

“OUR WORLD IS SMALL”: TRANSFORMATIVE BEHAVIOR AND FILIPINA AU PAIRS' EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF COLLECTIVISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

Background of the Study

Problem statement



Existing literature rarely gives ideas of how **au pairs** might **express collectivism** given the gray area in which they find themselves (as de facto yet unrecognized workers; as part of the “family” yet an outsider; etc.). A focus on Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands, given the **Philippines’** unique history of **care labor export** and the **Netherlands’** particular **regulatory context** remain unexplored altogether.

Research Question



How do Filipina au pairs create their own forms of migrant worker collectivism amid the contradictions inflecting their experiences in the Netherlands?

Methodology



Physical participant observation and conversational interviews with ~40 au pairs

Online participant observation of TikTok + Instagram posts, and 7 Facebook groups

Semi-structured interviews with 12 au pairs




Theoretical Framework: Why Dialectics?

Letting contradictions “speak” to each other and noting how they result in “transformative behavior” can deepen understanding of Filipina au pairs’ unique position.

Focusing on linkages across space and time contextualizes Filipina au pairs’ experiences.

Recognizing that interactions between many different actors create, sustain, or challenge phenomena like collectivism leads to more nuanced analyses.

(Harvey 1996)

Key Concept	Definition	Application
 Global Care Economy	The ties of care labor between countries in the era of global capitalism, typically involving the movement of migrant women to richer nations (Parreñas 2000)	situates Filipina au pairs in terms of connections across history and the world
 Collectivism of the Everyday	An informal form of collectivism that extends beyond the context of work or the workplace (McBride and Lucio 2011; Stephenson and Stewart 2001)	expands definition of collectivism to include what Filipina au pairs experience, especially as “workers” with layers of experience unaccounted for in formalized collectivism
 Migrant Aspirations & Trajectories	Aspirations are imagined futures that individuals can act upon (Gorbachev 2022). These interact with migrant trajectories, which refer to an individual’s journey across the world over time (Snel, Bilgili, and Staring 2020).	look into “possible futures” Filipina au pairs imagine and work towards both individually and collectively

Findings



FILIPINA AU PAIRS ARE CARE LABORERS WHO ARE MUTUALLY CONSTITUTIVE OF THE GLOBAL CARE ECONOMY.

- Flows of racialized and gendered labor export create a contradiction-ridden, precarious stay for Filipina au pairs.
- Interactions among Filipina au pairs, host families, au pair agencies, the Philippine government, Dutch government, and the broader global care economy decide what forms of care labor au pairs perform.
- Filipina au pairs harness “transformative behavior” (Harvey 1996) that arises from contradictions to deploy or withhold intimacy, become visible or hypervisible, etc. to take control of their situations.



SMALL GROUPS IN DYNAMIC AU PAIR NETWORKS RELY ON “COLLECTIVISM OF THE EVERYDAY.”

- Given the temporary and atomized nature of their stay and work, Filipina au pairs do not have one solid community. Instead, they have “barkadas” (Tagalog for small close group of friends) in a changing network of “friends of friends.”
- “Galas” (Tagalog for trips) are forms of “collectivism of the everyday” as this is how they meet other au pairs, discuss problems, and identify solutions with each other.
- Filipina au pairs share material objects, opportunities, and knowledge in ways that support each other within and beyond the context of work.



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ASPIRATIONS HELPS SHAPE AU PAIRS’ NONLINEAR, NETWORK-ORIENTED TRAJECTORIES.

- Filipina au pairs’ paths before, during, and after their contract in the Netherlands are multi-directional and rely on networks that transcend borders.
- These trajectories are based on aspirations of mobility and an idealized notion of Europe, in part due to underlying colonial histories and labor export campaigns.
- Through manifestations of “collectivism of the everyday,” Filipina au pairs help each other achieve individual aspirations and conceive of improved au pair schemes for their au pair peers.

Conclusion

Filipina au pairs exhibit “transformative behavior” arising from contradictions when they build forms of “collectivism of the everyday” on which small groups within changing au pair networks rely.



Filipina au pairs’ collectivism resembles their invisibilized and atomized care labor. While far from the usual idea of collectivism, it is collectivism nonetheless as it involves: 1.) the construction of a shared sectoral identity; 2.) collaborative aspirations and trajectories; and 3.) a commitment to their peers that all help them **transform their situations and negotiate their places within the global care economy.**

Recommendations

For academia: Conduct further research on au pairs in other regulatory contexts (e.g.: Luxembourg); au pairs’ relationships with cleaners and nannies with whom they have overlapping tasks; and what forms of collectivism manifest for au pairs from other countries.

For local organizations: Consider the casual form of gathering au pairs prefer when devising interventions or outreaches. Build on their conceptions of care labor as interpersonal rather than strictly professional, as well as their networks of mutual support to solve any arising problems regarding their work conditions.

Research and Infographic by M. Magbuhos

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