developed global ‘south’ to the more industrialized ‘north’” (Constable 4). Recognizing the absence of discussions of labor as gendered and sexualized in Marxist thought, I argue that Marx’s theoretical frameworks are still valuable in conceptualizing the experiences of Filipina marriage migrants. Moreover, I describe how these experiences can be understood as what I term “consensual trafficking,” wherein Filipina women knowingly enter contractual marriages in which domestic and sexual labor is expected of them with the hope of receiving socioeconomic benefits in exchange for this labor. I argue that this labor can be understood within the frameworks of Marx’s theory of “surplus value,” where the manufacturing costs of a product are low in comparison to the profit earned through the sale of that product. By utilizing this theory, I

describe how the initial monetary “investment” of American men into their marriages is eventually surpassed in value by the domestic and sexual labor of the foreign wife. This labor establishes the Filipina marriage migrants as human capital- a product capable of being exploited by their husbands under capitalism and the Western patriarchy. These concepts are exemplified through the published experiences of Susana Remerata Blackwell, a Filipina marriage migrant who was publicly murdered by her American husband shortly after her transnational relocation to the United States. Overall, I re-examine Marx’s compatibility with feminist theory while furthering feminist discussion of the marriage migrant industry.

## **DEDICATION**

*To my family, friends, and friends that are family.*

*Your boundless belief in me is what made this possible.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Though there may be greater economic opportunities for women, the reality for some once they begin their married life is at best being treated like a maid and a sexual servant, and at worst is intense domestic abuse.

Kathryn A. Lloyd, *Wives for Sale*.

Coming from the world's largest international exporter of "mail-order-brides"—the Philippines—Filipina women are disproportionately subjected to gendered and sexual violence. Feminist scholars have argued for the need to refer to these brides as "marriage migrants." Marriage migration describes the process whereby women "move from poorer countries to wealthier ones, from the less developed global 'south' to the more industrialized 'north'" (Constable 4).<sup>1</sup> Acting as human capital for her American husband, the labor of the Filipina marriage migrant takes the form of traditional feminine domesticity and sexual labor. Although migrant marriages have previously been conflated with non-consensual trafficking in works of feminist scholarship, I argue that Filipina brides are subject to what I term "consensual trafficking." As marriage migrants, Filipina women knowingly enter contractual marriages where domestic and sexual labor is expected of them in hope of receiving socioeconomic benefits in exchange for this labor. As the eventual benefits of her labor for the American husband,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use the term "mail-order-bride" when describing the industry-side of marriage migration, while I use the term "marriage migrant" when referring to the woman seeking marriage in the global North. I do this to acknowledge the way that not all marriage migrants are part of the mail-order-bride industry and that even those who pursue marriages outside their home nations for complex reasons are not reducible to their status as global commodities.



including the long-term unpaid reproductive labor of childbirth, childcare, housework, etc., vastly outweigh the American husband's initial monetary investment, the marriage migrant's relationship to capitalism cannot be defined solely by her desire for economic rewards. Rather, the marriage migrant exists as human capital through the consistent exploitation of her domestic labor within her marital union.

As a result of the purposeful isolation of Filipina brides following their immigration to the United States, as well as the underground nature of the marriage migrant industry, published accounts of Filipina marriage migrants' experiences are gravely limited. The only published examples of the experiences of a specific Filipina bride are those of Susana Remerata Blackwell, a young Filipina woman who immigrated to the United States in 1994. As such, Remerata's narrative will be the primary source material utilized when discussing the real-life experiences of Filipina marriage migrants. The concept of human capital is also demonstrated through the experiences of Susana Remerata, who, in 1995, was publicly murdered by her American husband, Timothy Blackwell, following the annulment of their marriage. During a break from court proceedings, Blackwell approached a pregnant Remerata and shot her – she was pronounced dead shortly after.

In the small village of Caitangan, Philippines, in the year 1990, Susana Remerata met a local, older woman who worked for the American marriage migrant catalogue, *Asian Encounters*. The woman was paid approximately \$0.40 USD for every young, Filipina woman she recruited. Right away, Remerata decided to apply for enlistment in the magazine. In her home village, Remerata's family was considerably fortunate – they had a larger concrete house and owned a few local shops at which Remerata worked. She had been sent to college in the large city of Cebu to study hotel management and was known locally as a beauty queen. Further,

her home was cared for and food prepared by local domestic workers. But despite these privileges, the island was still devoid of the Western modernity that Remerata craved. She longed for a “land across the ocean where she didn’t sweat day and night” and the opportunity for “beautiful children,” whom she believed would be stronger than the Filipinos in her village due to their “American blood” (Tizon 4).

Shortly after her placement in the catalogue, she began receiving correspondence from nearly 100 different prospective American husbands. In the summer of 1991, Timothy Blackwell became one of these interested men. Remerata and Blackwell corresponded for approximately one year before marrying in the village of Caitangan. After immigration difficulties, Remerata arrived in the United States in 1994. Exactly 13 days later, Blackwell physically abused Remerata and she departed their shared residence; moving in with local, working Filipina immigrants who had also relocated from Caitangan. Blackwell immediately filed for a marriage annulment, an action that would result in Remerata’s deportation. She was offered the option to forgo the annulment and instead reimburse Blackwell for all the associated costs of the marriage. Before court proceedings could continue, however, Blackwell publicly killed Remerata and her unborn, “illegitimate” child.

In order to conceptualize the experiences of Remerata within a capitalist framework, I compare the labor of the Filipina marriage migrant to Marx’s theory of “surplus value,” in which the labor of the marriage migrant ultimately results in an emotional and physical “profit” for the American husband. This is due to the value of her labor outweighing the American husband’s initially monetary investment in the marriage. By the time of their annulment, Blackwell argued that he had invested approximately \$17,000 USD into his relationship with Remerata – including all expenses for her transnational relocation. In an effort to conceptualize the value of

Remerata's expected labor, I argue that Filipina brides perform a type of domestic labor that is both aligned with and distinct from Marxist principles. With recognition that Marx did not objectively discuss gendered and sexual labor such as domestic housework and sexual labor in his theory of labor power, Marx nonetheless provides theoretical frameworks helpful in understanding the experiences of Filipina marriage migrants within capitalist societies. Marx's description of the (male) laborer inadvertently implies the existence of a domestic laborer whose work enables the labor power of the paid laborer. For example, within patriarchal societies, the male laborer under capitalism must have someone who is ironing his shirts, preparing his meals, and birthing and nurturing future capitalist subjects under his family name. Though Marx fails to address this concept of "affective labor" outrightly, the frameworks of Marxist feminism bridge the gaps between Marxist ideals and domesticity and sex as labor. For example, Nicole Constable's *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia* which works to redefine stereotypical viewpoints of marriage migration including, but not limited to, motivation by poverty, the economic standing of the American man and the foreign wife as individuals, and the "cartographies of desire" often deemed compulsory within the institution of marriage (Constable 14).

The cultural familiarity and western proximity of the Philippines to the United States, resulting from U.S. imperialism, encourages American men to seek out Filipina women. Because of histories of U.S. colonization, Filipina women are viewed as "much more culturally compatible" with American men while embodying "desirable" traits such as fluency in the English language, a petite stature, and westernized features as a consequence of Spanish colonization of the Philippines (Lloyd 341). For Remerata, her status as a beauty queen in the

village of Cataingan, as well as her fascination with Western culture, is what drew her prospective husband to initially begin their correspondence.

In this thesis, I explore the following research questions through the case study of Remerata as a marriage migrant: How does the capitalist servitude that inheres in the domestic arrangements of marriage migrants contribute to understandings of the sexual violence that marriage migrants experience? What counts as “sexual violence”? Furthermore, to what extent are Filipina marriage migrants, such as Remerata, inserted into a system of gendered and sexual labor that replicates some of the formal structures of sex trafficking? The first of these questions focuses on the private lives of marriage migrants and their relationships. The second, however, links these relationships to the domestic labor and sexual violation of minority and/or feminine individuals in general.

I will begin with an analysis of the current legislation utilized, both within the Philippines and the United States, to regulate the transnational marriage migrant industry. This legislation introduces the concept of consent within the Filipino legal definition of trafficking. I critique this definition’s use of “consent” within Filipino law, which victimizes marriage migrants; instead, I assert that marriage migrants are agential and thus consent fully to their commodification for the purpose of marriage. To exemplify this point, I utilize the example of Remerata’s self-enlistment in the Washington-based catalogue *Asian Encounters*. A brief history of the United States colonization of the Philippines follows, in order to conceptualize the racial and gendered power imbalances within migrant marriages, as well as the reasoning behind American men’s interest in Filipina women at higher rates than any other exporting country of marriage migrants. Lastly, I analyze the process of meeting and entering into a conjugal relationship with a marriage migrant

– as well as how the domestic and sexual labor expected of the foreign bride during this marriage relates to Marxist theories of labor production.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In response to local media stories detailing the abuse endured by Filipina women in foreign marriages, Filipino government officials established both the Republic Act 6955 (Anti Mail-Order-Bride Law) of the Philippines and the Republic Act 9208 (Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003) of the Philippines. Enacted in 1990, prior to the widely publicized murder of Remerata, the former prohibits the advertisement of Filipina women by commercial industries for the purpose of foreign marriage. Colloquially known as the “Anti-Mail Order Bride Law,” Act 6955 has been criticized for “[pushing] the industry underground,” rather than decreasing the frequency of marital trafficking (Lloyd 349). The act states that,

Pursuant thereto, it is hereby declared unlawful:

(a) For a person...or any other entity to commit, directly or indirectly, any of the following acts:

(1) To establish or carry on a business which has for its purpose the matching of Filipino women for marriage to foreign nationals either on a mail-order basis or through personal introduction;

(2) To advertise, publish, print or distribute or cause the advertisement, publication, printing or distribution of any brochure, flier, or any propaganda material calculated to promote the prohibited acts in the preceding subparagraph;

(3) To solicit, enlist or in any manner attract or induce any Filipino woman to become a member in any club or association whose objective is to match women for marriage to foreign nationals either on a mail-order basis or through personal introduction for a fee;

(4) To use the postal service to promote the prohibited acts in subparagraph 1 hereof.

Act 6955, 1990.

While this act clearly prohibits the advertisement and marriage of Filipina marriage migrants, it nonetheless proved ineffectual in countering the widespread popularity of foreign marriage among Filipina women. Perhaps the most notable shortcoming of the act is its origination within the Philippines itself; though Filipina women cannot be advertised or married in migrant marriages on Filipino soil, no such restrictions exist within the United States. Therefore, marriage migrant agencies must merely change their name to “pen-pal” agencies to elude the restrictions of Act 6955 and allow for the advertisement of marriage migrants in Filipino catalogues (Tizon 6). The act is further rendered ineffectual by the existence of marriage migrant agencies operating from the United States, to which Filipina women may simply mail their photograph, details of their appearance, and contact information to be listed. Such was the case of Susana Remerata, whose marriage began through her self-solicitation to the marriage migrant catalogue *Asian Encounters*, based out of Washington state. After approximately one year after first contacting Remerata, Blackwell and his Filipina bride were married on American soil – albeit, as “pen-pals.” In these instances, solicitation and advertisement of a marriage migrant becomes legal for Filipina women.

Consequently, Act 6955 does little to address existing marital unions or the proliferation of underground marriage migrant transactions which remain unaffected by advertisement legislation. This oversight, however, is partially combated by Act 9208 of the Philippines, which relates to the marriage migrant industry through its statements against the exploitation of vulnerable persons. In subsection A of Act 9208, “trafficking” is defined as the “transportation...

of persons with or without the victim's consent," wherein the trafficker "[takes] advantage of the vulnerability of the person, or, the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person" (R.A. No. 9208).

Though this definition acknowledges the existence of consent within trafficking situations, such as in the case of transactional marriages, I argue that it misrepresents the role of consent within marriage migrant unions. Filipina marriage migrants do not consent to be trafficked following the giving or receiving of economic and/or social incentives. The bride is not merely "taken advantage of," a phrase that wrongly disassociates marriage migrants from their own agency and conflates their desires for a different life with a lack of knowledge of the circumstances involved in a foreign marriage. Rather, the "consent" in consensual trafficking, as it differs from Filipino law, begins the moment that the woman decides, on her own accord, to list her photo in the pages of a catalogue. She decides herself to enter marriage migration; she must consent to her own commodification before it ever takes place.

Feminist scholars commonly disagree as to whether the commodification of a woman can truly be consensual (Lloyd 357). I argue that it is, in fact, possible for a woman to consensually commodify her body and/or her domestic and sexual labor – as is shown through the union of Remerata and Blackwell. Despite her relative poverty when compared to her American husband, the Remerata family was rather fortunate for the small village of Cataingan. Her family owned two small shops, at which Remerata worked, and lived in a sturdy, rather large concrete home. To further exemplify their relative wealth for the region, Remerata was able to be sent to university in Cebu – a city nearly 12 hours away by ferry. Thus, Remerata was not inherently stripped of her ability to consent to transactional marriage due to her status as "woman from the Global South."



By Filipino standards, Remerata was not burdened by immense poverty or in danger of exploitation for her domestic and sexual labor. She was a respected student with a career in hotel management- it was her own desire for foreign travel and infatuation with American culture that led her to consent to her own commodification. Constable argues that, in the case of many migration marriages, “the brides are not necessarily poor, nor do they categorically marry men who are above them in the socioeconomic ladder” (Constable 17). She goes on to state that Filipina women may not “move higher up the chain of economic resources,” despite relocating to a more developed country (Constable 17). To assume that all migrant marriages take place solely for economic advancement overlooks the many other factors that contribute to marital unions – including love and romantic desire. These marriages, though initiated in a seemingly unconventional way, are not inherently devoid of love and romance. However, they also cannot be expected to possess romantic and sexual desire in every instance simply because they are legal unions. Marriage, both within the marriage migrant industry and outside of it, occurs for any number of reasons – financial, social, romantic, etc. In short, a marriage migrant domestic arrangement cannot be deemed “loveless” nor “romantic” due to the means by which the marriage was formed.

Though it is impossible to know whether Remerata married Blackwell out of true romantic desire, it is known that the two communicated for over a year before deciding to meet and, eventually, get married. This, along with the knowledge that Remerata was not in a position of immense poverty in her home village, demonstrates how economic factors were likely not the sole motivator for Remerata’s decision to seek a foreign marriage. Nonetheless, Remerata’s ability to consent to her commodification, as well as her relative wealth in the Philippines, was not sufficient to place her into a position of power once within the United States. Upon

consenting to the marriage and relocating, Remerata no longer had access to the small luxuries accessible within her village. Rather, the distance from the Philippines alone was enough to render her “isolated and vulnerable,” and entirely dependent on her new husband (Constable 20). A husband whose status as a white, Western man placed Remerata, indubitably, into a position of subserviency.

Within the United States itself, there exists a singular regulation regarding the entry of marriage migrants into the United States. Passed in 2005, the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA) works to “provide foreign fiancé(e)s and spouses immigrating to the United States legal rights as well as criminal or domestic violence histories of their U.S. citizen fiancé(e)s or spouse” (United States Public Law, 2005). This act encourages the distribution of pamphlets to immigrants entering marriages with U.S. citizens, with the pamphlets providing a comprehensive list of the immigrants’ rights as well as emergency contact information in the event of abuse. Such information, it should be noted, was not available to foreign brides prior to 2005 – resulting in Filipina women, like Remerata, being left without proper support or knowledge of histories of domestic and/or sexual abuse.

## 2. U.S. COLONIZATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

The dehumanization and commodification of Filipino subjects began as early as the 1898 Spanish-American War and subsequent incorporation of the Philippines as a United States territory. At this time, a new term emerged to describe Pinoy<sup>2</sup> proximity to American citizenship. Unable to be described as either aliens or American citizens, Filipinos were referred to as “nationals,” colonized subjects with freedom to travel between the Philippines and the United States. The physical distance of the Philippine territory to the mainland, along with the common perception of the dark-skinned Pinoys as a “backward, alien race,” allowed for the colonization of the Philippines to be seen as consistent with the fundamental beliefs of self-governance upheld by the United States (Ngai 98). Thus, the United States’ overtaking of the Philippine government was viewed through the lens of “duty, to protect and civilize Filipinos” (Ngai 98).

The concept of assimilation played a large role in the American mission to “civilize” their Pinoy subjects. Due to their long history as Spanish and, therefore, European subjects, Pinoys were Christians who spoke English, enjoyed Western fashion, and had knowledge of Western culture. They therefore couldn’t be stereotyped as “heathen...steeped in ancient traditionalism” (Ngai 109). Quite the contrary, Filipinos residing in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s found themselves active members of American society, most notably in the common dance halls populated by foreign or lower-class white women.

Due to the difficult passage for Filipino immigrants from their homeland to the United States, the vast majority of the early Pinoy population on American soil were young, unmarried

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<sup>2</sup> “Pinoy,” relating to the Philippines or Filipinos, a person of Filipino descent or origin.

men. Labeled as largely “womanless,” Filipino men gradually came to be viewed as “childlike,” a description that related not only to their perceived racial barbarianism, but their sexual promiscuity as well (Ngai 110). Known to spend excess money on gaudy clothing and risqué entertainment, Filipino men came to be viewed as “feminized males, not homosexual yet not fully heterosexual either” (Ngai 113).

David Eng’s model of “racial castration” describes existing as an Asian male in Western culture as “the antithesis of manhood, of masculinity” (Eng 1). Eng states that “the West thinks of itself as masculine – big guns, big industry, big money – so the East is feminine – weak, delicate, poor” (Eng 1). The femininity and quasi-homosexuality of Pinoy subjects in the early twentieth century was not limited to those who most often frequented grungy dance halls or wore the flashiest outfits but was applied to all Filipino men.

These histories of Asian male feminization, together with the Western cultural practices of the Filipino people, cannot be separated from the social components of the modern marriage migrant industry. The skewed understanding of Filipino men as “womanless” during the early twentieth century was ultimately caused by a lack of female immigration during this period. This led to Pinoy male migrants performing traditionally “feminine” labor and, eventually, to them being labeled as feminine themselves. But what was to become of the Filipina women, left behind overseas? In the perceived absence of “masculine” figures (note “perceived,” as the racial castration of Filipino men caused them to be viewed as unsatisfactory romantic or sexual partners, even decades following the U.S. relinquishing of the Philippine colony), Filipina women came to be viewed as an “unclaimed commodity,” to be rescued by Western men and their proximity to wealth and Western amenities such as electricity, television, and telephones. Much as the Philippines itself was painted as “tribal” and “backward” for the justification of United

States colonization, Filipina women are similarly degraded and dehumanized in the twenty-first century through the marriage migrant industry (Ngai 98).

The feminization of Filipino men was specifically consequential in the marriage of Remerata and Blackwell. During the annulment proceedings, Remerata became pregnant with another man's child whilst living with two Filipina women who had immigrated from the same region as Remerata herself. Remerata argued to the court that she had been raped at a recent party, that the pregnancy was not of her own choice. Her Filipino friends and family, however, argue that Remerata did, in fact, choose to become pregnant – the pregnancy was a deliberate action to prevent her own deportation. Perhaps the most meaningful detail of this pregnancy was that Remerata's partner was not another American man, similar in many aspects to Blackwell. Remerata's pregnancy was reportedly due to her relationship with a Filipino man – an immigrant, much like herself. It is conceivable that Blackwell took offense not only to Remerata's failure to act as his wife, but to her deliberate choice to mate with a Filipino man, a subject who has historically been feminized and emasculated in Western culture.

### 3. TRANSACTIONAL MARRIAGE: COURTING A MARRIAGE MIGRANT

Following feminist movements in the United States and the subsequent entrance of many American women into the workforce, Western men began to look outside of the United States border for a wife with “old-fashioned values” (Chun 1159). These values, of course, refer to the gender-power dynamics of the Western patriarchy, in which feminine figures are subordinate to the masculine. The American women’s entry into the workforce signified not only an economic advancement for Western women, but a social advancement – no longer were they confined to the home, forced to perform domestic and sexual labor without compensation comparable to their male counterparts.

By narrowing their search to developing countries within the Global South, and specifically to women who have long been labeled “unclaimed” by the Western world due to the perceived femininity of Pinoy men, American men are once more able to hold a dominant position, in relation to white women, within their marital unions. This dominance specifically manifests in the form of economic and social power. With an estimated 20,000 Filipina women entering foreign marriages annually, and approximately half of these marriages being to American men, the modern marriage migrant industry markets itself as a business intended to “sell information and facilitate meetings between people separated by thousands of miles” (Lloyd 351). The notably “transactional” terminology utilized within this description – “sell,” “facilitate meetings,” etc., clearly denotes the Filipina brides as commodity – an item that can be purchased and, in many instances, returned on a “money-back satisfaction guarantee.” These agencies expedite the exchanging of photographs, addresses, letters, and plane tickets between

two individuals, the American man and the Filipina woman – all of which are paid for by the male suitor.

Despite the plainly monetary language often utilized within the marriage migrant industry, feminist scholars such as Nicole Constable argue that “it is important to stress that... [marriage] migrations are shaped not only or simply by economic geographies” (Constable 14). There are many factors that contribute to a marriage, including what Constable describes as “cartographies of desire” or “sites of desire” (Constable 14). These are formed by an intersection of cultural exchange that is not defined solely by unequal structures of social and economic power between the foreign wife and the American husband. Rather, the man’s desire for a “traditional” wife, coupled with the woman’s desire for modernity, often influences the onset of marriage migration.

For Susana Remerata, her desire to travel beyond the deteriorating barrio of Caitangan, Philippines, is what first sparked her desire to be featured in the *Asian Encounters* catalogue – a marriage migrant agency based out of Bellingham, Washington. From this catalogue, Seattle native Timothy Blackwell selected her photo out of dozens of Filipino women. Remerata had been raised in a concrete house without access modern plumbing, a car for travel, or a telephone. Electricity had only arrived in the village in the early 1980s and was still inaccessible to many of the farmers and fisherman that inhabited the region. For these reasons, Remerata was determined to leave the Philippines. Her determination, however, was unfortunately halted with her untimely death shortly after her arrival to the United States. Following this incident, in which Remerata’s American husband publicly murdered her in a local courthouse, friends and family described her as “not a pure victim,” but rather as a “dreamer, not of the wishy adolescent kind, but a serious one, someone inclined to take the necessary steps” to achieve a more socioeconomically

advantaged lifestyle (Tizon 3). These “steps” included the commodification of her labor – both domestic and sexual in nature. It is important to note that Remerata’s experience of poverty and violence within her foreign marriage, though much more widely published than others, is not merely a singular, sensationalized experience. Rather, Remerata’s story - and its subsequent publication – provide a rare glimpse into the inner workings of a marriage migrant union, as well as the collective violence faced by Filipina brides.

The widespread publication of Remerata’s experience is, indeed, rare, as it is acknowledged that marriage migrant agencies actively encourage the isolation of their Filipina brides. This isolation strengthens the need of the bride to depend upon her husband as well as prevents her from “fully integrating into [her] new society” (Lloyd 365).



#### 4. HUMAN CAPITAL

When discussing transnational conjugal arrangements such as Remerata's, the "language of capital" is consistently utilized to define marriage migrants. Filipina brides are consistently associated with an eager desire for financial gain; I argue, however, that Filipina women are not just simply seeking capital in the form of economic support, but rather that they *act* as capital through the exploitation of their domestic and sexual labor. In the beginning stages of courtship, prospective American husbands make what I will refer to as an "initial investment." This investment includes fees paid to the marriage migrant agency to obtain photographs, addresses, phone numbers, etc., of the women listed within the catalogue. In addition, the prospective husband covers all costs associated with travel, including the Filipina woman's eventual transnational relocation.

The concept of an initial monetary investment followed by the continuous exploitation of the bride's labor relates to what Marx terms "surplus value," which can be defined as the amount raised through the sale of a product in comparison to the – comparatively low – amount paid by the owner to manufacture it. The price of meeting and legally marrying Filipina women can be viewed as the "manufacturing cost," while the continuous output of domestic and sexual labor by Filipina brides can be viewed as the capital earned by the husband after his initial investment. This "profit" from the labor of the brides ultimately becomes disproportionate in comparison to the investment of the husband, as conjugal relationships under Western patriarchy continuously demand domestic and sexual labor throughout their duration.

In the case of Remerata, her untimely death was precisely because of her perceived indebtedness to her husband: Timothy Blackwell had purchased a wife, an act that presumably

guaranteed him unlimited access to Remerata's domestic and sexual labor, emotional loyalty and, above all, her subserviency. Ninotchka Rosca of GABRIELLA, a Quezon City women's advocacy group, states this concept succinctly. "A paid for wife," she says, "is a slave for life" (Tizon 5). After nearly a year of struggling with immigration paperwork, Remerata was able to join her new husband in the United States in February 1994. They spent only 13 days together before Remerata was forced to call the police and report that her husband had violently assaulted her. It was at this time that Blackwell began the annulment proceedings – an annulment that, if approved, would cause Remerata to be deported back to Cataingan. Before the trial began, however, Blackwell offered to forgo the annulment on one condition: Remerata reimburse him for all accumulated costs since the beginning of their correspondence.

It is with Blackwell's expectation of reimbursement that the relationship of the marriage migrant to capitalism becomes clear. She (in this case, Remerata) performs labor from which her husband is able to profit, whether this profit be emotional, physical, or monetary. When such an affective profit is not possible, such as in the case of divorce or separation, the bride is expected to return the investment made on her, to offer a "money-back guarantee" for inadequate services of domestic and sexual labor. Following the annulment, when Remerata ultimately became pregnant by another man, Blackwell felt that he was still owed the subserviency that was promised to him amidst the pages of women in the *Asian Encounters* magazine. Feeling betrayed by Remerata's loyalty to another man, as well as her apparent independence in spite of all efforts to isolate her, Blackwell regained his monetary investment not through Remerata's domestic or sexual labor, but by taking away her life and, thus, her ability to exist as anything other than a commodity for his own use and enjoyment.

## 5. LABOR AND DOMESTICITY

The concept of gendered and sexual labor, such as that expected of Remerata, has been extensively related to Marxism by feminist scholars. These scholars do not discuss Marxist theory in its pure form, in which gendered and sexual labor is largely absent, but rather through the framework of what is termed “straw Marx,” a Marx whose work is “riddled with failures” (Gimenez 12). These “failures” refer to Marx’s exclusion of proper theory regarding labor and oppression that is often unique to women. This includes, but is not limited to, childbirth, childcare, domestic housework, etc.

The notion of domesticity and sex as labor began in the late 1960s, as women’s rights advocates began to centralize the specific experiences of feminine subjects under capitalism. The concept of the nuclear family, specifically, aids in exemplifying what is described as “modes of reproduction” in Marxist literature, i.e., “the historically specific combination of labor, and the conditions and means of reproduction (the material basis - biological and economic - for the performance of reproductive tasks)” (Gimenez 19). The specific label of “modes of reproduction” is favored against “family” and “nuclear family,” as it acknowledges the necessary existence of human reproduction within the capitalist regime – there must be new capitalist subjects born in order for the regime to continue. Vogel states,

For Marx, labor power is a capacity borne by a human being and distinguishable from the bodily and social existence of its bearer. Labor power's potential is realized when its bearer makes something useful - a use-value - which may or may not be exchanged. The

bearers of labor power are, however, mortal and suffer wear and tear; every individual eventually dies. Some process that meets the ongoing personal needs of the bearers of labor power is therefore a condition of social reproduction, as is some process that replaces them over time. These processes of daily maintenance and long-run replacement are conflated in the term reproduction of labor power...

(Vogel, 156).

Modes of reproduction, however, are consistently subordinated by the capitalist system, as this form of labor is directly influenced by the social and economic climate of modes of production.<sup>3</sup> For example, if the male laborer receives a wage which renders him unable to care for children or provide housing for a larger family, this circumstance will directly impact the family's "reproductive strategies and their outcome" (Gimenez 21). Furthermore, men who must sell their labor under capitalism, and therefore do not own means of production, find themselves with a narrower list of options in terms of agents of reproduction. Without the ability to sustain a "proper" nuclear family under capitalism, these men often choose to enter relationships corrupted by power imbalances, where a mediocre income and proximity to white, Western culture is sufficient for procuring means of reproduction. This is exemplified through the marriage migrant industry, in which male laborers purchase the domestic and sexual labor of a women of color who is often viewed as socially and economically disadvantaged. This action not only allows for certain male laborers to achieve the means of reproduction necessary under the capitalist regime but empowers them through their ability to profit from the labor of the foreign

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<sup>3</sup> Traditional forms of labor production under capitalism.

wife. This profit is not merely monetary, however, but rather refers to the continuous output of domestic and sexual labor exhibited by bride that eventually surpasses in value the initial monetary investment of the American man.

In considering the experiences of Susana Remerata as a reproductive laborer, it is necessary to analyze the diminishing roles of domestic and sexual labor in modern capitalist society. For example, with the onset of afterschool daycare, washing machines, microwave ovens, “fast food,” etc., reproductive laborers have the ability to spend less time in the domestic and sexual sphere and instead devote their energy towards the labor of production. While American men such as Timothy Blackwell purchased foreign wives in hopes of procuring the domestic and sexual benefits of the Filipina women’s so-called “traditional values,” they failed to account for the evolving nature of necessary reproductive labor.

Remerata’s relocation to the United States did not take place in the early stages of capitalism, wherein tasks such as laundry, childrearing, and food preparation seized the majority of the reproductive laborer’s waking hours. Rather, her relocation in the early 1990’s allowed for Remerata to benefit from modern conveniences, conveniences that were intended for agents of reproduction to be able to act as both paid productive laborers and unpaid reproductive laborers. As such, Remerata was able to separate from her husband and move into a home shared by other working Filipino immigrants. Just as capitalism allowed for the commodification of Remerata as a foreign wife, modern advancements under capitalism also allowed her to rescind her consent to this commodification.

## CONCLUSION

The modern marriage migrant industry, as it pertains to Filipina marriage migrants in the United States, is inseparable from gendered and sexual labor, gendered and racial power imbalances, histories of colonization, and the effects of the twenty-first-century feminist movement in Western nations. Susana Remerata's experience as a marriage migrant, being the sole Filipina marriage migrant whose story has been published, serves as one representation for the plight of the agential Filipina bride. This bride, who consensually commodifies herself through her self-enlistment in international marriage migrant catalogues, enters a contractual marriage where domestic and sexual labor is expected of her by her American husband. This relationship, with the husband profiting from the affective labor of the foreign wife, categorizes marriage migrants as human capital within a Marxist surplus-value framework.

With recognition that this thesis is unable to explore multiple facets of marriage migrant unions, future research may be based upon the following questions: What types of labor do the American husbands engage in? How does the labor of integration (i.e., introducing Filipina marriage migrants into the community) affect the social power balance of a migration marriage? How do the experiences of marriage migrants relate to the modern Filipina domestic labor migration, in which Filipina women are sent by the state to act as care workers, nurses, etc. overseas? Lastly, how does utilizing a legal framework of sex trafficking to talk about marriage migration inhibit possible explorations of the definition of consent?

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