

Three Decades Later: The Persistent Challenge of Overcoming Perpetrator-Victim Narratives

Over thirty years ago, my research into German-Philippine marriages was motivated, amongst others, by the often sexualised portrayal of Asian women, depicting them as victims of a so-called 'modern slave trade' and portraying Filipinas as helpless and hopeless. This imagery spurred my curiosity to delve deeper into their life stories, matrimonial journeys, and present living conditions. Today, it's disheartening to observe how these public perceptions and discourses have largely remained unaltered. Several factors contribute to this stagnation. Firstly, the media continues to operate on the notion that 'sex sells'. Secondly, overcoming essentialist views – such as the stereotypical 'Asian Woman' or the 'Sextourist' – remains a significant challenge. Thirdly, many individuals engaging with these topics primarily aim to 'do the right thing' by denouncing social injustices and inequality, often overlooking the importance of first understanding and explaining the nature of these situations and grasping the underlying social mechanisms and causal relationships. This is particularly difficult with subjects to which we all have first gut reactions and that demand moral judgement, as it requires one to step back, detach oneself, and strive for comprehension. In this discussion, we will explore what alternative approaches might exist. How can we move beyond these entrenched narratives to gain a more nuanced understanding of migration and migrant biographies?