

Accepted version:

(Un)configurable masculinities and gender dynamics in men’s eyes: “Mixed” couples of Filipino migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands

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Abstract

Studies on “mixed” couples focus mainly on women’s perspectives, which results in the neglect of the viewpoints of men. Addressing this empirical gap, this research note investigates the case of Belgian and Dutch men in (former) relationship with Filipino women, and Filipino men (currently or previously) married to Belgian/Dutch women. Ethnographic data analysis unveils the importance of the traditional division of household chores to these men. Belgian and Dutch informants maintain a gendered division of labor in their respective households, whereas Filipino informants, whose Belgian/Dutch spouses pursue gender equality, adopt various strategies to regain their masculine self.

Keywords

(un)configurable masculinities, gendered division of labor, “mixed” couples, strategies, migration

Introduction

The literature on marriage migration—spatial movement aiming at or resulting from marriage—mainly focuses on the experiences and perspectives of women in heterosexual “mixed” couples in which the partners have different nationalities (mostly at the beginning of relationship) and ethnicities (for example, Johnson, 2007; Piper and Roces, 2003; Suzuki, 2003). This scholarly tendency results in few studies on mixed couples concentrating on or including men in the analysis (Constable, 2003; Maher and Lafferty, 2014; Thai, 2008; Thompson et al., 2016; Wang, 2017). Thus, men’s voices remain largely unheard and their situations mostly unexplored. How do these men experience conjugal mixedness, notably the gender dynamics within it? In what way do they (re)construct or modify themselves as men in this context?

The present article deals with these questions using a gender perspective, a lens that views the perceived differences between men and women as socially constructed and that considers the qualities socially ascribed to them—masculinities and femininities—in relational and experiential terms (see Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki, 2017). In analyzing men’s experiences, it is therefore important to pay attention to the forms of masculinity that men perform, which results from their social relations and interactions. The dominant form is called “hegemonic masculinity” and is linked

to economic and physical prowess as well as to heterosexuality, whereas the other forms are “subordinate” (associated to homosexuality) and “marginalized” (like for instance that of working-class men) masculinities (Connell, 1995). In the context of migration, men may develop during the process of spatial movements and during contacts with other men what Pande (2017) calls “mobile masculinities” characterized by disempowerment and resistance. In the case of heterosexual mixed couples who most often inhabit cross-border social spaces, marriage may have nuanced meanings and impacts on men’s sense of masculinity. To find out, the present article examines the experiences of men in Filipino-Belgian and Filipino-Dutch couples residing respectively in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Despite the considerable number of scholarly works on Filipino marriage migration, Filipino men’s experiences remain rarely analyzed. This is probably due to their small number: between 1989 and 2016, men made up only about seven percent of the total 522,002 registered Filipino spouses/partners of foreign nationals (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2018). Another probable reason is the scholarly interest in the agency of Filipino women whose unions with foreign men continuously rise: from 7,806 in 1989 to 20,554 in 2016 (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2018). Among the European partners of these women, Belgians and Dutch are less numerous than Germans and British. However, Filipino-Belgian and Filipino-Dutch marriages may be empirically interesting due to similarities in Filipino migration to Belgium and the Netherlands. Historically, in the 1960s, Belgium and the Netherlands started to receive an influx of Filipinos (mainly women) in the health sector. In the 1970s and 1980s, they became destinations for Filipino women working in the domestic work sector as well as in the entertainment and sex industries (see De Stoop, 1993). Since the 1980s, the two countries have received many Filipino women immigrating to form families with Belgian and Dutch men. Hence, highlighting the voices of these European men and those of Filipino men in mixed couples may bring fresh perspectives on Filipino mixed marriages. In particular, men’s voices may bring to light how mixed unions reinforce, challenge or reconfigure gender identities, notably men’s sense of masculinity. To present the hypothesis of the present study, the next section reviews the specific literature on ethnically and nationality-mixed marriages while paying attention to the question of masculinities.

Men, migration and mixed marriages

Studies on ethnically and nationality-mixed marriages highlight the reasons behind men’s engagement in mixed union, how some of their ideals of masculinities were questioned, emphasized or undermined during their family lives, as well as how they (re)build their masculine self.

Migrant men who originate from developing countries and who are in mixed marriages may experience “marginalized masculinities” (Connell, 1995: 83) due to the negative stereotypes about them and/or their difficulties to access the local labor market. This is the situation of Nepali men married with Japanese women in Japan, who face in their everyday life “‘racial’ and ethnic bigotry” (Yamanaka, 2007: 14). In China, where women are socially expected to join their husband’s family, Chinese men who decide to marry French women and migrate to France find their masculinity put into question by their parents and co-workers (Wang, 2017). Restrictive migration policies contribute to the production of marginalized masculinities of migrant men, who in many cases, resort to marriage with the citizens of their receiving countries to stabilize their legal status (Rodríguez-García, 2006). This often makes them legally and economically dependent on their wives. In Germany, Cameroonian men married to German women feel “under extreme pressure” to maintain their marriage and give in to their wives’ wishes to prevent divorce (Fleischer, 2011: 258). Interestingly, migrant men find ways to regain their masculine self, such as by resorting to religious expression (Yamanaka, 2007) or by engaging in entrepreneurship (Kudo, 2008).

The situation seems nuanced in the case of men from economically developed economies who are joined by their partners from developing countries or who move to their wives' countries. In many industrial countries, men who are engaged in less socially valorized occupations are unattractive in the local marriage market and turn to other countries to look for a possible partner. In Japan, South Korea and mainland China, many men marry Southeast Asian women, thanks to matrimonial agencies and other intermediaries (see Ishii, 2016; Suzuki, 2003). By doing so, these men not only ensure the social reproduction and the biological continuity of their kinship line, but are also able to upgrade their marginalized sense of masculinity by becoming the breadwinner and head of their respective family. Some men from Europe and the United States of America find partners in Russia, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia (Constable, 2003; Johnson, 2007; Sizaire, 2018). A few studies show the logics of these men's mixed marriages – the desire for a traditional form of relationship in which the woman fulfills reproductive and caregiving roles (for example, Roca and Urmeneta, 2013). The quest for the “exotic” also influences the behavior of some men who present themselves as “good husbands and providers” in real and virtual worlds (Angeles and Sunanta, 2007: 18-19). Men from affluent countries moving to their wives' countries may also boost the men's ideals of masculinity. For example, Western men with Thai partners in the Isan (Northeast) region of Thailand enjoy a privileged status linked to their whiteness and economic capital; by fulfilling the role of family provider, they can perform the hegemonic form of masculinity characteristic of their countries of origin (Maher and Lafferty, 2014). In contrast, Thompson and colleagues (2016) observe “changing or emergent masculine identities” of Western men in the Isan region who experience “transient subjectivities” through time as they turn from sex tourists into *farang* (Western foreigner) sons-in-law.

In sum, men experience different masculine identities across social spaces. Migrant men from economically developing countries who are in mixed couples most often see their masculine identities downgraded in their partners' countries. In contrast, men from economically wealthy societies generally experience a hegemonic form of masculinity when they migrate to their wives' natal countries. Such differences suggest that economic disparities among nation-states and gender ideologies influence men's experiences of gender, marriage and self-making. Regardless of their country of origin, men employ strategies to maintain or pursue their ideals of masculinity usually drawn from their natal countries. Based on these observations, we can hypothesize that the ideals of masculinity of migrant men from less affluent societies are reconfigured due to the vulnerability of their status as foreigners in a new land, whereas men from wealthy countries validate and reinforce a hegemonic form of masculinity due to the advantages they gain from their marriage with women from the “Global South.”

Methodology and sample

The present article is a product of two qualitative studies: one on Belgian-Filipino and Belgian-Thai families in Belgium (2012-2015) and the other on cross-border divorces of Filipino women in Belgium and the Netherlands (2016-2017). The 17 men interviewed within the scope of these studies comprise two groups: 13 Europeans (11 Belgians and 2 Dutch) married to or divorced from Filipino women, and four men of Filipino origin (one with Belgian-Filipino, one with Belgian-Australian, one with Dutch and one with Filipino nationalities) married or previously married with a European woman.

Most of the informants were Belgians because the first study from which the present article draws from was specifically focused on mixed couples involving Belgian citizens. Likewise, there were only two Dutch men informants as most Filipino women interviewed during the second reference study were no longer in good terms with their former partner, and often they did not know the contact details or were generally reluctant to pass them to people outside their family circle.

Moreover, there were only four Filipino men informants for two reasons: most Filipinos in mixed couple in Belgium and in the Netherlands are women, and the two aforementioned studies targeted Filipino women.

Six of the informants met their Filipino spouse in Belgium, four in the Philippines, another four in other countries and three through dating/pen pal agencies (including Internet websites). Eight informants came to know their partner via an intermediary (a friend), four in their work environment, and two met by chance. Eleven informants were older than their wives, whereas the other six informants were the younger partners in their respective couples. In terms of educational attainment, most of the informants have the same level of education as their wives. Twelve men had salaried employment, four were retired and one was a job seeker at the time of the interview. The average age of the informants was 53 years and most of them had two children. In general, the informants had been married for about 18 years. At the time of the interview, thirteen were still married, three were divorced and one was legally cohabiting with a new partner. The following sections highlight the perspectives of these men regarding their masculinity while decorticating the gender dynamics in their (former) union. Their names have been anonymized in this research note to protect their privacy.

Expectations of marrying a foreign woman

Studies on mixed heterosexual marriages have uncovered through women's perspectives the often overlapping reasons behind their union with a foreign national: love, family formation, economic purposes, migration status regularization and so on. In the present study, the informants' impetus to marry a foreign woman also stemmed from intersecting factors.

It was a fantasy. In fact, when I was twelve years old, I already had my feminine ideal [...]. Asia always made me dream. The mystery, that's it. So, it was always a phantasm for me, and then growing up, I realized that I would never have an Asian (girlfriend), because here in Belgium, we had (only) Chinese at that time, and the Chinese get married between them [...]. Starting when I was in my 40s, we started to have Asians [...]. I hired a person (for my business), who invited me to eat at his place, but he did not tell me that his wife is Filipino, and when I got there, I said 'ah you have an Asian wife, you?', 'oh yes, yes', [...] jokingly, I told him, 'your wife does not have a sister, a cousin, or whatever?'. He said, 'if you want, there is a party. They celebrate Philippine independence. If you want, there is an evening event. There are Filipino girls there who are not married, etc...'. So I was there and I met her [his wife]. (Robert: 67-year-old Belgian, married)

Like Robert who "fantasized" about Asia and its women, a few other European informants emphasized the difference between what they call "Asian" and "European women". As Benjamin (51-year-old Belgian, married) explains: "Asians in general, they are more refined (in behavior) than some Belgian women." Another informant underlines the "respect" that "Asian women have" for their husbands, in contrast to their European counterparts. Interestingly, most of the European men interviewed had a past, often unpleasant relationship(s) with co-nationals prior to marrying their Filipino partner, an experience that partly shaped their point of view. These men criticized the women of their own countries by expressing their disagreement with their "liberal" behaviors, for instance, concerning finances (their holding separate bank accounts, their engagement in the labor market and so on). In this context, "liberated" European women are often demonized (Angeles and Sunanta, 2007), whereas Asian women are seen through an orientalist lens that reinforces essentialized stereotypes about them. The way some European informants compared the two groups

of women appeared as a way for them to assert what Nader (1989: 234) calls a “position of superiority,” which is linked to their ideals of masculinity as will be later discussed.

In contrast, the Filipino informants held a rather positive regard for European women: “I was attracted [to his wife] because she is a white woman” (Renato: 49-year-old Filipino, married). In fact, two informants were already attracted to “white women” even before their marriage to their European wives: Romano (53-year-old Filipino, married) confided that he had “American girlfriends” before meeting his wife, whereas Arturo (48-year-old Filipino, divorced) had a “plan” when he was young to “marry a foreign woman, maybe an Australian.” In this context, “white” refers not only to the person’s skin color but also to the privileges linked to his or her status as a citizen of an economically developed country (Maher and Lafferty, 2014). The latter sense alimts the stereotypical view in the Philippines that marriage with a citizen of a “First World” country can facilitate overseas migration and upward social class mobility (Ricoardeau, 2012). This latter factor shaped the decision of one of the four Filipino informants to start a relationship with a European woman who later became his wife. Knowing that the woman liked him, Jose (35-year-old Filipino, married) courted her hoping that marrying her would “bring me luck (*pasuwerte*). I just told her that I loved her.” This informant came from a modest family and being the eldest among his siblings, he aimed to migrate abroad to help his natal family through remittances. This desire set the tone of his attraction to his European wife, echoing Constable’s (2003) observation that personal motivations can overlap with the feeling of love and that love may appear later on in such binational relationship.

Aside from Filipino informants’ attraction to a “white woman,” most of them, except Jose, stressed “love” as the main reason for their marriage with their European wives. Romano recalled the moment he met his wife: “I was married to my work and Melanie came to the Philippines and... yeah [I fell in love with her] and she also fell in love with me”. Likewise, most European informants emphasized the romantic dimension of their relationship with their Filipino wives, except in the case below of Paul (75-year-old Dutch, divorced) who had difficulty having a child of his own and chose to marry a Filipino woman with a child from a previous relationship:

She has a child and this is the most important because I am already old enough. If I would like to have a real wife... she [should] like to have a child. This seems to me ideal: a young child, he is already there, as a matter of fact not that grown up. I can start a relationship with him, so this is already better.

Overall, European informants’ decision to embark on an intimate relationship with a Filipino woman stemmed from intersecting factors: their “fantasies about the exotic” (Manderson, 1997: 123) or their search for “exotic love” (Angeles and Sunanta, 2007: 5), their experiences of couple life with European women, their stereotypes regarding Asian women’s femininity, their romantic feelings and their project to build a family. Filipino informants, on the other hand, entered a relationship with European women because of their sense of obligation towards their natal family. They expected that marriage with a foreign “white” woman would provide them access to certain economic resources. Love or attraction also came into the picture, and this was often shaped by postcolonial stereotypical views in their country of origin. For both groups of informants, mixed marriage served as a site where their masculine ideals were strengthened. As the next section uncovers, at some point, mixed marriage also put into question their masculine ideals.

Improved, reinforced and challenged ideals of masculinity

When I got married to a white [woman], some people [in my village] were happy. They said, ‘sometimes he [Jose] was fishing in the corner, then he got married with a white’.

[...] Their regard for me changed. Almost everyone [in my village] said [that I am] 'lucky.' They said that 'even though you are poor, luck comes to you. You become an inspiration to us: whoever a person is, even though he is ugly, whatever he is, even though he is so poor, people should not look down at him, [because] we do not know what the future holds.' (Jose)

The remark that Jose "was fishing in the corner, then he got married with a white" implies how the people in his village viewed his marriage to a "white woman" as unexpected for a man of working-class background like him. The other parts of the vignette above suggest what such a marriage brings to some Filipino men like Jose: an upgraded social status and an improved image of their masculine self. Jose who was mainly known in his village as a fisherman had occupied a position of "marginalized masculinity" (Connell, 1995) in the Philippines, where "work, breadwinning, family and community respect" represent "the key elements of successful adult masculinity" (McKay, 2011: 4). Another example is Arturo, who was the eldest son and breadwinner of his family when he decided to marry his Dutch girlfriend at the age of 18. Although they knew that his marriage would mean migration to the Netherlands, his family members did not stop him, provided he would continue supporting them financially. When he settled in the Netherlands, he sent remittances to his family in the Philippines. His marriage allowed him to fulfill his natal family's expectations and be a "good" son to his parents as well as an "ideal" brother to his siblings. Thus, Arturo, like Jose, "married up" as his wife originates from a more economically advantaged family and country than his. For two other informants who came from an economically privileged family and who had already a socially valorized employment before meeting their European wives, their mixed marriage reinforced their already "successful adult masculinity" (McKay, 2011: 4) as they gained even more respect from their family and village of origin. For example, Renato mentioned that his natal family members became "very proud" of him and the people in his village "looked up" to him. The gaze of others appears here central in the construction, improvement and reinforcement of Filipino masculine ideals (Rodell, 2002).

On the contrary, such an element is peripheral in the conception of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995) in the European contexts, where this dominant form of masculinity seems to be tied not only to breadwinning and fathering but also to physical prowess and character (Mosse, 1998). Speaking of character, Belgian and Dutch informants paid less attention to what other people would think about them, notably regarding the division of labor at home that they most often imposed on their Filipino spouses.

I take care not simply of bills but of all more serious situations. I don't know, it can be anything. I take care of that, all that is administrative, all that is technical, all that is... I am simply saying that you [his wife] take care of the house. Since you don't work, you can take care of the house, prepare food, clean, etc. The rest is for me. This is clear and honest. It has been like this since the beginning [of our relationship]. (Robert)

Robert's notion of the division of domestic labor can be partly explained by the large age difference (22 years) between him and his wife. This is also the case of four informants who were ten years older than their Filipino spouses. Concerning their wives' economic condition, most of the European informants found themselves in a situation similar to the one of Robert, in which their Filipino spouse stayed at home. These men preferred their wives not to engage in paid work as it reduced their income tax (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018). This resulted in a gendered division of labor resembling the traditional arrangement in the Philippines, where the father mainly provides financially for the family, whereas the mother takes care of the domestic chores and the children. In

the households of many European informants, the Filipino spouses performed most of the work considered as “feminine” (cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes...) while the husband generally accomplished “masculine” tasks such as filling up administrative papers, paying bills and repairing broken or damaged parts of the house. This arrangement can also be observed in other mixed couples involving Asians such as in French-Chinese couples (Wang, 2017).

Despite this gendered division of labor, the Filipino spouses of the men interviewed successfully navigated the power dynamics in their union and asserted themselves, usually to the surprise of their husbands who initially held a stereotypical image of Filipino women as passive and silent. Basing on his experience with his wife openly expressing her feelings and arguments, Robert cautioned: “we should not take Filipino women as nice little persons. I think that the influence of the Spanish [colonization of the Philippines] remains [in each Filipino]; [they] keep [everything inside], keeping [them] and then this results to an explosion.” Paul described his wife as “very kind and soft, but clinging to her ideas.” The strong character of the Filipino spouse of some European informants often lead to conjugal tensions, which in the long term prompted a few men to let their wife run their household. Indeed, one Filipino spouse confided that she was the one who made important decisions in her family and that was the same for her Filipino friends who were married to Belgians.

The Filipino men interviewed also reported conjugal tensions. The reasons behind this tension partly stemmed from their challenged ideals of masculinity and femininity:

Actually, the stereotype about a Filipina wife—that she prepares the food and [that] she has the time to prepare the food, [that] she has to prepare it—still remains ingrained in me. But when I come here [to Belgium], I see the children watching TV and she [his Belgian wife] is also with them, and there is no food, so I have to make the food myself, so I'm frustrated. (Renato)

Three informants, including Renato, wished to follow the traditional division of labor in the Philippines and expected their European wives to fulfill reproductive labor, notably preparing and cooking foods regularly. However, their European spouses adhered to gender equality at home. This leads to frustration, except for Romano, who was most often away from home due to his job in another country:

I think in the Philippines we have quite an overt sense of masculinity but actually it is the mother who decides, although openly we say that it is the man who is head of the family. But we are essentially matriarchal, I think. (Romano)

Romano’s remark highlights the ambiguity of the gendered division of labor in the Philippine context, which can be attributed to the country’s complex historical past. A more egalitarian division of labor had been observed in this society before the Spanish and American colonization (Eviota, 1992). It is through his emphasis on the ambiguity of the gendered division of labor in his country of origin that Romano managed to preserve his masculine image.

Maintaining and negotiating masculine ideals

Within the realm of the home, the clash between the masculine ideals of the men interviewed and the ideal femininities of their foreign spouses resulted in mixed feelings and dynamic negotiations. These produced strategies to maintain or reinforce one’s image of one’s gendered self.

The first strategy employed by Filipino and European informants was their continued engagement in the labor market. This made them the breadwinner in their family and in some cases an occasional financial-aid provider for their wives’ natal family in the Philippines. Failure to

become or remain the family's breadwinner often leads to frustration, as experienced by one European informant who lost his job and was unable to find another employment immediately. Filipino informants too underwent emotional difficulties, particularly at the beginning of their immigration when they were economically and legally dependent on their European wives. Their migration status was attached to their marriage with an insider citizen and their low proficiency in the language of their receiving country made it difficult for them to find a job. This reverberates findings of recent studies showing how restrictive policies on migration and family reunification produce dependence and inequalities within the familial and social realms (Fleischer, 2011; Strasser et al., 2009). To get out of their situation, Filipino informants strived to learn the language of their receiving countries: "[I took an] intensive [course] during half year then again a half year [for an] intensive [course], but of technical Dutch to prepare myself to get a job" (Renato). As soon as they were able to speak the language, Filipino informants like Renato embraced paid work. Salaried employment allows them, like the European informants in this study, to buy properties in their country of residence, thereby strengthening their sense of masculinity.

To avoid (heated) discussions (with my wife), I decided to cook a lot of dishes (during the weekend) and then freeze them. When I arrive home, I will just reheat them. This is what I found as a solution to my problem. (Jose)

Aside from productive labor, all Filipino informants like Jose incorporate reproductive labor in their family obligations to avoid conflicts with their wives. Similar to the case of some European informants, the age difference between the partners influences the division of domestic labor. Two Filipino informants who were much younger than their wives adopted an open attitude and engaged more in reproductive labor than the two other informants. This strategy contributes to the construction of a form of modern masculinity inscribed in the principle of gender equality. Usually characterized with disempowerment, migrant masculinity appears in such a case as fluid, flexible and therefore "mobile" (Pande, 2017). European informants, on the other hand, relegated reproductive labor mainly to their Filipino spouse as they busy themselves in fulfilling their "masculine" role of family breadwinner. Paul recognizes that his Filipino spouse does not easily change her mind, but he affirms that, "economically speaking, I am the one at the moment who has the economic power [in this house]. There is nothing to do about it [...] when it is needed to decide on something. I am the one who pays [the bills]." His remarks affirm what other studies observe about the strong link between money and masculinity (see Maher and Lafferty, 2014).

Cultivating a close relationship with their children is another strategy for the informants to maintain their sense of masculinity: "football, we always go to football together" (Philippe: 41-year-old Belgian, married); "I put a basketball ring near the door. Yes, he [his son] likes it" (Jose). Going out with their children to do some physical activities like sports or helping them do their school assignments are some of the informants' fathering practices. This echoes the findings of previous studies showing that fathering is one of the important elements of being a man (see Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya, 2005).

Many informants, notably Filipino men, also engaged in outdoor activities. For example, Renato went out motorbiking every weekend. Jose and Romano also actively participated in the activities of Filipino associations near their places of residence, whereas Arturo regularly attended the Sunday mass in a Filipino church. Nearly all Filipino informants pursued their activities without their wives, who were usually busy during weekends with household chores and/or were not interested in such activities. This provided the informants with a possibility to withdraw themselves for a moment from the domestic sphere where expectations, happiness and frustrations most often intersected. It also allowed them to assert themselves as men with projects of their own.

Conclusion

The case of Filipino, Belgian and Dutch men underline how mixed marriage and migration affirm and put into question men's conventional views regarding what represents ideal masculinity as well as femininity.

Filipino men's experience has spatial and temporal dimensions, as they start by gaining a good reputation and upgraded social status in the Philippines, thanks to their mixed marriage. As they change country and inhabit a new social space, their mixed marriage acquires a different signification. They reconfigure their sense of masculinity to adjust to the situation in their home where their European wives follow the gender equality principle. On the contrary, Belgian and Dutch informants' masculinity gets boosted as they pursue a gendered division of labor in their respective households. When these men encounter resistance on the part of their Filipino wives, they keep, defend and reinforce their ideals of masculinity by adopting certain strategies such as cultivating their relations with their children and maintaining a gendered division of labor at home. This latter strategy differentiates them from the Filipino informants who embrace reproductive labor (specifically cooking) while at the same time engaging in "masculine" outdoor activities. These differences highlight how economic inequalities between nations affect the lives of migrant and non-migrant men in mixed marriages: originating from an economically developing country, Filipino informants appear to have less bargaining power in their home than their Belgian and Dutch counterparts. Differences between partners in terms of social class belonging and age also fashion the gender dynamics in the informants' home. Interestingly, both groups of men mainly draw from their natal countries' ideals of masculinity and as much as they can, they try to be "the man" they think they ought to be.

These observations confirm the present study's hypothesis: migrant men's masculinity does become configured due to the vulnerabilities linked to their status as foreigners in a new land. In contrast, the Belgian and Dutch informants seem to display unconfigurable masculinity as they do not necessarily need to reshape their sense of self due to the advantages they obtain from being insider citizens, their marriage with women from less affluent societies and being older than their wives. They validate and reinforce the hegemonic form of masculinity known in their natal country, which is linked to productive labor. This process entails negotiations and power struggles between the couple, making marriage an arena in which masculinities and femininities continuously collide, mutually influence each other and converge (or fail to do so) at a certain point in time.

These findings open new doors for future research on men's experiences and perspectives, particularly concerning the (re)production of certain forms of masculinity in the context of international marriages. A large-scale study using a mixed-method approach and focusing on both heterosexual and homosexual mixed unions would yield in-depth insights on the porousness of gender relations and identities in space and time.

Acknowledgments

The present work would have not been possible without the trust of all the study informants and without the intellectual guidance of Jacques Marquet and Laura Merla of the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) as well as Betty de Hart of Radboud University Nijmegen (The Netherlands).

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The studies from which the present research note originates were supported by the following grants: 2012-2015 postdoctoral fellowship at the Catholic University of Louvain from the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique - FNRS in Belgium, and 2016-2017 Excellence Fellowship from Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands.

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