"We are Living in a Different Time Zone" Transnational Working Places and the Concept of a "Glocalized Intermediary Class"

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The article would like to make a proposition on how to amend the underdifferentiated way social stratification within the "global society" is usually theoretized. In the dominant discourse there seems to be only one global class, the "winners of globalization". Critics of this narrative, which I call the cosmopolitan delusion, make the "losers" of neoliberal globalization visible. But the "vulnerable" (Robert Castel) and precarious are usually not included in such a dualistic two-class-approach. If the middle class(es) within societies of the Global South again are mentioned, this is usually done in simplified way. I would like to introduce the concept of a "glocalized intermediary class" (GIC) to better capture the social location of transnational class positions in between societies of the Global North and the Global South. The GICs can be considered to be part of the (service or white collar) proletariat of the North but at the same time to be part of the middle class in the society of their origin (in this case: the Philippines). If the middle class(es) can be understood as a "contradictory class location" (Goldthorpe), this is even intensified for GICs working and living in between the worlds and the class positions. The exploratory theory of a "glocalized intermediary class" is exemplified by the agents working at international call centers in the Philippines. They are working at transnational working places and can be considered sociocultural migrants.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Social Stratification, Middle Class, Habitus, Postcolonialism

Der Artikel möchte einen Vorschlag machen, wie eine unterdifferenzierte Theoretisierung der Sozialstruktur innerhalb der Weltgesellschaft erweitert werden könnte. Im dominanten Diskurs scheint es in ihr nur eine Klasse zu geben: die "GlobalisierungsgewinnerInnen". Kritiker dieses Ansatzes machen auch die VerliererInnen sichtbar. Die "verwundbaren" (Robert Castel) Zwischenpositionen werden in der Regel jedoch nicht berücksichtigt. Und wo Mittelklassen im globalen Süden Berücksichtigung finden, wird dies meist in einer vereinfachten Weise getan. Ich möchte das Konzept einer "globalen Zwischenklasse" (Glocalized Intermediary Class/GIC) vorstellen, um die soziale Lage dieser Zwischenpositionen besser fassen zu können. Die GICs werden als Teil des (Dienstleistungs-)Proletariats im globalen Norden wahrgenommen, gleichzeitig aber auch als Teil der Mittelklasse in ihrer Heimatgesellschaft (hier die Philippinen). Wenn Mittelklasse(n) als „widersprüchliche Klassenlage" (Goldthorpe) verstanden werden, so wird dies für GICs, die zwischen den Welten leben und arbeiten, noch verstärkt. Die heuristische Theorie der "globalen Zwischenklasse" wird anhand der TelefonistInnen, die in den internationalen Call-Centers in den Philippinen arbeiten, ausgeführt. Sie arbeiten auf transnationalen Arbeitsplätzen und können als soziokulturelle MigrantInnen verstanden werden.

Schlagworte: Transnationalismus, Sozialstruktur, Mittelklasse, Habitus, Postkolonialismus

Preliminary Remarks

Studying societies of the Global South – esp. the Philippines – for more than a decade now, I got more and more dissatisfied with how social stratification within globalized societies is theoretized. I think that an important group of people from the South is only scantly covered by it. The article takes its starting point in two perceived deficiencies of the theory of social stratification within the "global society". Not only in mainstream media, but also in much of the literature social differences let alone inequalities are not problematized. Here the impression is created that only one global class exists, the "winners of globalization". If again the "losers" of neoliberal globalization are noticed this usually leads to a dualistic two-class-approach. The middle class within societies of the Global South is hardly taken into consideration and if it is, this is usually done in an underdifferentiated way. Secondly, the "container approach" of clearly cut country societies (or nation states) still prevails in social analysis.

This article aims to introduce the concept of a "glocalized intermediary class" (short: GIC)

as an attempt to better catch the "social location" respectively the social condition (*soziale Lage*) of a "class in between": being a transnational class in between the societies of the Global North and the Global South and being vertically an intermediary class in between contradicting class locations. The GICs can be considered as part of the (service or white collar) proletariat of the North but at the same time as part of the middle class in the society of their origin (in this case: the Philippines). If the middle class(es) can be understood as a "contradictory class location" (J. Goldthorpe), this is even intensified for GICs working and living in between the worlds and the class positions. GIC is a heuristic term and a work in progress. Developing this concept is part of a longer research project, which wants to identify the sense of citizenship within the globally exposed and connected marginal middle class in the Philippines. The notion of citizenship I want to draw on expresses itself in (a) political agency and (b) a sense of entitlement to social and public services. It is not necessarily linked to a sense of nationalism and a clear identification with one nation state.

The first step in this research is to identify this globally exposed and connected marginal middle class in the Philippines. This article serves as a first step to do so. For now I am focusing on four groups which possibly are GICs: Overseas Contract Workers with a professional educational background (teachers, doctors and nurses, technical training etc.), call center agents in international call centers, local staff of foreign and transnational companies active in the Philippines and possibly even people working at foreign-funded NGOs - in case one considers the "aid industry" to cater to the philanthropic and political needs of the middle classes of the North (as well), which would turn these NGO workers to service providers of the First World. In November 2007 I did a research project on international call centers in Manila and Davao, conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 call center agents and several expert interviews (Reese 2007). Many of my theoretical assumptions took off from the case of this "transnational working places". Therefore they will serve as major example to empirically ground my theoretical concept, even though they probably will not be the central focus of the further research (for reasons see below). In July and August 2008 I discussed the first draft of this article with several people in the Philippines (Reese 2008) and I will try to include the outcomes in this presentation.[1]

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[1] I like to thank all the persons who found the time to review this article and share their thoughts with me. Maraming Salamat! I have been working for an information office on the Philippines in Germany (www.philippinenbuero.de) for several years and as lecturer for Philippines Studies at the Universities of Passau and Bonn. The insights I gained during more than ten "field trips" to the Philippines ranging from 4 weeks to 6 months between 1998 and 2008 shape much of my assumptions as well. Last but not least I like to mention the more than insightful Master thesis of the Filipina sociologist Aya Fabros on which I draw more than once during the article.

I. International Call Centers in the Philippines

Before deliberating on my assumption that international call centers typify 'transnational working places' let me give a short overview on international call centers in the Philippines.

International call centers are one of the fastest growing industries in the country. The boom is due to the fact that there is a redirection of business process outsorcing from India to the Philippines by US-clients (see in detail Fabros 2007). Especially in an industry close to the customer like the call centers there have been regular complaints from American customers that they can hardly understand the (British coloured) English of the Indian agents. A market gap for the former American colony Philippines, which like India, possesses a well-trained and computer-literate population and in addition has one of the largest English-speaking populations in the world. Due to the colonial past and the neo-colonial present Filipinos and Filipinas are more familiar with US-culture, particularly with American expressions and places, than other English-speaking low-wage economies. Labour costs are even slightly below those in India. In the Philippines companies must pay only about a fifth of what they are paying their employees in the US. At the same time the payment is what is mentioned first when asked for the motivation to work in an international call center. One earns much more in an international call center in Manila than in local jobs which college graduates can take up. A teacher e.g. earns about 10,000 to 13,000 Pesos (150 to 190 Euro) a month, while even a newbee call center agent earns at least 15,000 to 18,000 (215 to 245 Euro). This is if graduates find a job at all! The unemployment rate is especially high for young people and for college graduates. According to the Labour Force Survey, 37.6 percent of the unemployed in 2006 had at least a college level education. Getting a job in the public sector is a tedious affair. Applying for a government job usually takes several months to get approved, requires in many cases job experience and often one only gets one of the scant jobs with a *padrino* using his or her connections and who even in awhile asks to be bribed for this "service". Getting a job in a call center in contrast formally does not even require a college degree and allows immediate hiring. It promises "fast money" if one is in need of cash as Psyche Fontanilla explained, who worked several months in a call center (Reese 2008). In a country where social mobility is significantly restricted, going abroad or working for foreign clients is a not to be underestimated avenue for upward mobility. The lack of job prospects for Filipinos with ample education fuels the migration of highly skilled workers like nurses (or doctors applying to be a nurse overseas) teachers or even law graduates and engineers. (It seems however, that call centers do not serve as an alternative to migration but more as a deferment of and preparation for migration.) Call center companies unlike many other companies furthermore offer social security contributions which are really remitted to the social security system

(SSS). Some even offer an extra health insurance supplementing the only basic payments of the mandatory health insurance Philhealth.

All of this makes the jobs attractive even for graduates of the country´s elite universities. When asking my interviewees whether they minded getting paid only a fifth of what their American counterparts received for the same work I received the following reply: "They're losing their jobs; we don't" (Reese 2007). The working conditions on the other hand do not belong to what makes the call center jobs attractive. Many of the problems call center agents encounter during their work resemble those of a factory job: high work speed and frequently changing shifts are just two of several bad conditions. This work routine has resulted in various health problems for agents. Furthermore they encounter job-specific impertinences like frequently disrespectful and racist insults on the part of the person they are talking to. As a good portion of the accounts in the Philippines are outsourced from the USA and Canada, most shifts are in line with North American day time. The 8-12 hour difference translates to peak working hours from 6pm to 6am Manila time. Adding to the changing shifts night work implicates that agents can hardly plan their week and are pulled out of the social rhythms of the remaining society due to the differing working hours. "The day-to-day lives of agents begin to revolve around call center production, strictly limiting outside, private activity and interaction with significant others. Family life and friendships suffers much from it", says Fabros (2007: 262), who spent six months as a call center agent during the research for her Master thesis. They then develop new friend networks which are composed usually of colleagues. The commonalities with the transnational family lives of Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) seem compelling (see Fabros 2007: 150 for an example). But call centers do not seem to be considered life-time jobs. Many agents drop out after a while. "If one would be offered a day time job with comparable remuneration, probably everyone would accept it", says Rosen, a 34-year old call center agent (Reese 2007). "Someday we want to have a normal life as well." In the long term most are frustrated too that they do not advance in career terms. "I did not study to be a better telephone lady forever", says an agent from Bicol. Only for those, whose tasks are within range of what they have studied (IT-consultants e.g.) call centers are a job location where they find personal fulfillment.

II. Pinoy by Day, Kano by Night - Transnational Working Places

The assumption I want to develop in the second part of my article is the following: International call centers typify transnational working places, which are globalizing and localizing at the same time. "Transnationalism" is a term which tries to express the increase

of economic, cultural and social interaction world-wide, coming along with the loosening of the significance of national borders. Social interconnections are created which transverse and lay across geographical borders (Pries 2001). "Transnational", however, is not equivalent to "cosmopolitan" – a normative and sometimes even ideological term propagating the idea that all of humanity belongs to a single moral community, which implies that borders (geographical, but social and cultural as well) are of only little significance. At the same time "transnational" is not equivalent to the term "multicultural" which rather assumes the idea of a peaceful coexistence of different cultures (which people can easily and unequivocally be associated to), which only marginally influence each other. Instead (at least) dual loyalty is a central characteristic for transnational existences: people have religious, cultural or political ties to societies other than the country of their origin or residence. Saskia Sassen has described the urbanities which are in this sense transnational as global cities (e.g. Sassen 2001).

I believe that international call centers can be considered such "transnational working places" as they are situated in a "space" which transverses national borders in respect to time and culture even if they are clearly situated within a specific country. Fabros identifies a "spatiotemporal reconstitution": "In order to reach the customer, agents have to submit to temporal cycles of others. Call center production requires agents to reorder their day-to-day routines according to the cycles of the time zone they service" (2007: 61). The clocks on the floor of call centers usually show the time zone they service. "We are living in a different time zone", therefore says Rosen, an agent from Manila (Reese 2007). Fabros (2007: 61) says that agents are forced to reorder their life according to imperatives that are not situated in the physical space they occupy nor the common social space they share with significant others. Barbara Adam even calls the synchronization of agents´ shifts with Western customer servicing hours a "colonization with time" (Fabros 2007: 134). Agents are compelled to live in at least two "places" at once and at the same time they are held responsible for managing and reconciling these contradictory lives on their own. They are Pinoy (a colloquial term for Filipino) by day and Kano (a colloquial term for American) by night. It seems agents have to live a "second life": What is real around them is irrelevant for the virtual space they inhabit. They have to "defy time and space" (Fabros 2007: 60): Should there be a natural calamity in the Philippines like a typhoon which is a frequent occurrence, operations go on as scheduled and agents have to act as if it was an ordinary day. Agents have to deliver their performances, business as usual. American callers have no idea that they are calling a place being ravaged by a storm or threatened by a coup. National holidays in the Philippines are ordinary working days for the agents, not allowing them to spend these very social days with their relatives and their beloved ones. At the same time they take on American holidays like Thanksgiving, which have no real meaning in their everyday lives. Therefore Fabros does

not consider transnational existences like the mentioned call center agents to be merely "deterritorialized" (as Appudarai would do) but more than that, to be "disembedded" from the society surrounding them (Fabros 2007: 61). Call center districts like Eastwood in Metro Manila could be described as outlets or franchises of the USA, inhabited by onlookers[2] consuming Western products in the branches of Western coffee house chains thanks to higher purchasing power in comparison to the rest of the society around them. They have at least got hold of a place in the standing room. These districts could be understood as Western theme parks, which are not merely simulations of the West as they develop their own distinct reality. Some agents not only work but also live in these disembedded global cities which take the form of artificial islands amidst of the squatter areas of Metro Manila, places again other agents live in and so cross the "border" every day. Fabros considers this to create a "social-jetlag that requires no physical displacement" (2007: 61).

Making Extraterritoriality Homelike

Conventional service delivery usually requires physical proximity. To make up for this "default" and to close the gap to the temporal approximation to the customers´ world alone is not enough. To "manufacture proximity" (Aya Fabros based on Reese 2007) not only the spatiotemporal gap has to be bridged but the social and cultural gap also has to be closed as far as possible[3] and in market logic this is at the expense of the service provider. The logic of "service wage labour" with its motto "The customer is the king" leads to a neo-colonial appropriation of the "periphery" by the metropolis. "Closing the gap" requires the performance of considerable social and cultural labour and the neo-colonial subjects are the ones to move and to adapt.[4] They have to bear the burden of producing respectively constructing proximity and they are the ones who have to cope with with the resulting disembeddedness and their alienation.[5]

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2 The German term "Zaungast" even grasps the phenomenon more clearly: Literally it means guest on the fence, making him a second-class guest who can only watch and hardly participate unlike a fence sitter who is free to go to either side.

3 To manufacture proximity may even be of higher significance in a non-view-business as it can create the necessary trust for a continued patronage.

4 I will omit at this point for reasons of space that the social production by the agents goes beyond closing these gaps. In a capitalist service economy in general it includes a lot of emotional work on the side of the (alienated) service provider demonstrating that "the customer is valued", "is always right" and has to be understood no matter how weird s/he behaves. "Whatever the case may be, the agent is expected to establish rapport, empathize, deliver customer care, and ensure customer satisfaction." (Fabros 2007: 58) "The companies force us to be a kind of sponge which absorbs the anger of the customers" says the 26-year old agent Leslie from Davao (Reese 2007).

5 Interestingly enough Fabros believes that Filipinos and Filipinas have learnt coping with disembeddedness over the centuries: "Particular social trajectories of Filipinos can be traced back to a long, historical process of disjunction and contradiction. [...] The 'training' of Filipino call center agents have (sic!) taken place long before the first call center arrived, embedded in the particular socialization of the Filipino. I do not just refer to the "Westernized" or "Americanized" sensibility of the Filipino, but a particular ethos that allows the Filipino to thrive and straddle contradictions, whether economic, political, social or symbolic [...]. For Filipino agents raised by

Agents are required to slip into a more "westernized" identity and perform the attitudes and persona that the interaction under neo-colonial circumstances demands. Ideally they have to pass themselves off as "locals" and act as if they are talking to the customer just from some place in the USA (although the Ateneo based industrial sociologist Regina Hechanova indicates that agents are less forced to deny that they are based in the Philippines than in earlier times - Reese 2008). Customers are to be presented with the reality that the call center encounters are still taking place 'at home'. ("Let them feel at home" as a trainer from a call center training course expresses the aim of the trainings.) In a very literal sense these are white lies.

Various Ways of Manufacturing Proximity are Pursued to Establish a Homelike Reality:

1. Agents are "instructed" to speak English with an American intonation. Training facilities advertise their courses by summoning the prospective agents to "learn the right accent". Up to now only five to ten applicants out of hundred are accepted although the need is substantially larger due to a lack of "excellent" English speakers. On the floor, agents are required to follow an "English Only Policy."

2. Agents have to acquire "local knowledge": During trainings they are taught US history, culture and geography, have to be proficient in their knowledge about Superbowl and Thanksgiving - and they have to be able to pretend they go skiing in Aspen (even if most Filipinos have never in their life experienced snow).

3. Agents are required to be up to date with events in the US: They are factually forced to live virtually in the US as they are told to watch CNN or CBS news as well as American sitcoms and sports shows (which many of them do anyway). They have to know what the weather is like at their alleged current location as it "helps to establish rapport if you can do small talk about the weather or the game the night before", as one trainer says (Fabros 2007: 176).

4. In several cases agents are even required to change their names which are more familiar to their American callers.

5. Finally "manufacturing proximity" even requires a "mentality training": Agents have to adjust to attitudes different from their own. For instance American (or European)

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the ethos of Sesame Street and MTV [...] inhabiting the call center lifeworld the new capacity to accumulate the symbols and lifestyle this engenders, is essentially a validation of the self. This explains the ease at which Filipinos predisposed to consume images and assume roles that resonate an inner inscribed logic of contradiction, assume this new vocation despite the seemingly dramatic transition it requires" (Fabros 2006). In a personal interview she explained to me: "We have always lived in contradictions, we are even socialized in contradictions; that is what makes it easy for us to inhabit that place" (Reese 2008).

callers tend to be more demanding and assertive, clarifying that it cannot be them who made a mistake. Filipinos on the other side believe in "smooth interpersonal relationships". Filipino consumers are believed to be more 'understanding' and less confrontative.

All this brings Fabros to the conclusion, that "the worker in effect bridges the global distance that offshored accounts have straddled" (2007: 178). The anger they encounter when a customer realizes the deception also has to be absorbed by the agent.[6] Taking this setup into consideration one may regard call centers not to only be a (temporary) alternative to physical migration but in fact another form of migration – "a different form of migration, one that is social and temporal, rather than spatial" as Fabros says (2007: 150). While the workplaces are offshored to the Philippines physically, the call center agents are mentally offshored as much as possible to the USA. Their body in contrast must remain in the Philippines, because of the iron fences around the Fortresses in the North and as their reproduction requirements can be remunerated much cheaper in a Third World country.

III. The Concept of the "Glocalized Intermediary Class"

The second part of my article described the working places of the call center agents as "in between the worlds". The third and final part shall try to describe their social position "between the worlds" as well. I believe that what is said about call centers is true in one way or another for the other GIC-groups as well (e.g. migrants). In my research project on citizenship I will even concentrate more on people with migration experience as this is still the big business in the Philippines. One million are said to leave the country a year and there are only around 160.000 call center agents in the country.[7]

Before that a brief overview is needed of how the social structure of global society is usually depicted. The most common description of "global society" one encounters in mass media and mass culture is one which I call a "cosmopolitan deception". It does not visualize social differences let alone inequalities and solely focuses on the winners of globalization. The

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6 But it should be noted that "manufacturing proximity" can also have a protective meaning to the agents. Several of the ones I interviewed told me that acting this way makes customers ask less questions and therefore makes it easier to finish the calls within the prescribed handling times. They can also evade the emotional work explaining to their customers why they are not "only Filipinos" (Reese 2007).

7 Additionally I believe that developing a sense of citizenship (a positive one or a negative one as I could witness in many interviews I conducted in 2008) needs a longer experience with the state and the public sphere and reflection on these experiences resulting in a more sustainable sense of citizenship. Call center agents are usually only 20-26 years old. I will therefore focus in my qualitative research more on respondents of 30 years and above, whose "sense of citizenship" seems to be more 'reliable' to me. Furthermore the call center culture may be as much a product of youth culture as of glocalization. Avoiding this pitfall leads me to lesser rely on them as respondents.

marginalized if at all only appear as objects of charity of these winners, privatizing welfare to be a part of the lifestyle of a "socially conscious citizen". I call this narrative "communication society" and consider its motto to be the Microsoft slogan "Where do you want to go today?"[8] There seems to be only one global class (as there has been only one really human being before enlightenment and during colonialism which was the [socially established, Western] male – all the others being insufficient deviations of him and most of the time simply kept invisible) and this is the "executive class" of neoliberal globalization. It includes (a) the (often expatriate) transnational capitalist class and the corporate expatriates which are at least upper middle or even upper class and (b) the (mainly indigenous) "global middle class without location" (*globale ortlose Mittelklasse*). This class is economically networked and culturally connected (by Internet and cyber society), socially established and secured. Following Goldthorpe, these people therefore could be categorized as "global service class". They have at least one thing in common: They fulfil, intentionally or unintentionally, the (flexibilized) functional requirements of global capitalism. Leslie Sklair says: "The transnational capitalist class [...] is transnational in at least three senses. Its members tend to have global rather than local perspectives [...]; they tend to be people from many countries, more and more of whom begin to consider themselves 'citizens of the world' as well as of their places of birth; and they tend to share similar lifestyles, particularly patterns of luxury consumption of goods and services" (Sklair 1995: 71). This/These class/es appear most often only as actors of the "communication society" narrative, which tells the story of a cultural synchronization of world society in form of a global culture, which is patterned after the Western or even American way of life and suggests or better mocks an unlimited (*grenzenlos*) freedom for each and every citizen of this society "to go where s/he wants today".

The narrative of the global communication society - spread by media and the advertising industry - consists of communities, which seem to develop independently of national and language borders, a kind of global off-shore society, in which the e-mail address in Tokyo and the chat partner in Sydney are much closer to one than the unemployed mother next door. This model is probably most purely embodied by those who Anne Meike Fechter (Fechter 2007) calls "young global professionals" in her research on expatriates in Indonesia: They are young, flexible and unattached, maintain an international lifestyle and are globally mobile. They differ from the earlier generation of expatriates by the fact that they do not consider their stay in a foreign country as a burden but as vocational challenge and as a desired part of their career. Their social networks are more international than those of the corporate expatriates. They have de-nationalized themselves culturally and due to their global attitude,

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8 Insofar it is what Ernst Bloch calls an "ideology" as it deletes the contradictions and presents the drama of a fulfilled humanity, but not by transcending the realities (which would make it an utopia) but by denying them.

their mobility and their international network they call themselves "the new global tribe".[9] One of Fechters interviewees explains "Home is where my email is" (Fechter 2007: 139). The narrative of the global communication society is accompanied by rhetoric free of class and gender contradictions; the peasant of the remote Bondoc Peninsula has the same right to follow the developments at the stock exchange as the CEO in the main financial district of Makati or the broker at the Frankfurt stock exchange does. However, "gated communities" are just the most manifest sign of the formation of communities based on similar values, interests and economic as well as cultural capital, which come along with the walling-off of the winners in exclusive areas (in clubs, private schools up to whole city districts) usually resulting from the gentle form of a higher purchasing power.

Going back to Fechter´s "new global tribe", she says they are living in a parallel society (the German *Parallelgesellschaft* could mean ghetto society as well) which she marks as Western international bubble. Belonging to the group of the young global professionals is not explicitly based on ethnic criteria as Fechter observed in the case of corporate expatriates. Nevertheless, the majority of the locals (here: Indonesians) is excluded from this group as they lack the necessary economical and cultural capital. In effect locals can only belong to this group if they are rich, have studied abroad and work themselves in multinational companies, meaning to say they have the necessary economic and cultural capital at the same time (Fechter 2007: 128 et sqq.).[10] The critics of the medially hegemonic communication society narrative try to overcome its blindness by making the other class(es) produced by neoliberal globalization visible: the "global proletariat" like the workers in the free trade zones and "the displaced, superfluous and excluded" like the slum dwellers, the peasants or indigenous people. Taking off from this dichotomization Zygmunt Bauman (1997) considers "globalization" to be an ambivalent process and considers it rather to be a "glocalization": globalization for the ones coincides with localization for the others. This kind of "glocalization" expresses itself especially in the polarization of mobility. "While the 'global class' lives in the time as spatial distances for them are bridgeable and therefore insignificant, the others are stuck in the restriction of space. They lack the resources for moving" (Bauman 1997: 323 - translation by the author). The counterpart of the "global citizen" (*Weltbürger*) is the "global villager", who is required to create profit "while his mental horizon does not exceed the immediacy of his existence" (ibid.).

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9 I like to acknowledge my student Nina Benischke, who discovered Fechters book and explained the concept and the adjoining groups very clearly in her presentation on "expatriates as migrants" in my seminar on migration in South East Asia and Latin America at the University of Passau in the winter term 2007/08. In explaining the concept I follow the written version of her presentation (unpublished).

10 Part of my further research will be to distinguish if this is true for its Philippine counterpart the "Makati crowd" too. Can they be understood as onlookers and bystanders and not less important: do they experience themselves this way? Is the financial district of the Philippines, seemingly the most global place in the country inhabited by first- and second-class citizens in this as well?

Transcending Dichotomy: The Three-Layer-Approach

In my eyes this purely dichotomical and dualizing model of global class society (of winners and losers, of competitive and superfluous) in the tradition of Marxism is too simple and should at least be amended by an intermediary stratum the way Robert Castel (Castel 2000: 336 et sqq.) does this for Western work societies: he observes a division of the European labour societies (*Arbeitsgesellschaft*) into three main zones.[11] (A) a "zone of integration" with protected standard employer-employee relationships (the winners of modernization; Castel calls them "the integrated"). (B) Opposite to them Castel places "the zone of decoupling", inhabited by groups, which are more or less permanently excluded from regular wage labour. They are the superfluous or as Castel calls them "the excluded". (C) In between we can find intermediate zone(s), which Castel calls the "zone of precarity", a bundle of heterogeneous zones which are determined by employment conditions, which not permanently secure ones livelihood and are therefore "vulnerable". Castel consequently calls the group(s) found there "the vulnerable".

The two most important categories, which decide on membership and belonging to either zone, are the usefulness as worker as well as state citizenship as Helga Cramer-Schäfer believes. While the superfluous must be kept in check in order not to simply knock down the pawns, the precarious are governed in a different way: who is still needed, must not only be kept at it, but shall follow the intensified mobilization imperative - at best voluntarily.

As "from the perspective of liberalism the direct rule over the subject turns out to be unproductive" (Opitz 2004) and neoliberal policy can reach its political aims more 'economically' and 'efficiently' through individual self-realization respectively self-exploitation, it is pivotal for neoliberal governing to delegate the responsibility and liability from formal state government to the individual subjects. Ulrich Bröckling calls this "responsibilization". To govern under a neoliberal regime means to activate the commitment ("mobilization") and the will of the individual to make decisions under the sign of individual responsibility, independence and individual initiative ("empowerment"). The figure of the "enterprising self", making "a project out of himself" represents the role model of neoliberal subjectifying (Reese 2007a; Bröckling 2007). In addition to that: where not primarily rights, but purchasing power is determining the satisfaction of ones needs, the interests and demands of the "purchasing powerful" - the

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11 In the sociological description of Southern societies the tripartition is usually a different one. While a significant middle class seems missing, there is a two-fold bourgeoisie (or upper class) making up for three classes in addition to "the poor". The upper (middle) class is depicted as being split into a traditional (often national) bourgeoisie, (which are mainly the groups Evers and Schiel call strategic groups) which forms the old elite and a new (globally connected and even comprador) new bourgeoisie, which mainly form the "new rich" as described in Pinches (1999) and the other articles of the compilation "Culture And Privilege In Capitalist Asia" and its sibling books.

"modernization winners" - are to what society and goods production are oriented to and whom the precarious have to serv(ic)e. Castel developed his model for Europe - I believe however, it can be translated to "global society" (where this exists). Scholz (2001) sees a concurrence of integrating and fragmenting processes on the global scale leading to a tripartition into (integrated) "global places", (precarious) "globalized places" and (redundant) "segregated rest world".

The "Glocalized Intermediary Class"

One of the groups inhabiting the global zone of precarity (or in Scholz' words a globalized place) is the Cinderella sibling of the "global service class", which I call for now "glocalized intermediary class" (GIC) – following it up in the mentioned three year research project.

As already mentioned taking the case of the Philippines I am focusing on four groups which possibly are GICs: overseas contract workers with a professional educational background, call center agents in international call centers, local staff of foreign and transnational companies active in the Philippines and potentially people working at foreign-funded NGOs. I think it to be adequate to call these professional groups not only a stratum but a "class in the making" (see Thompson 1963: 9) as they have (a) central characteristics in common [e.g. similarities in education, capabilities or income] and (b) like for Goldthorpe`s "service class" the different "locations" or "occupations" could be accessible and interchangeable for all different GICs undergroups. All occupational locations I consider to be part of this GIC require at least a college degree and serve as (restricted as well as qualified) job options for them. Individuals could pass between one location and the other (although it seems that at least the call center jobs are not an alternative but a "stepping stone" or a preparation for migration [two respondents; Reese 2008]). In how far this is a "Klasse an sich" and also leads to a "Klasse für sich" or at least lifestyle communities (milieus) meaning similar values and tastes, friendship networks and intermarriages and even shared associational memberships is still to be seen. Initial research showed that the GICs share lifestyle: the places they patronize, the books they read, the movies they watch. What unites all of them is that they do not only dream of "joining the global" but are already part of it. Considering that "if you have a foreign friend or you work with foreigners, that gives you a certain distinction, a level up from the other people" (Yasmin Quitan-Teves following Reese 2008), to me this "asset" or "status symbol" seems a pivotal issue for understanding social stratification in the Philippines.

Let me give some evidence that the GICs belong socioeconomically and culturally to what is commonly called "middle class". The "middle class" is less a class than a stratum of

different social or class locations which is why I find the term "intermediary" more helpful. "Middle class" with Wright (1985: 42—57) can be defined as an ambiguous, contradictory social location as the classes within this stratum usually swing between bourgeois and proletarian actions and attitudes. It is especially an income beyond survival (disposable income) and a sense of aspiration which makes someone belong to this intermediary stratum. And I consider the GICs to be one (not the!) class within a differentiated even fragmented middle stratum, located at its lower end. So it is similar to what Bautista calls "marginal middle class", a class which is no longer working class but does not belong to the established middle class (Bautista 2001).

a) Socioeconomic (Materialistic Dimension)

Looking at the features usually attributed to the middle class, the GICs have acquired a higher education (degree). In addition, they have an income beyond the threshold of necessity (a discretionary respective of a disposable income) - but only in their society of origin. Knowledge and skill (or at least the credentials imputing skill and knowledge) are the most significant "capital" the GICs command over. Therefore, according to Barbara Ehrenreich (1989) they can be considered part of the professional middle class. Ehrenreich regards all those people to be "professional middle class" "whose economic and social status is based on education, rather than on the ownership of capital or property", which distinguishes them from petty bourgeoisie or executives and managers. Then again most GICs occupy only proletarian job locations in the global economy (which is less true for the local staff of transnational companies and even more for the ones working at the foreign funded NGOs). In the global society property rights and bureaucratic assets which allow the controlling of the labour of subordinates are not with them and even for the foreign funded NGOs the issue of "ownership" is at least ambivalent. Nevertheless no matter which work they are doing the GICs have a sense of being professionals.

b) Habitus (Cognitive Dimension)

The mindset of the GICs shows another pivotal trait of middle class belonging. They show aspiration and advancement orientation and are willing to follow the mobilisation command.[12]

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12 "The true member of the middle class denies this fixity to which both upper and lower are committed. Life depends, not upon birth and status, not upon breeding or beauty, but upon effort" (Margaret Mead according to Ehrenreich 1989: 75).

In addition, it seems that they also show significant distinction. Following Bourdieu`s "Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste" it is characteristic for intermediate classes to show behaviour of distinction towards the ones below them in the social ladder – and simultaneously to display a sense of "pretension" (or imitation) towards the classes above them (Bourdieu 1987). How true is this for the GICs? Not only trade union organizers told me that call center agents have a very derogatory way of treating the simple service personnel in the global coffee shop branches. Especially the younger ones consider themselves to be something better as they speak English more fluently and have a lot more money than "the normal population", the common *tao* (Reese 2007). Similarly, Christ (2008: 30) reports from Dubai that "Filipinas working in the low-pay-sector see people from South Asia on a much lower level than themselves".[13] This behaviour - well proven in research for the petty bourgeoisie and for social climbers - may be a result of their vulnerable social position which leads to applying a strategy of dissimilarity.[14]

And finally the fact that their income transcends the "necessary", motivates GICs to invest it into conspicuous goods which can be seen as demonstrative consumption. Gehrke considers this to be a "part of the class formation process [as] the production of lifestyle is not just a personal matter; it is also directed towards the establishment of social boundaries and structures of exclusion, in order to establish a 'collective' identity" (Gehrke 2000: 149). He furthermore argues that "consumption becomes a symbolic act signalling 'modernity' and membership in the ascriptive category 'middle class' "(Gehrke 2000: 145).[15] Earning in local comparison relatively high salaries they "find themselves with the purchasing power to consume goods and services that affirm and validate the identities they construct for themselves: for instance by drinking coffee at Starbucks" (Fabros 2007: 250).[16]

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13 But then again the derogatory behaviour is not specific to any middle class person in the Philippines. All my respondents (Reese 2008) have found it (to different degrees) an overgeneralization if Niels Mulder describes the attitude of the Filipino middle class towards the underclass this way: "[Their culture] centers overseas, far away from anything that reeks of common natives, mere tao. [...] They are not offended by the poverty of the majority of the common people. It is clear why the latter are poor: they are indolent and lazy, wasting their scant resources at fiestas, in cockpits, and during irresponsible drinking sprees. [...] It is not poverty that is the problem. The problem is that there are so many poor people. These latter are basically a nuisance (Mulder 1997: 51).

14 Looking at the middle class employed in Europe and America this strategy shall lessen the "fear of contamination" and at the same time legitimate the own better position. By stressing the dissimilarity between them and the unemployed they try to suppress the fear of failing (Ehrenreich 1989) and to keep up the illusion of controlling the own risk of losing the job by well-behaving (see Newman 1996).

15 This consumption demonstrating middle-class membership is not even linked to a disposable income. As Gehrke (2000) says, 'membership' is not necessarily dependent on income but can be defined through social behaviour and lifestyle, which can give ones life a middle-class 'touch'. She class this kind of behaviour "lifestyling", which makes a middle class even there where it is not socio-economically present – and helps this symbolic middle class to distinguish itself from the ones it consider socially below itself even if they have a similar socio-economic location. For Indonesia Gehrke observes that "lower-ranked bureaucrats with a monthly income similar to that of the lower class would not identify with those of similar class positions such as small-scale businessmen, lower-ranked members of the military and other wage workers. Instead, they would identify with higher-ranked members of the bureaucracy and attempt to imitate whenever possible the latter's lifestyle (2000: 151; see as well Thompson 1999). In Marxist terms one could call this a "false class consciousness" going along with a high occupational group consciousness.

16 Similar to what is stated about call centers in Delhi one can observe that a call center culture came into existence by the purchasing power, the night-shifts and the contact with the 'Western world'. The experiences

IV. A Glocalized Social Location

If it is characteristic for the middle class(es) to be in a "contradictory class location", this location is even intensified for GICs as in the global economy they are merely considered to be "service workers" (or white collar proletariat), but "at home" they are considered and consider themselves to belong to the middle class.

"Be a Part of it" – The Global Middle Class as Orientation Model

Coming back to Bourdieu´s critique of taste, middle class(es) are 'pretentious' meaning they orient themselves to a "legitimate culture" defined and exemplified by the upper class. Is there any "legitimate culture" the GICs follow and if yes which culture is it? 350 years of colonialism and more than 60 years of a neo-colonial relationship to the West make many believe that "the colonial mindset" accompanied by an inferiority complex towards the West is deeply rooted in the country. The omnipresent whitening applications, English as the language of education and status, the awe a "Joe" (as all white foreigners are called here) and the admiration of their not that flat noses creates or the great relevance attributed to today´s US-culture here are just some hints for that. White people are considered by many people to be more independent, tolerant and of course generally rich.[17] 'Qualifications' like "Expat" or "Caucasian" are highly appreciated and looked for at friendship portals like Filipino Friend Finder.

> *This could lead to the assumption that the cultural orientation (not only) of the GICs is embodied by the "global (professional) class" or the "universal middle class" (Ehrenreich 1989: 19). It can be assumed that what Brian Owensby says regarding the Brazilian middle class can be said similarly for the Filipino middle class: "The experience of being modern was mediated by the image of an idealized modernity located outside Brazil. Through newspapers, books, magazines, advertisements, radio shows, photographs, and movies, a growing number of Brazilians from the nineteenth to the twentieth century came into contact with the idea of what it was to be modern. It was an idea that took life from the visions of modernity issuing from New York, Paris, London, and Los Angeles, where it was supposed the modern had already been achieved. And since by the 1920s the celebratory middle-class storyline had become normative for modern societies, middle-class Brazilians could not help but conduct their lives in tangled relation to the middle-class ideal. Amidst the commotion and swirl of rapid change, they, perhaps more keenly than other Brazilians, experienced modernity*

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of the new proletarianized middle class generation are characterised by a call centre job straight after school or university, the night shifts, the technological control and general pressure, the shared flats, the purchasing power, the expensive food in the neighbouring shopping malls, the long hours in cabs, the frequent job changes, the more open gender relations at work, the burn out, the difficulty to keep the perspective of an academic career or to find jobs as academics" (Anonymous 2006).

17 Probably like in Indonesia white people are considered by the new middle class as "uniformly modern and are seen as carriers of the modernising spirit into (..) social life: As the carriers of superior civilisation, high technology and modernity they are looked up to culturally" (Heryanto 1999: 161).

through the incongruity and dissonance of trying to live by an ideal they could never quite live up to" (Owensby 1999: 8).[18]

None of my respondents questioned the existence of this orientation. Most even believe that "colonial mindset" and "inferiority complex" remain strong in the Philippines. This seems to me to be a pivotal issue for understanding a weak sense of citizenship in this country. It comes along with a (purely) "negative narrative" which downgrades what is going on in the Philippines and romantizes the West and its political system and its workings. This narrative seems to be a stumbling point for developing a sense of citizenship (which I do not equate with nationalism or patriotism per se).

Five caveats, however, can be formulated:

1. The colonial mindset may not be that strong and universal as some people assume following the negative narrative mentioned, which seems to me very common especially among intellectuals these days. This might be a result of their quest for systemic change which leads them to "describe the present without salvation" as Jude Esguerra from the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) thinks (Reese 2008).

2. The longing for the West has not only cultural, but also economic reasons. A life in overseas (or as in the case of the other GIC-locations in service of overseas) is equated with escaping scarcity, social and political insecurity and living a decent life. Usually economic reasons are considered as nearly the only reason for migration. This seems to me to be as much a simplification as only blaming the colonial mindset as sole reason why it is "mabuti pasa sa Amerika" (good to go to America) and why people believe everything is better abroad.

3. Even if the Western culture functions as the cultural orientation (*Leitkultur*), that does not imply that middle classes of the South simply copy Western lifestyles. There is a considerable "indigenisation" (which is what Robertson calls glocalization) of Western lifestyle like the fast food chain Jollibee or Pigeon languages like Taglish (the lingua franca of the lower middle class) creating words like "mag-enjoy" (to enjoy) today. During the independence struggle against the Spanish the Western educated *Illustrados* are an example for this, bringing ideas from Europe but rooting them in the Philippine society and culture.

4. There is a considerable desire for being cosmopolitan and having a global mindset amongst the educated middle class worldwide, not only in former colonies. This does not equate with just longing for the West but is expression of their sense of aspiration

18 See Lakha 1999 for the Indian example of orientation towards the Western middle class.

wanting to transcend the well known, exploring the new and exotic, tasting the options. *Plus ultra*![19]

5. Finally, being accommodating and hospitable (*mapagbigay*) is part of the self-understanding of the Filipinos. It remains to be seen if this is indeed a special cultural trait of the Filipinos which must not be confused with simple subservience or if instead mapagbigay is mainly a form of indigenization of the colonial mindset.

How entrenched the colonial mindset is still in the Philippines and in how far it effects the decision of the GICs to "join the global" (by applying for call centers or even more relevant by going abroad) is one of the pivotal points I want to follow up in the further research project.

By now it seems to me that unlike the metropolitan counterpart described by Bourdieu the (new) middle classes of the globally exposed periphery is at least less subject to the hegemonic control of the indigenous dominant class. Michael Pinches e.g. states for the Philippines that an "increasing normative weight is being placed on the ideas of industry achievement and merit" (Pinches 1999: 288) and that "many new rich reject or only conditionally accept the high cultural authority of the old elite. Indeed, like the younger generation of that elite, they are also subject to global fashion trends whose main arbiters are located outside the Philippines" (ibid: 295). "The fundamental weakness in the high-culture claims of the old elite is their association with economic backwardness and national humiliation" (ibid: 295). This questioning of the cultural authority of the old elites could be a result of the Western middle-class merit myth (*Leistungsmythos*) transmitted by a professional education that stresses the benefits of achievement and entrepreneurial merit as well as the ubiquitous middle class role model in the Western movies et al. To restrict the relationship between middle class and upper class in the periphery to a merely pretentious behaviour of the middle class and a merely distinctive one of the upper class (as Bourdieu does for the French Society) would be far too simple. Rather the globalized middle class shows distinctive behaviour towards the lower and the upper classes.

An assumption that could be made from these observations is as follows: The new middle class (in this case the GICs) is trying to participate in the "global culture" conceived to be more progressive and hip than the culture the old middle class is offering and distinguishes itself from the other classes by that.

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19 The pivotal question to distinguish cosmopolitan orientation from an inferiority complex seems to me: Is spatial and "mental" migration done to leave the Philippine realities behind as they are considered to be stagnant and below average – or is it done to enrich the own culture to give it a "new blend".

Participating in the Global

My research came to the conclusion that call center agents understand themselves as part of the "global crowd", Fechters "new global tribe", and are proud if customers do not recognize that they are Filipinos (Fabros 2007: 178). Fabros further observed a "certain pride [...] that agents derive from working in the frontlines of a transnational corporation or a Fortune 500 company and dealing with foreign customers" (2007: 250). Agents told me they appreciate working in such an "efficient" environment (Reese 2007). Speaking English very well is a central means of production for status and distinction and can be converted into other forms of capital. "To speak English is equated with being intelligent. And for a lawyer this is very important", says one respondent who will be a lawyer one day (Reese 2008). Many young people are tempted to work in a call center for these reasons.[20] Then again I do not want to belittle the relevance income and job security have as reasons for people to work in call centers or to migrate. In stressing the cultural reasons I want to make a point as I think the economical motivation is often overemphasized as sole reason. Especially for the middle class the cultural reasons (the global outlook as Josua Mata from the Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL) calls it – Reese 2008) may be of explanatory relevance other than for migrants from the lower classes who may just escape poverty and are not (that) strongly motivated by the desire for the overseas as Mata believes.

Distinguishing Oneself from the Local

My (still too much *prima facie*) assumption is that GICs not only orient themselves to the lifestyles of the global middle class, but also understand themselves to be superior to not only the underclass but also to the traditional upper class. This would be a major difference to what Bourdieu stated for the French society.[21] Living up to a "professional" working style (see below and Owensby 1999: 68), promoting a model of democracy following Western examples (in case of the NGO-workers) or planning to leave the Philippines behind in looking for greener pastures not only for financial reasons may be done in the self-conception to be "missionaries of 'modernity' as well as trend-setters of a new way of life [...] [and] providers of symbolic goods of 'modernity'", as Gehrke (2000: 146) stated this for the Indonesian middle

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20 Like the 27-year old Psyche, who worked seven months as an agent after finishing her law studies and in the meantime working in a political NGO. "For a time this work is fun, you get into touch with people from other cultures. It is something different and you can learn something. [...] Next to the improvement of my English I also learned to be more patient and disciplined. [...] And it was improving my self confidence" (Reese 2007).
21 But in the same line there are authors who question the validity of the purely hierarchical model of taste for Western societies which Bourdieu proposes. Lofgren and Frykman for instance state that "the middle class claims superiority for its lifestyle and attempts to impose it on other classes" (following Ockey 1999: 231).

class. I assume that drinking coffee at Starbucks or going out at Greenbelt or Serenada (the most popular places in Metro Manila nowadays) at night is for young, educated, middle class, professional, urban Filipinos at the same time a matter of pretension (towards the Western middle class) and of distinction towards the common Filipinos. The same could be considered true for the growing patronage of organic products, an idea which mainly comes along as a cultural import of the West and expresses a global, although alternative lifestyle.

"Just a Filipino" – The Localization of the GICs

Media and employers promise the GICs to be part of the "global" drawing on the narrative of communication society. The call center industry for example instrumentalizes these desires quite explicitly. The promise to belong to the 'communication people' plays a central role in the job ads: Self fulfilment, creativity, "aiming high" or "rising above the rest" are highlighted there. "While jobs are designed like a production line, the image projected by the call center, with its global accounts, high-tech work places, posh work environments and cosmopolitan clienteles, coincides with signs and symbols that relate with agents' middle class [and Western oriented N.R.] identities (Fabros 2007: 249). Sooner or later, however, GICs are reaching limits and make experiences that remind them that they are more service personnel and second rowers than full citizens of "communication society". Overseas Contract Workers can hardly escape these experiences as they suffer derogatory and racist treatment by their employers and the citizens of their host countries in a regular and structural manner. Call center agents may find it easier to deny their being second-rate (*Zweitklassigkeit*) although they have a similar experience in their interaction with US-colleagues and customers, who from time to time openly consider them to be "only a Filipino". Agents are told "I cannot understand you" and customers demand "to speak with an American". Most probably NGO-workers are the ones who least experience being pushed back into the inferior, on the one hand as it does not fit into the "partnership culture". Northern funders claim to cultivate with their recipients, on the other hand exactly this culture has a blinding effect as one tends to believe that "it cannot be what may not be" (C. Morgenstern). There is, however, enough evidence of unequal treatment of Southern NGOs which does not come up to the claim of partnership.[22] GICs seem to be neither really integrated here nor there and live in an intermediate world in between the global north and the Global South. Agents as well as OCWs seem to be

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22 One of the examples I heard from some NGO workers I interviewed during my second field trip for this research project (Reese 2008) is the fact that Skype conferences which involve participants from the South and the North are usually scheduled in a way convenient to the participants from Europe and America even if most participants are from Asia.

considered something special in their home country, but at the lower edge of society in the societies they serve. GICs cannot be completely part of the global middle class. Overseas travel, which is regarded as the 'ultimate symbol of distinction' amongst the middle class (Lakha 1999: 258), is beyond their means. NGO-workers and the local staff of the transnational companies do fly abroad once in a while, but only if their employer or their funders ask them to do so. Even if they had the necessary means to travel abroad they would encounter major difficulties due to the "wrong" colour of their passport. They are limited to remaining referred to the local place, while the global class easily crosses the borders of nation, race and class, as their American, German and other "Expat" bosses or partners in the case of NGOs do. Lakha believes that the Southern middle class is confined to emulating middle-class consumption through the consumption of inferior copies (1999: 258). Coming back to the call center districts like Eastwood, the agents there remain restricted to a simulacrum of the West – the "town center" being a kind of Disneyland version of the (imagined) West - placed amidst a typical third-world urban environment.

Managing Contradiction: Symbolic Consumption and the Discourse of Professionalization

There seems to be a gap between the class position given to the GICs in the global society and the position they give themselves. There is an attempt to bridge this gap in a two-fold way. One of the ways is compensating their working class-like occupational position with a middle class-like symbolic consumption (see above).

The second strategy of managing the intensified contradictory class location GICs are in seems to be a discourse of professionalization. In short, it contains a reconstruction of the work situation which apparently is factory-like to be well done only in a professional manner and by professionally educated people. GICs (re-)construct their work as demanding, prestigious and relevant much more so as from the global perspective their work is commonly perceived as proletarian. This is especially the case for call center agents and professionals turning to be service workers as a consequence of overseas migration. "Being 'professional' strikes deeply into the heart of agents as it allows them to reconcile the conditions of repetitive, routinary, 'no brainer' work with their skills and educational background" (Fabros 2007: 192). "It comes with the construction of a work ethic, standards, commitment, competence, efficiency and 'getting the job done'" (Fabros 2007: 239).[23] There is the attempt to reconstruct a work

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23 This again is used to govern the agents: "Control and discipline is exacted in a way by tapping into the agent´s 'sense of duty' and 'professional ethos' developed through their particular educational and discipline training" (Fabros 2007: 192). This meets with the neoliberal governementality of self-guidance (Foucault) and at the same time resembles the production of docile bodies which was typical for the "making of workers" at the beginning of the industrial age.

which is considered especially by other professionals as a "no brainer job" as intellectually demanding.[24] An agent quoted by Fabros lets her know: "Call center work is not easy, in a sense that, though the work may look easy, there are so many hidden challenges to overcome" (Fabros 2007: 111). Professional is who knows to get along with the given circumstances in a seemingly intelligent and witty way (see Fabros 2007: 169, 192). One reason for that is to meet up with their own self-image of a middle class using their main asset, their credentials, for achievement. The possession of credentials serves as the key distinction marking the "boundary" between themselves and "deskilled workers". This is how I explain myself merely receiving smiles when asking what the agents think about the characterization of call centers as "air-conditioned hubs for exploiting workers" by the leftist labour center KMU. Even if repetitive, even robotic mode of working lets call centers appear like factories, at least the agents make something out of it. "Agents would always affirm their sources of distinction such as their fine background and good education. The constant reference to good schools, background, and education can also be viewed as an assertion that Filipino agents are trying to make, as they distance themselves from the image of call center work as dead end, no-brainer 'mcjobs'" (Fabros 2007: 233). Nevertheless this strategy of beautifying the seemingly unavoidable does only seldom lead to the glorification of call center work as dream jobs!

Distinguishing oneself from the working class may also be an important reason why one can observe "everyday resistance" (e.g. Scott 1990) against unfavourable working conditions amongst call center agents but collective organization in trade unions and alike is nearly completely absent. The latter is considered to be underclass behaviour and joining a trade union is seen by middle class members (real or imagined) as inconsistent with their status and a threat to their hope of rising or at least of remaining a part of the respectable middle class (Owensby 1999: 175 et seq.). "Immersed in this rich, symbolic space, agents do not necessarily consider themselves oppressed. Rather, they are 'stressed out'" (Fabros 2007: 250).[25]

Distinction Within the Transnational Zone

Distinctive behaviour is also applied when the educated middle class of the South ends up serving the everyday man of the North – be it as migrant worker or as call center agent, performing work which may contradict with the worker's sense of self, for instance in the

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24 Within the Philippines the reputation of call center work is ambivalent. While most admire the agents for their good English and the amount of money they apparently earn, which they apparently earn, agent turned college graduates of the elite universities are asked by their fellow students now active as attorneys or other established middle class professions: "Why does someone like you work in a call center?", as two graduates from the University of the Philippines told me (Reese 2007).

25 See Fabros (2007: 189-247) and Reese (2007b) for a lengthy description of resistance in international call centers.

case of teachers becoming domestic workers, engineers becoming construction workers or professionals working as clerks. "These 'contradictions' in relations force workers to continuously construct their location within the exchange. Previous social axes of class and status are in a way subverted and challenged by the global distance. This situation demands for new symbolic systems to be created or for strategies to re-assert old meaning systems", says Fabros (2007: 231). They distance themselves to be considered merely drop-outs by their American customers (which the agents believe call center agents in the USA are, underestimating the precarious situation many middle-class members in the global North are exposed to in the meantime as well). "Caught between two competing symbolic systems [race and class – NR] agents play up symbolic hierarchies of status and prestige to reconstitute their position in the exchange" (Fabros 2007: 226). Customers are cursed as stupid people, dull-witted or even white trash, while the agents consider themselves as knowledgeable, bright and university educated. While this downgrading of customers can also be understood as keeping one´s dignity (and therefore a form of everyday resistance), similar distinction strategies are also played towards their main competitors, the Indians: Indian agents are mocked for their thick accents and their "formal" (British) English, characteristics that are then played up as signs of 'incompetence' or 'ineptitude' in doing the job. "Speaking with the proper accent becomes a measure of skills and status, which Filipino agents claim they possess more than their counterparts" (Fabros 2007: 233).

Are the GICs taking pride in being able to adapt successfully to the "global culture" and are using their flexibility as a weapon in global competition? This would indeed be a very efficient way of self-leadership and responsibility, which the Governmentality studies referring to Foucault consider to be the aim of neoliberal government. I elaborated on this very extensively in an article on how Filipinos and Filipinas cope with social insecurity (Reese 2007c) and simply hope that this notion can be at least modified when going on with the research on "the sense of citizenship within the globally exposed and connected marginal middle class in the Philippines".

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