



Guilt: A gendered bond within the transnational family



Cécile Vermot*

UMR 196, Paris Descartes, Ined, IRD, ESA/RN11, 19 rue Jacob, 75006 Paris, France

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ABSTRACT

Between 1999 and 2003 Argentinians lived an economic, social and political crisis that led some of them to emigrate, mainly to the United States and Spain. There are few studies on Argentinean migration and even fewer studies that take emotions and gender during the migration process into account. The aim of this work was to understand the link between gender and guilt within the migration process. In order to consider this, I analyzed the expression of guilt within the narrative of Argentinean migrants in Miami, United States and Barcelona, Spain. In-depth interviews of Argentinean migrants were conducted in both cities. Research shows that guilt is a gendered emotion, which allows migrants to temporarily stay attached to their family in a gendered way during the migration process. Nonetheless, its expression depends on four different factors that are interrelated: representations of gender role and “imagined family”, representations’ changes during the migration process and the context of departure and the context of arrival.

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1. Introduction

Belonging is a gendered emotional¹ process (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Anthias, 2006; Ho, 2009; Probyn, 1996; Rowe, 2005; Svasek, 2008; Yuval Davis, 2006), which results in a fluid interrelation between representations, cognitive status and its “performance”² (Butler, 1990; Bell, 1999; Fenster, 2005; Fortier, 2000; Probyn, 1996; Skrbiš et al., 2007: 262). Yet, “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987) implicates not only performing the corresponding actions, but also the corresponding emotions. Individuals express emotions (through body, language and scheme of actions) corresponding to their gender identity and social class, that is to say that they follow the “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 2003) specific to their society and culture³ (Lois, 2001, 2005; Mead, 1935). This gendered expression is also constructed through the interrelation of “embodiment and spatiality” and “affectivity and emotion”

(Ahmed et al., 2003; Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 199; Probyn, 1996; Simonsen, 2007), which create a specific attachment to place through normative effect of actions (Fenster, 2005; Richter, 2011).

Migration is a process in which belonging is in play at every different level of its construction according to gender (“caregiver” versus “breadwinner”).⁴ During the migration process, migrants have to adjust their “practice”, “sense” and feeling corresponding to the “place-belongingness”⁵ (Antonsich, 2010). In this perspective, researchers have noticed that in the face of the transformation of the family at the transnational level, some women who cannot practice caregiving “traditionally”, i.e. with a physical co-presence, may express culpability (Aranda, 2006; Baldassar, 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997; Parrenas, 2005). In the face of “long distance intimacy” (Parrenas, 2005) and “spatially ruptured practices of migrant families” (Landolt and Da, 2005), women may feel guilt

* Tel.: +33 687883144.

E-mail address: cecilevermot@gmail.com.

¹ In this research, I use Hochschild’s definition of emotion: “an emotion is the result of cooperation between the body and a picture, a thought and a memory” (2003).

² For Butler, it goes beyond the iteration, the constant repetition of the action.

³ The term culture is used here as a generalization based on nationality (Sardan, 2008: 33).

⁴ All through this paper, when speaking about gender role, I mean hegemonic models as “caregivers” for women versus “breadwinners” for men, the way individuals perform these roles and may try to break them, or not, through their performance (see the section: gender construction of guilt).

⁵ Family relationship is one of the factors among the five highlighted by Antonish, which contribute to “feeling at home”, understood here as a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security and emotional attachment. The other four are: auto-biographical, relational, cultural, and economic & legal (Yuval Davis, 2006: 19).

because of their gendered socialization. On the one hand, women's greater involvement in transnational family networks (Le Gall, 2005; Zontini, 2007) can be seen as remedial actions that allow them to continue to feel part of their families in their country of origin but also to continue to fulfill their gender role. On the other hand, the experience of guilt can be seen as an emotional answer to their adjustment to belonging but also as a way to constrain women to fulfill their gender role despite geographical distance. Gender comes into play continuously, socialization and the management of guilt is part of this "doing gender". Nonetheless, comparative studies on gender and emotional affiliation to transnational family remain under-researched and under-theorized, whereas its analysis is a key to our understanding of migration as a gendered and gendering process.

By taking into account the expression of guilt within the migration narrations of Argentinean middle class migrants in Miami and Barcelona according to gender, this research analyzes gendered emotional affiliation to transnational family and how and why gender reconfigures itself. To take guilt within the migration process into account will help to illustrate how and why gender is performed within the transnational family. It will also help emphasize the migrant's own gendered sense of self (Shields et al., 2007) in regard to places. The first part of this paper describes the Argentinean economic, social and political crises, which pushed Argentineans into migrating specifically to Spain and to the United-States. The theoretical part focuses on the articulation of gender and guilt by exploring the theory of "feeling rules" from Hochschild, the theory of 'habitus' from Bourdieu and gender theory from Shield. This part is followed by a description of the methodology used during this research to capture guilt from the migrant's narrative. A third part analyzes empirical material and demonstrates that guilt is a gendered emotion, which allows migrants to temporarily stay attached to their family during the migration process. Finally, the paper discusses these findings in relation to the questions surrounding gender and guilt within the transnational family. As its research shows, expression of guilt depends on four different factors, which are interrelated: representations of gender role and the "imagined family", changes in these representations during the migration process and the context of departure as well as arrival.

2. Argentinean emigration

During Carlos Menen's government (1989–1999), market deregulation and privatization of public companies increased the number of unemployed as well as the poverty rate. Fernando de la Rúa, elected in 1999, followed Menen's model, which resulted in further deterioration of the economic situation. In 2001, the inflation rate climbed from 10% to 67%, gross domestic product decreased by 15% and external debt (public and private) reached \$147.881 billion (Iriart and Waitzkin, 2006). The unemployment rate was above 25%, and 57.5% of the population had fallen below the poverty line (Iriart and Waitzkin, 2006). Argentineans lost trust in their state and no longer felt protected by the police, nor represented by politicians, nor defended by labor unions (Velut, 2002). All institutions suffered a credibility crisis. Argentina's collapse, combined with chronic instability, led to a weakening of social ties.

Economic problems combined with the government's inability to tackle them, increased social uneasiness and led to numerous popular mobilizations and social violence on a scale unknown to

Argentina until then. On the first Monday of December 2001, economic laws were implemented to stop capital from leaving the country. The *corralito*⁶ law forbade people to withdraw more than 250 dollars per week from their bank accounts. The *corralito*, which was the culminating point of the crisis, complicated daily life, while violating individual rights. The social sustainability mechanism, which was built on hope and patience (Scribano, 2010), was broken. This crisis, which was partly covered up during the presidency of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007), particularly affected the middle class (Armony and Kessler, 2003).

Argentina's middle class believed that its country was destined for a brilliant future but instead it learnt to face hyperinflation, endured for two decades, and pauperization. This situation led to collective anxiety, pessimism and disillusion (Melamed, 2002). This economically catastrophic situation between 1999 and 2003 marked the fourth period of Argentinean migration, mainly to Spain and the United States.

Because of historical and political links between Argentina and these two countries, there was a higher rate of immigration to Spain than to the United States. Indeed, in the year 2007, census statistics indicated that the number of regular Argentinean immigrants went from 100,864 in 2000 to 185,618 in 2005 in the United States. Argentinean migration to Spain is an old migration and was, until the 2001 crisis, a moderate migration (Actis and Esteban, 2008). Now forming the third largest national group in Spain, the number rose from 40,039 in 2000 to 231,630 in 2007 (INE).⁷ Despite those differences, there are similarities between Argentinean migrants in Spain and those in the United States. In both countries, there are as many male as female Argentinean immigrants. In 2007 in Spain, 50.2% of Argentineans were male and 49.8% were female (Actis and Esteban, 2008). In 2005, in the United States, 51.6% were male and 48.4% female (Census). In both countries, the average age of the Argentinean immigrant is 33.5 (Actis and Esteban, 2008; Census). In both Spain and the United States, a large percentage of migrants consisted of households: among immigrants over 15 years old, 56.9% in Spain and 53.4% in the United-States were married (Actis and Esteban, 2008; Census). Moreover, in both countries, Argentineans are concentrated around coastal cities. In 2007, there were 20,000 Argentineans in Barcelona (Actis and Esteban, 2008) and 25,659 in Miami (Census). Barcelona and Miami are two cities where tourism is an important part of the economy and where two languages are spoken, Spanish and Catalan in Barcelona and Spanish and English in Miami.

3. Gender construction and guilt

I argue that emotions are embodied within gender power relations through "habitus". Habitus implies individual incorporation of social structure, the construction of specific disposition toward a scheme of action and representation but also experience of specific emotion (Bourdieu, 1980, 2000) according to gender. Through the interrelation of social scheme, emotions are a tool of control to justify gender role and to constrain individuals to fulfill their gender. For example, differential construction of caregiver and breadwinner role is naturalized through emotions. The "emotional nature" of women is used to justify their role as

⁶ The Spanish word *corralito* is a diminutive for corral and means playpen or farmyard.

⁷ I speak here of regular immigrants, who were born in Argentina and have Argentine nationality. There were a number of Spanish and Italians born in Argentina and registered in Spain or Italy. They were respectively 47,247 and 50,000 for the Spanish and the Italians. Figures increased to 86,953 and 42,198 in 2006. Moreover, irregular immigrants were estimated at 15,819 in 2000 and 50,916 in 2006 (Actis and Esteban, 2008).

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