

Article

Silent Bodies in Religion and Work: Migrant Filipinas and the Construction of Relational Power

Pinelopi Topali

Department of Social Anthropology and History, University of the Aegean, Mytilene 81100, Greece;
E-Mail: ptop@sa.aegean.gr; Tel.: +30-22510-36345

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Abstract: The present article explores the relationship of silences, as vocal and non-vocal bodily practices, to forms of power in religion and work. More specifically, it focuses on Filipina domestic workers in Greece who are members of Iglesia ni Cristo, an independent Filipino church. In the hierarchical contexts of the church and paid domestic work, where the church expands its influence, silence is a dominant embodied religious ethos, an ideal behavior for female workers and an expression of obedience. This silence enhances women's subordination resulting in strict power relationships. Silencing the body, however, is also an agential practice of Filipina immigrants themselves, a tool to transform power relationships into more reciprocal ones. By reflective and unreflective practices of bodily silence, migrant Filipinas reverse subjection, transform the power relationships in which they are involved and attribute to them a more relational character.

Keywords: religion; silence; body; Iglesia ni Cristo; domestic work; immigration; Filipinas; Greece

1. Introduction

In 1973 Clifford Geertz describes the object of ethnography using an example involving non-vocal, silent bodily practices:

[it is] a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not (not even the zero-form twitches, which, *as a cultural category*, are as much nonwinks as winks are nontwitches), in fact exist, no matter what anyone did or didn't do with his eyelids ([1], p. 7).

Through this example, Geertz places at the center of “thick description” body practices, gestures, and non-verbal forms of communication. A visual and acoustic perspective on bodies, body states, and body movements can get us some steps away from a logocentric scientific tradition and help to contribute to a new ‘sensory democracy’ ([2], p. 2) in ethnographic fieldwork and, at the same time, to an enrichment of ‘thick descriptions’. Bodies are thought of maintaining ‘a language’, of constructing a ‘grammar’ and of ‘speaking’ about mentalities, cultures, and religions. These perspectives seem to value Husserl’s idea that cognitive attitudes and not bodily ones bridge the intentional gap between mind and world. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, argues that the body is the condition for a man’s relations to the world and to others, the core of our expressive capability and the ground of all meaning. Embodiment, thus, has a special philosophical significance for Merleau-Ponty (but not for Husserl) and “raises questions concerning the very notion of the mental as a distinct phenomenal region mediating our intentional orientation in the world” ([3], p. 206). Moreover, by elaborating on the body, the philosopher regards silence as the hinge of the passage between language and nature and the body as a ‘silent cogito’, a ‘gesture’, which is already a ‘tacit language’ [4]. However, he keeps a distance from cases of explicit attention to one’s body and on explicitly conscious somatic sensations, which, according to Shusterman [5], could challenge his philosophical argument about the body’s tacit, unthematized and unreflective mode of perception.

In the present paper, I approach both reflective and unreflective (or better less-reflective) body silences and try to elucidate graduations of conscious, experiential body-focused states, thoughts and representations [5], following Shusterman’s proposal to complement Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the body, by including reflective somatic habits through the study of which “we can achieve a higher unity of experience on the reflective level and, thus, acquire better means to correct inadequacies of our unreflective bodily habits” ([5], p. 176). By drawing the trajectories of these two kinds of body silences into the field of social relationships, I examine their repercussions and direct effects in religion and work. By silence(s), I refer to individual and collective practices of minimizing sound produced vocally and non-vocally. Even though silence, literally, never exists it is very much alive and stands as signification and meaning itself. Exploring Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the mediating role of silence, in the transition from nature to language, I center on the silence of the body trying to reveal its transformative power in human relationships.

Moreover, I follow ethnographers and historians of the Philippines who stress the existence of a cultural tendency to transform power subjection into something more reciprocal [6]; also, a tendency to invert hierarchical relations [7] and to make power relational [8,9]. Rafael [6], Iletto [7], Anderson [8], and later Cannell [9] all converge on the idea that power relations in the Philippines are not conceived and treated as fixed but as eternally balanced between persons. Cannell, in particular, very clearly shows how the lowland Filipinos of the Bicol area are “concerned with *transformation* from states of greater hierarchy, distance and asymmetry between persons to states of greater balance, intimacy and harmony” ([9], p. 228). As power does not carry a sign of any internal ‘essence’ ([9], p. 229), relationships such as those between very poor people and wealthy people have the potential for a never-ending negotiation and, most importantly, are thought of as inherently dynamic and malleable. In Catholicism, as well as in other contexts, Cannell observes that power is constructed relationally through idioms of speech and idioms of emotion (such as pity, oppression, and love). I argue that, in the case of Filipina women in Greece, it is mainly outside speech and through the body that power relationships get

reworked. The use of the transformative power of body silence(s) leads to negotiations of power and control, in religion and work, and to the creation of more fluid, relational structures.

Dominant western representations being under the influence of the Cartesian dualist ontology of mind and body split the gap between nature (body, silence) and language. Dualisms such as body *vs.* mind, nature *vs.* culture (woman *vs.* man)¹ and, finally, silence *vs.* language (and sound) seem like eternal, essentialized antitheses whose attributes characterize groups of people and their activities. Sounds of nature are thought of as silences and the body as the most natural aspect of human beings; in euro-American societies, people who are defined mainly through their bodies (e.g., refugees, immigrants) are also people whose ‘word’ has not much importance, and who better fall into silence [11,12]. Speaking means going beyond the body or expanding body boundaries and this is a privilege that only some groups retain. Manual jobs, where women and migrants gather, are works whose naturalized character require and highly praise silence and invisibility of the body (e.g., paid domestic and care work). On the other hand, relationships with the divine are also obtained through body control and silence, through manipulation of the fundamental, ‘natural’ core of Man. In the first case, speech’s receding leaves place to the body, which reveals more and more its natural, material character by being silent; in the second case, speech’s receding leaves place for spirit(s) to appear and reveals its spiritual character through silence. Silence signifies a return to the body and a return to the spirit, living mind out of the equation.

Through either representations, which identify silence with a mysterious, unpredictable nature that aims to cross its limits, or ontological placements of silence in-between nature and language, silence remains ambiguous, biased, and illusive [13,14]. This ambiguity leads to an enhanced need for contextualization. Saville-Troike argues that silence is “more context-embedded than speech, that is, more dependent on context for its interpretation” ([15], p.11). Following this contextualization process we see that the distinction between sound and silence is not a given and in different cultural contexts silence can either mean acceptance or rejection, can be affirmative or negative. Social scientists have shown that in some cultures silence is important and has a relatively positive valuation e.g., Finns [16], Japanese [17,18], Athabaskan Indians [19], and Apache of Arizona [20]. In others, though, silence acquires a relatively negative valuation e.g., Italians [21], Afro-Americans [22], New York Jews [23], and Igbo [24]. More specifically “[c]ultures with strong notions of ‘private space’ [...] are more prone to complaints about noise” ([2], p. 9). Greece, where the notion of privacy is very weak, places little value on silence. On the contrary, silence seems prevalent in aspects of Filipino culture. In the present article I will show that, in the context of religion and work, silence is a technique of the Filipino body, an action of a mechanical, physical or physic-chemical order according to Mauss’s [25] definition. Here, Mauss intersects with arguments of Merleau-Ponty (placed, of course, on a different basis) who focuses on body responses of an unreflective nature. I argue that silence gets its transformative character by both, having this unreflective character and by being naturalized through culture; in other words, by being both an ontologically defined original response *from* the body and a culturally defined original response *of* the body.

¹ Silence is highly gendered. It was and continues to be considered an integral part of femininity. According to Glenn “silence may well be the most undervalued and under-understood traditionally feminine site and concomitant rhetorical art” ([10], p. 2).

Besides cultures, there are regimes (e.g., dictatorships), groups (colonized people, women), and places where silence is the expected response. In these places of high control and surveillance people can have a more cognitive perception of silence as a bodily state. “Churches, courtrooms, schools, libraries, hospitals, funeral homes, battle sites, insane asylums, and prisons, for instance, are often places of silence” ([26], p. 41); in such places where silences are obligatory and controlled there is more awareness of silence. The strictest the domination the more present the silence is since “[it] is a desirable state for all power groups that are afraid that the mere expression and exchange of opinions or the free flow of information will threaten the existing status quo” ([14], p. 116). However, the cultural relativity of silence is only provisionally weakened by its overwhelming connection to hierarchy. Its meaning remains variant, often non-conventional and, at times, subversive. To reveal the meanings of silence, in cases of domination, we need to contextualize it and discern its conventionalized meanings from alternative ones.

In ritual contexts “silence may be conventionally mandated as the only form which could achieve the event’s communicative goals” ([15], p. 9). In religion, silence has been an integral part of people’s practices for a long time as an expression of awe, holiness, and order. It is prevalent in Catholic and Quaker worship [27], while in Pentecostal Protestantism it is a marker of the formalism from which churches are trying to distance themselves [13]. For the Puritans silence has been a demonstration of self-control while useless speech was considered a sin [28]. In Iglesia ni Cristo (INC), a Filipino church that has been transferred to Greece with the arrival of Filipina immigrants in the country, in the 1980s, silence is connected to discipline and obedience. In the present article, I will attempt to show that silence(s) in INC are being both culturally defined techniques of the body and a religious body ethos compatible with obedience. These characteristics of silence(s) combined with its ambiguous character, make them the appropriate vehicle for transforming power relations into more reciprocal ones.

In the racially and ethnically biased environment of domestic and care work, silence(s) are also important. Ideal domestic workers are the ones whose bodies do not appear either acoustically or visibly, especially in cross-cultural relationships². Bull and Back argues that “racism is a discourse of power that thinks with its eyes” ([2], p. 14), while sound escapes. In the cross-cultural relationships built in domestic work “race” is built by both eyes and ears: the presence of the Other should be such to allow eyes to see nothing and ears to hear nothing. In Greece, Filipinas are considered discrete, silent, invisible, hard-working, and passive; these representations reproduce ossified, traditional orientalist stereotypes of Asians and contrast the newly founded hypervisibility of Asian cultures ([33], p. 411); [34], pp. 69–72). Iglesia ni Cristo, in its systematic effort to control the field of domestic work in Greece, proposes a specific model of relationship between employers and workers, in which cornerstone is obedience, an embodied aspect of which is silence. The transition of silence to a cross-cultural context enhances its awareness and makes it part of immigrant women’s identities. I argue that the resulting graduations in the awareness of silence as a body state do not cancel its transformative character. In

² From the Filipino men domestics during the American colonial period in the Philippines ([29], p. 71), to the African American ([30], p. 157), and the Latin American domestic workers in the USA ([31], p. 5) the invisibility of the worker’s body is the ideal situation in paid domestic work. According to Constable [32] Filipinas in Hong Kong negotiate rather unsuccessfully power relations and contribute to their own submission, adopting ‘whispers’ rather than ‘loud voices’ in order to become ideal, obedient workers for their employers ([32], p. 206).

passing into the realm of representations, silence remains a decisive point in the transformation of power relations into more reciprocal ones.

2. Silence and Power Relations in Religion and Work ³

2.1. "Obedience" in Religion and Work

Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) is a Filipino church founded in Manila on the 27th of July, 1914. Felix Manalo (1886–1963) established this independent Filipino church after passing from Catholicism to the Methodist, Episcopal Church, and became the last prophet of God for the new church. In 1968 the church started its expansion mostly to the U.S.A., but, also in other countries. Since 1984, the church has had a museum in the Philippines (Iglesia ni Kristo Museum and Gallery), a museum in Hawaii, U.S.A. and a television program in the U.S.A. While the numbers of its members are kept a secret by officials of the church, in 1990, the Census of Population and Housing in the Philippines estimated members of INC at 1.4 million, three times its size in 1970s ([35], p. 104). According to earlier studies, members of INC come from low socio-economic strata and have a low educational level ([36], p. 344; [37], p. 356). In Greece, Iglesia ni Cristo's branch was created with the arrival of Filipina immigrants the late 1980s and received recognition by the Greek state in 1997. It is an ethnically-based church with only a few members from other nationalities and no Greek members. This ethnic basis provides its members with a strong religious and ethnic identity and fosters group solidarity ([38], p. 321). As an ethnic church, INC forms a discourse that places the Philippines in the locus of its religious history. Greece, however, has a special place in this history as it is considered the third center of gentiles (after Jerusalem and Rome), where Paul the Apostle spread God's message. Thus, it is important in the church's local rhetoric that Filipinas migrated to Greece because they can (and ought to) spread God's message.

The church is organized around the minister, a graduate of the College of Evangelical Ministry, appointed every three to five years by the Central Office. The minister is a man, he can marry, but he cannot work outside the church. He has the assistance of head-deacons (men) and deacons (men and women) whom he appoints to their positions after completing a relevant workshop program. Deacons supervise groups of 7–10 people and can work outside the church. The church has also a choir, under a choir leader (a woman). Going up the pyramid hierarchy, lays the district minister and then the Administration. All these relationships are governed by the logic of obedience. In INC's journal *God's Message* we read:

³ Data that have been used for this article were collected through anthropological fieldwork in Athens, Greece from 1999 to 2001. Fieldwork included participant observation, open-ended interviews with 54 Filipina migrants in churches, Greek and Filipino domestic spaces and migrant associations and interviews with 30 employers. A return visit to the field in the period 2004–2005 revealed more aspects of the Filipinas cross-cultural relationships through semi-structured interviews with 12 and questionnaires with 167 Filipinas (post-doctorate research "Pythagoras", conducted in the Department of Social Anthropology and History, at the University of the Aegean and funded by the European Union and the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs). Finally in 2012 data on the integration of Filipinas in the Greek society and the effects of the economic crisis were collected through participant observation and open-ended interviews with 15 Filipina immigrants (research program of the European Integration Fund for Third Country Nationals, conducted by the Department of Social Anthropology and History, at the University of the Aegean and financed by the European Integration Fund and the Greek Government).

The *Iglesia ni Cristo* believes that every member is duty-bound to submit himself to the Church administration because it is God's commandment (Heb. 13:17). To submit to the Administration is to be bound by its instructions (Mt. 18:18). To abide by the decisions laid down by the Administration is to abide by the words of Christ (Acts 16:4, Lk. 10:16) ([39], p. 25).

The Administration is composed of by the executive minister, the deputy executive minister and 12 members. The succession of executive ministers follows family lines: after Filix Manalo, his son Erano became the next executive minister and he was followed by his son Eduardo Manalo. Both women's exclusion and preference of family members are not accompanied by an essentialist discourse about the nature of women and/or family members. The exclusion of women from the high ranks of the church is attributed to social conditions that make them more vulnerable than men. Thus, it confirms ethnographers' observations who note that gender difference in South-East Asia is discursively relegated and is independent of gender inequalities (see [40–42]). On the other hand, family members are not thought of being inherently entitled to their status; blood ties or essences of any kind are not necessary for the transmission of holiness⁴. Rather, it is attributed to a knowledge of religious subjects, which emanates from growing up in a family environment where deep knowledge on religious themes is offered. Other churches, however, often accuse INC of been a 'family business' or a 'religious dynasty'.

INC greatly differs from other churches because of its exclusivist membership, its strong influence to work, politics, kinship and ethnic relations and its strict disciplining practices. According to religious studies, the INC lies "outside the main group of historical Christian Churches" ([43], p. 118), and shows "nationalist, exclusivist and anti-ecumenical tendencies" ([44], p. 20). It does not collaborate with churches of other Christological and Ecclesiological doctrines ([43], pp. 1–2) and does not participate to the National Council of Churches, which is the largest coalition of non-Roman Catholic churches in the Philippines. The INC recognizes the doctrine of Christ's humanity and rejects Mary as Bearer of God, the doctrine of the Trinity and the communion of saints. Most members of Filipino catholic or protestant churches in Greece attend, sometimes regularly, other churches and religious fellowships; religious participation and affiliation is considered circumstantial, idiosyncratic and, thus, allowed to members of various faiths. This peculiar "church shopping" is characteristic of the immigration condition and observed by Filipino and Korean immigrants in the U.S.A. [45,46]. Members of *Iglesia ni Cristo*, though, never attend a religious activity of another faith. "They have a singularity of faith [which] cannot be found outside the Church of Christ", writes a columnist of the church in its journal *God's Message* ([47], p. 4). Church requires complete devotion from its members and promotes homogeneity in all aspects of their life rather than personal, idiosyncratic behaviors.

The discourse that builds this homogeneity and fosters the logic of "one body" in the INC is "obedience". In its attempt to expand its control to all social fields of its members' lives, the INC proposes "obedience" as the appropriate behavioral model. Family is the first field of influence for INC. People do not participate in the church as individuals but rather as families, and become members of INC after taking an oath for not marrying "non-believers". "Obedience" flows inside families, especially nuclear families, and define family relationships. The first act of "obedience" of children towards their parents is their participation to the church's activities. From their birth, children have already been

⁴ Cannell also observes that Bicolanos of the Philippines do not regard possession of superior power and wealth as sign of an internal 'essence' ([9], p. 229).

dedicated to the church. Afterwards, though, their responsibilities grow bigger and their behavior affects the status of their parents in the church. If children disobey their parents, do not attend the church, adopt habits that the church interprets as inappropriate and “disobedient” (drinking, gambling, adultery, not attending the church regularly), parents may suffer severe penalties for this behavior, e.g., they may be removed from the position they carry in the church.

Politics is also a field of influence for INC and one where the “obedience” ethic is prevalent. In the Philippines, as well as in countries of destination for Filipina immigrants, the church controls the vote of its members who owe “to obey” the Administration’s decision and vote as “one body”. “The Iglesia ni Cristo observes unity even in electing public officials. This is not to interfere in politics, but to obey God’s commandment. This unity is never betrayed by a true member of the Church of Christ, even if some may be displeased” ([39], p. 26). In some countries, where immigrant groups have the right to vote (e.g., U.S.A.), the INC is considered a noticeable force exactly because of this policy. In political demonstrations in the Philippines, INC members participate in populous rallies again as “one body”. In foreign countries, such as Greece, integration policies are very weak and legalization is the main issue for most immigrants. The INC proposes that Filipina migrants “obey” the rules and regulations of the host state. In contrast to other churches (e.g., Born Again Christians) that aim to satisfy more their undocumented immigrant members than the country of settlement ([48], p. 188), the INC maintains a policy against undocumented immigrants. While prayers are offered for members to get a legal status, at the same time, there is pressure put on undocumented individuals and their families to conform to the immigration policies of the country of settlement.

A third important field of influence for the INC is work. In the Philippines the church prohibits participation in labor unions and takes on their role as well as the role of recruitment agencies. According to church officials, there are businesses in the Philippines that employ only members of the church because they are “obedient”, hard working and do not unionize. Church members supervise the work of these members and if a worker does not perform satisfactorily he has to apologize both to the business and to church officials. In Greece, INC prohibits participation in one of the most dynamic immigrant’s association in the country, the Filipino Workers Association KASAPI-Hellas. The low level of integration of Filipinas in Greek social structures, however, prevents the church of acquiring an active, mediating role between Greeks and its members. The church systematically forges the ethic of “obedience”, the cornerstone of all working relationships. ‘Obedience’ emanates from kinship relationships, especially the relationship of parents with children. Relations between people and God, laymen and officials, immigrants and state of settlement, domestic and care workers and employers are all following the model relationship of the basis of all social organization. Lay members obey the minister, he obeys the Administration, Administration obeys the executive minister, and he obeys God. An official says: “There is a leader and the members faithfully obey because this is our basis, and it’s written in ...ah... Hebrews 13:17 ‘obey you leaders! And submit to them. For, they keep watching over your souls’”. And he continues: “It’s so great! The doctrine, the teachings of the church based on the Bible on the employee-employer relationship. And I think if you could let this be known to the Greeks, I think they would be very interested”. “Obedience” in work often acquires extreme forms and involves even slavery (at least in language). Employees are supposed to obey and serve their employers as they serve Christ: like slaves. An official says:

OK, here slaves are the servants. ‘Be obedient to those who are your masters. With good will rent your services as to the Lord’. So the doctrine here, the teaching here is that the servants or the employees when they are working, they should be working as if they are serving Christ himself.

And after that:

“Slaves obey your human master with fear...and doing with a sincere heart as though you were serving Christ”. Imagine that? “Do this not only when they are watching you because you want to gain their approval, but, with all your heart do what God wants as slaves of Christ. Do your work cheerfully as though you serve the Lord.

Even if in Greece the church cannot substitute immigrant’s networks for finding a job, nonetheless it ‘promotes’ Filipinas as “obedient” workers and often advertise them to ‘representatives’ of the Greek society as ideal “obedient” workers. Through the official discourse of “obedience” rigid power structures that exist inside the church are extended in all fields of life, such as family, work, and politics. However, this official discourse is also realized through the body. Following an equally strict regulation of bodies, the INC builds an embodied manifestation of “obedience” through order, discipline and silence.

2.2. Silence and the Embodiment of Obedience in Religion and Work

In orthodox Protestantism “church services and revivals are stripped of overt, imagistic, and sacramental material; relatively little happens visually, and spiritual realities are not communicated through sensuous, nonlinguistic means” ([49], p. 169). In the INC, though, the lack of overt imagistic material coexists with spiritual realities communicated through nonlinguistic means. The space rented for worship services in a suburb at the south of Athens is unadorned: there are neon lights, empty white walls and long white curtains. Numerous small folding chairs are placed and kept in perfect symmetry. Women attendants have to sit separately from men, to dress modestly, to wear skirts and dresses, but not trousers. Short skirts or dresses, naked shoulders and any denotation of femininity are considered inappropriate. Dress functions as an effective means of establishing gender identity and at the same time it establishes normative behavior. The choir is dressed in long beige dresses with light green patterns and beige shoes, deaconesses wear long, bright, white dresses and white shoes and men officials wear well ironed dark costumes, white, stuffed shirts, and ties. A Catholic Filipina says “I like them because they are very disciplined. You see how quiet it is? And the clothes and everything is disciplined. When I feel this way I want to attend their worship service”. This discipline arrangement, realized through symmetry and uniformity, is complete with the achievement of silence: not only absence of speech, but, most importantly, a specific technique that bodies have.

During the worship service, body control to acquire silence reaches its peak. Even before the beginning of the worship service people standing outside the church start to prepare for silence: minimizing speech, vocal sounds and body sounds. The passing from the front yard to the backyard where the entrance to the church is, signals a passing from noise, laughing, speaking, and children’s voices to another soundscape and another ‘bodyscape’: people stop talking or talk in very low voices, children are shushed, feet touch carefully to the ground not to produce sound, bodies replace their loose posture with more compact one, controlled and inwardly oriented. After the beginning of the worship service, the door closes and nobody is allowed to cross it and disturb peace. In the crowded first room of the building where people strive to reverse their attendance cards on the wall to ascertain their presence

to the worships, the lack of noise is noticeable. Women greet each other slightly bowing their head in silence, or say a few words very quietly and enter the room where the worship service will take place. The minister, the head-deacons and the choir members are already in the room and in their seats. Bodies sitting still, heads facing down, and in complete silence. Considering the church's strict hierarchy and "obedience" discourse, these bodies set the sound, visual, and movement rules for the rest of the members. Instead of language, the organized 'nature' of silencing is produced through a specific sensory technique, the observation of the body in charge. It is by observing, following and at the same time "obeying" body practices set by officials that members acquire their silent body attitudes and practices. The only sound is that of the electric piano. Women find quickly a seat, preferably at the front, and very skillfully place themselves on this crowded room, without producing any sound with their body touching chairs, the floor, personal objects (bags, tissues), and other bodies. Immediately after that members' bodies receive a position similar to that of the officials. There is no exchange of words or looks. Deaconesses distribute the books of church hymns and women stay with the book in one hand and the tissue, ready for use, in the other. The choir stands and starts singing, the number of the hymn demonstrated on the electronic board for everyone to see and prepare. Turning pages is very quiet. The hymn finishes, the choir members stand still for a moment in complete silence, eyes looking far to the front. With a coordinated movement all the choir members quietly sit down. While this procedure is repeated women remain sitting still, with only their hands going up and down to their faces to sweep the eyes or nose. No other movement is seen. Completely oriented forward, necks sometimes lean at the front to hide tears and eyes look far beyond, or to the choir.

Even during fund raising, the worship service continues to be extremely disciplined and quiet. The church does not use any metallic objects for gathering money.⁵ Deaconesses advance a white pouch made of soft cloth and members immerse their hand into the pouch to leave the money, almost always banknotes and never coins. Bodies and objects harmonically cooperate to minimize sound. After gathering the money from men and women, the deacons, with one soundless, synchronized movement, leave their pouches in a wooden box placed on the main table. For a Greek to sit still and completely noiseless in this crowded space is an ordeal as it requires specific body skills. However, bodies around me never showed signs of pressure or fatigue. Silence was a technique of the body brought into perfection inside the INC.

In addition to the worship service, discipline and silence govern all activities of the INC. It even becomes part of an internalized, personal project of self-control and self-discipline. Every day, at 8:00 p.m., women of the INC have to silently pray, wherever they may be: at work, in buses, in parks, they stop what they are doing and, for a few minutes, close their eyes, bow their head and pray in silence. Through the mastering of "obedience" on a personal level, body silences become part of everyday activities, integral parts of a task that members have to accomplish. Populous gatherings for the public in hotels of Athens reproduce a similar quiet atmosphere. Visitors from other faiths who attend these gatherings praise its deep and logical analysis of the Bible and its discipline and strict organization, realized in symmetry and vocal and non-vocal silences. Even though members of the specific church are sometimes

⁵ Even though members of the church keep silence of money issues, Filipinas of other faiths blame INC for demanding money offerings up to 10% of members' salaries. Strangite Mormons were also obliged by their founder to offer 10% of their salary to the church as part of their devotion and obedience to the church ([50], p. 77).

referred to as fanatics, the silent, deeply spiritual atmosphere they create in the worship is highly valued by other Filipinas. Children of INC families in the Filipino school *Munting Nayon* impress their teachers for being very quiet and for keeping their body, quietly, on one seat for a long time. Parents equally impress teachers for their mild personality and low tones. For me, teaching the Greek language to a group of INC's members offered the privilege of never having to shout or impose silence or discipline in any way, especially when the minister was present.

Officials never talk about silence to members; for 'outsiders' (non-believers and foreigners), however, they construct silence as a unique INC feature, constitutive of discipline and "obedience". After I remarked to an informant, who holds a position in the INC hierarchy, the beauty and quietness of the worship, she said to me:

Did you notice, eh? That's the greatness of our Church. Everything is organized, everything is in order. I don't know how it is in the Orthodox church but in other churches you see people talking and moving. Not in our church. Did you notice that the door closes at exactly 19.00? Nobody can pass after that. And the hymns are the same all over the world. They are sent by fax. Isn't it beautiful?

It is through non-believers' representations that silence becomes an issue inside the INC and part of the church's identity.

In another context, that of domestic and care work, Filipina women of various faiths are perceived by Greek employers as ideal workers because they are 'invisible' (also, fluent in English, hard-working, honest, and devoutly religious Catholics) and they can 'disappear' from domestic space.⁶ Many Greek employers like Filipinas because "you don't know they are in the house". The 'disappearing' ability of Filipinas is actually a very specific body state requiring an elaborate management of silence. When the employer appears in the room where they are working, they recede skillfully to another space. As they move their bodies in space or move objects in space they only produce a minimum of sound. Steps are careful and barely heard. Cleaning tasks like moving furniture, washing dishes, using appliances, *etc.* are performed almost noiseless. They barely speak, they don't discuss, they almost never argue with the employer. When sitting in the employer's house they remain alert, with their body completely compact and reserved without any signs of being loose and comfortable, even if they have lived in that house for 10 years.

This silent body state and attitude makes a difference in the Greek domestic space where cleaning is, and has to be, noisy. Greek domestic workers, and also foreigners (e.g., Albanians), easily reproduce a cleaning model comprised of a loud body and object sounds. Filipinas, even though perceived as a very different Other⁷, are idealized by Greek employers. Equally idealized becomes their silent body state, even though it carries no resemblance to the noisy Greek bodies. In Greece "filoxenia" [hospitality], the

⁶ In the 1990s, when immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Balkans arrived in Greece in large numbers, Filipinas remained the preferred ethnic group of the elite strata to perform domestic work. The majority of them were employed as live-in domestic workers even though before the economic crisis they slowly moved to the middle socio-economic strata and to part-time domestic work without showing other signs of working mobility (see [51,52]).

⁷ This difference refers only to employer's houses and not on the houses Filipinas rent for their days-off. In these domestic spaces, called "boarding houses", they are perceived as noisy by their Greek neighbors. Thus, silence is once again "context embedded" and considered an appropriate body state only in the strict hierarchical condition of paid domestic work.

dominant logic of perceiving the Other, places the host in a hierarchically superior position and the guest in a moral debt and in an inferior position [53]. The Other is provisionally accepted in the relationship only on the condition that he/she will suspend his/her alterity ([54], pp. 2–3). Filipinas' body 'disappearance', vocally and non-vocally, offers the most tangible case of suspending alterity. Through it, Filipinas become both ideal guests and immigrants. Silence, on the other hand, being recognized by employers, change levels of awareness and management from both domestic workers and INC officials. The INC recognizes part of Greek interpretations of silence (mainly, absence of speech or arguments) as passivity, subordination, and ideal guest behavior. Thus, it promotes it as an ethnic/religious Filipino characteristic. Especially the lack of verbal responses to employers' demands for more work and for the undertaking of additional tasks, common in live-in domestic work, is noticed and marketed. An official says:

They never show discontent. [T]hey are always obedient and hard-working. And you know the employer will see that. She will see that this girl of mine never complains and always does her job and even more than I ask her. And even if she doesn't have a good behavior in the beginning, slowly-slowly she will change. She will become calm and she will love her. And she'll say that this servant is the best I've ever had.

For officials, the silent acceptance of new working arrangements does not only show the ethic of "obedience" in a strict power relationship; sometimes, officials move a slight step towards the position of women workers and also envision the relationship as involving "changes" and having the potential of reciprocity.

To summarize, silence(s) is a dominant practice in the INC, a manifestation of a specific sensory and body technique, connected to "obedience". Foucault claims that the body is an "inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas) [...]" ([55], p. 83), while, only occasionally, he resolves to the pre-discursive materiality of the 'natural' body and only in order to explain its history of cultural construction. In the INC the inscription of silence on the body is not traced by language, but through a sensory technique composed of careful and detailed observation of the other. Through this, the body becomes a site of regulation, and silence (as body state) passes from super-ordinates to subordinates. Silence, however, is already there. Even if religiously inscribed and functioning as order and discipline, it is, also, culturally inscribed formulating a continuum, separable only provisionally for the sake of analysis. In the cross-cultural context, however, the inseparable layers of silence become somehow divided; silence's proximity to the materiality of the body recedes. Silence becomes noticeable and its enhanced ambiguousness opens it to cultural interpretations and conceptualizations. For employers, silence as an ethno-racial body technique, is an indicator of a submissive ethnic character that makes Filipinas the perfect guests, and, consequently the perfect domestic workers. Responding to these interpretations, INC officials conceptualize silence as a manifestation of the "obedient" Filipina domestics. It is not regulation that connects silence as a body state and practice to language and its reflectivity, but, rather, cultural (and religious) distance and a kind of body incompatibility. Regulation can easily involve silence as a means of inscribing silence into the body.

3. Silence and the Formation of Relational Power in Religion and Work

3.1. Religion and the Transformative Power of the Silent Body

In many Christian and Muslim traditions, silence is a means to communicate with God and a prerequisite for a deep religious experience (see [13,27,56,57]). In the INC, religious experience is

mediated by silences manifested in whisperings, quiet crying, quiet sobbing, and noiseless body movement (touching clothes, purses, chairs, floors, tissues, other bodies). Crying, in particular, is very important in the INC's worship service:

The religious services of the Iglesia seem designed to evoke a powerful emotional response from the participant [...] At the beginning of the service, some prayers are recited in an emotional tone by the minister; those for Manalo in particular would bring forth tears from the women present, and in general a show of tears is looked upon with favor" ([58], p. 57).

Crying involves imperceptible body movements: shoulders shaking, tears running on the face, hands moving tissues up and down the eyes. All these movements are inwardly oriented and performed by minimizing all sound. This silent crying, though, has to be observable for it stands as indication of the ethical status (present and past) of INC believers: it embodies "understanding" and "obeying" God. "Feeling", according to officials, follows. One of them says:

We cry because we are happy that we understand Him. Because of joy because we understand why God created us. And we understand that we must serve Him the way he likes. It's more than gold, it's more than money. The privilege to understand, the privilege to be children of God, that's the ultimate goal in life. You please Him by obeying the laws he put in the Bible. So, if we are there and we cry, we submit ourselves and we feel, we feel that we are children. [...]

Asad argues that 'in modern society [...] the Christian apologist tends not to regard belief as the conclusion to a knowledge process, but, as its precondition' ([56], p. 125). In the INC, belief (and religious practice) is considered the result of a clearly rational argumentation based on the Bible. The logic of the church is presented as almost mathematical, thus, undeniable. As a result, official discourse reformulates the church's relationship to modernity and makes it appear as "on the side of human enlightenment" ([59], pp. 233–34); belief and feeling result from the unquestionable logic of the INC. The rationality that the INC attributes to its thinking includes hierarchical schemas of organization and the value of "obedience". "Feeling" the Holy Spirit does not only presuppose "understanding" but also "obeying" to an ethical, rightful way of living. An official explains:

When we receive, we feel the Holy Spirit we cannot hold our tears. So, that's the reason we weep. We served Him right, we followed His rules and He is there. Sometimes, you don't even notice it, it comes just like that. So, you know, don't think that we are recommended to cry.

A mind that "understands" and a body that "obeys" can lead, according to officials, to a deep religious experience and communication with the Holy Spirit. This deep religious experience is bodily realized through crying.

Members of INC do not directly negate rationalism as a vehicle for achieving communication with the Holy Spirit. However, they undermine "understanding" and "obedience" and emphasize "feeling" situating it "in the heart" where the sensing of the Holy Spirit takes place. A Filipina of INC says: "When we are in the church we cry, you noticed... It's not sadness, it's a cry of joy because we can feel it. We can feel the Holy Spirit. You cannot tell with words, but, when you feel it in your heart, you cry". Words that come from the heart or words that lead members to "feelings" from the heart are spoken in the native language, in Tagalog. Maltz mentions that in the puritan view "[d]ivine inspiration [...] was understood

not as the Holy Spirit being located within the speaker, but, within the spoken word, thus, making the Spirit-filled word as animate a participant in the speech event as either the speaker or the hearer” ([13], p. 120). In INC, the Holy Spirit occurs through or maybe inside Tagalog, the mother or the chosen people’s tongue. Only Tagalog creates communication with God and feelings “in the heart” that lead to their embodied manifestation, crying. When distinguished foreigners guests are present, however, officials choose another language for the worship service (e.g., English).⁸ In this case, feelings cannot reach the heart and crying becomes a parody. Where cross-cultural management dominates, divine communication fails. In most cases, however, words reach the heart. And when they do so, they reflect more than an interior experience. As in the Ilongot of the Philippines, they also reflect a web of social relationships and social life ([64], p. 38).

In the INC, women cry in two occasions: first, during the hymns and, second, during the minister’s prayer. The hymns are prearranged by the church Administration who sends them by fax to INC churches all over the world. In official discourse, this practice is presented as a manifestation of the perfect organization and discipline of the INC. Prayer, on the other hand, is improvised. Crying of the members passes gradually from a completely unorganized, unstructured, personal practice during the hymns to a highly organized one during prayer. This latter cry is more collective, less static and more extroverted. Crying during the hymns is always extremely silent showing no crescendos or changes. Crying that accompanies prayer is different. It mirrors the relationship of the attendants to the minister (and his words) as well as the relationship to the Holy Spirit; even though it is also quiet, it is changeable, has crescendos and can be highly reciprocal. In other words, silent crying and its graduations reflect and, also, build relationships with the officials. If these relationships are troubled, crying is weak, static, and non-reciprocal. If they are harmonious crying is very emotional, has graduations and is reciprocal. According to Bauman, Quakers’ distrust towards speech is accompanied by a rejection of the role of the ministry [27]. In the INC, though, the management of this silent crying can legitimize and, on occasion, question church hierarchy.

The minister (and, also, the head-deacon) has to be a great speaker⁹ and orator to ensure the successful completion of religious experience. Prayer requires special rhetorical techniques to ensure it is persuasive and touching: changes in voice quality, continuous recitation, specific intonation contours and above all crying. Through his performance, the minister builds a reciprocal relationship between himself and the members of the church, and, also, between all of them and God: he offers the Spirit-filled word to the members, and, they enhance it and offer it back. He knows whether he has his audience with

⁸ In the Yaka of Zaire rituals in the urban context have a weaker metaphoric power because of the changes in the language used ([60], p. 18). However, the passing from monolingual to bilingual churches and the resulting marginalization of the ethnic character of the church is a survival strategy in an expanding immigration environment ([61], p. 327). Worship services in English and Tagalog are performed in the numerous congregations of INC in San Francisco and Daly City, U.S.A. ([45], p. 57), while in California during the Grand Evangelical Missions hymns are sung in Spanish to help the attendants understand ([62], p. 18). In Greece INC was trying to translate the hymns to Greek to become a “bridge builder” [63] between Greeks and Others (immigrants) and to build a multiethnic composition.

⁹ For Quakers, where silence and sound was a key to their culture, ministers were also “great speakers” ([27], p. 16). In the Philippines, to be a great speaker is important both in politics and religion. Ferdinand Marcos was the ‘voice of power’ creating deep emotions through his speeches ([29], p. 124), while the most effective healers and negotiators with spirits were the ones who had a subtle, calm speech ([9], p. 110).

him or not and whether he is providing them with an inspiring preaching or not. Attendants listen and make use of various vocal or non-vocal backchannel signals. They nod looking down, they sob, they whisper words like *opo* (yes), *Amen*, and use wordless murmurs at specific moments. These, restrained responses are integral to the preaching's success and very much appreciated by the minister. As the minister raises his voice and intensifies sobbing and crying, members, also, raise the tones of *Opo*, *Amen*, make sounds of sobbing louder and increase body movement. Even at its peak, though, this practice is quiet with minimal body movement, carrying no resemblance to the noisiness appreciated in a Pentecostal church (see [13]). The seemingly monologic, authoritative sermon of the official highly depends on listeners' participation and cooperation. Hirschkind says that in the Muslim tradition the rhetorical act of preaching is accomplished by the hearer and not by the speaker ([57], p. 134). The same can be observed in the INC; yet, the speaker's ability, here, is crucial and constitutive of reciprocal relationships that provisionally overturn the strict power relationships of "obedience".

Fissures in the gift structure of giving, receiving, reciprocating occur in situations when the official does not perform passionately or skillfully during the worship service because of lack of "feeling", the use of foreign language, or the development of the wrong subject. Such a case is when the minister, usually in the presence of Greek guests, chooses to talk of work and immigration issues and to include "obedience" in his rhetoric in the sacred hour of praying. Such cross-cultural negotiations with Greeks during praying are strongly opposed by Filipina immigrants who refuse to return the gift of "feeling"¹⁰. In such a case, the minister's attempts to create "feelings in the heart" will fail. He will try to gradually increase emotions but women will remain silent. At the moment that his voice will attempt to achieve the right trembling, the right graduation, an emotional peak women attendants will not reciprocate. They will keep their tone extremely low, they will minimize body sounds, words spoken, and body movement to reach an uncomfortable level of silence. Only a few hands will move the tissues up and down the face, a few hands will bow, a few tears will drop. Voices will be extremely low and passive and sobbing very sporadic and weak. Silence from a sign of awe will become in its extreme form a sign of failed communication, both profane and sacred. In contrast to Pentecostal church where people who keep quiet are "guilty of silence" ([13], p. 115), in the INC, silence is an embodied defiance of authority.

The 'frustration of reciprocal action' by the subordinate is manifested in the silent content of the hidden transcript, says Scott discussing resistant strategies, identified as hidden transcripts, against postcolonial structures in Southeast Asia ([67], p. 37). In the INC, silent practices are part of both hidden and public transcripts; they are both overt and evasive for the super-ordinates. Extreme forms of obedience *and* defiance are accomplished *in* and *through* silence in front of 'the intimidating gaze of power'. This composes the infra-politics of lay women which "take place in public view but [are] designed to have a double meaning [...]" ([67], p. 19). Due to silence's prevalence and the multiplicity of its meanings this infra-politics reaches to the church hierarchy and changes (at least provisionally) power relationships. Moreover, it is during the worship services that silence acquires its transformative

¹⁰ Kim (2007) analyzes the importance of race on the decision of Asian American students to resort to ethnically or racially homogenous evangelical fellowships in the USA [65]. In Greece, where ethnic and racial tensions are growing, especially in the context of the economic crisis, ethnic churches become a social enclave where immigrants can, among other things, escape from inter-ethnic or inter-racial encounters. In such places the Subaltern Other refuses to be 'heard' by the western Other who in turn also retains a contentious relationships with 'the West' in other contexts (see [66]).

role. There and in the bodies of women of the INC it becomes both “obedience” and an “embodied resentment”, to use Herzfeld’s terms ([68], p. 221). Through the body manipulation of silence(s), women of the INC achieve a “*transformation* from states of greater hierarchy, distance, and asymmetry between persons to states of greater balance, intimacy, and harmony” ([9], p. 228). Moving to the cross-cultural realm, silence becomes more visible. In domestic work, the visibility of silence leads to various conceptualizations of this body state and to different forms of body awareness. However, as we will see below, these verbalized silences follow similar trajectories of social manipulation to the silences ‘of just flesh’, aiming to a construction of relational forms of power and of more reciprocal relationships in domestic work.

3.2. *Work and the Transformative Power of the Speaking Body*

In the long processes of reformulation of power relations the role of religion is crucial. The first step is the defiance of the strict discourse of obedience. As we discussed above, the INC idealizes slavery and refers to domestic workers as “servants” or “slaves” who are obliged to “obey” their masters/employers as they obey God. However, workers themselves choose different conceptualizations of their working experience. In the Philippines, the *Passion*, a folk drama reenacting the Christ event, is the primary interpretive prism through which people perceive their reality (see [7,9]). *Passion* and the sacrifice of Jesus is a story deeply rooted in the folk Christianity of the Philippines. Drawing upon this story, which lies outside the official discourse of the church, members of the INC temporarily replace the discourse of “obedience” with that of “suffering”. Memories of “suffering” in domestic work initiate body responses (sobs, tears, shaking) inside the church and during the worship service. Shouting employers, employers with family problems, employers who don’t respect them are the reason for turning into God and cry. All these “sufferings” are not directly connected with health issues and body pains from work. “Suffering” emanates from employer’s attitudes, which may involve the body (shouting, pushing, pulling, even hitting), but, only partially they reflect on the worker’s body. Defying the slavery model that officials promote, an informant says:

Sometimes, when she will shout at me, you know sometimes they treat us like we are slaves, I feel very sad inside. Very, very, sad because she is like this. And then I cry, that’s why you see tears in our eyes. We feel bad, we suffer a lot in our life, and we cry.

Another informant says:

Yes, sometimes the way they talk, sometimes they talk harshly when you know yourself that you are not stupid at all, and they treat you as one. But we are not slaves! That’s sometimes... [laughing], ...but... we have to accept that we are helpers [...] and that we suffer”.

For some informants, their silent crying in the church, in buses, sometimes even at employers homes bring them in the position of Christ. Following a common cultural practice of Catholic Filipinos of drawing comparisons between their “suffering” and Christ’s ([9], p. 171; [69], p. 80), women of the INC undermine the “obedience” working model of the church, which is based on the identification of employers, rather than employees, with Christ. Officials tolerate the reproduction of this “suffering” discourse, but are reluctant to reproduce it, especially in the presence of Greeks. For Filipinas of the INC, though, “suffering” highly involves domestic work. And, even temporarily, they defy and reverse

the rigid hierarchical structures that officials of the church build drawing a new trajectory of more interacting relationships.

A second step involves the embedding of dominant culturally defined models of working relationships into religion. But, before that, we have to examine the overall context of cross-cultural encounters in domestic work. Perceptions of body and sound in Philippine and Greek cultures follow almost opposite directions. I already mentioned that many Greeks reproduce oriental stereotypes and regard Filipinas characteristically ‘Asian’, obedient and silent. On the contrary, Filipinas describe Greek employers and their domestic spaces as extremely noisy, filled with loud voices, shouting and rude manners.¹¹ As relationships develop inside paid domestic work, Greek employers enter Filipinas into the realm of kinship where they are transformed into the beloved, obedient ‘daughters’ [kores] of their employers. Filipinas are also inspired by kinship and initiate “caring” relationships with employers as are the relationships between children and parents. “Caring” relationships, however, are highly reciprocal and it is this component that is lost outside kinship and inside work. “Caring” involves a sensory technique of observing employers’ body practices and a technique of the body of silently fulfilling employer’s needs. Observation of body movements, body habits, absence of speech as an explanatory device and avoidance of interventions (at a visual and sound level) in domestic space are all constitutive of a “caring” model of relationships in work. Cannell stress the ambiguity and unpredictability that characterize systems of exchanges in Bicol, Philippines ([9], p. 231). In Greece, the reciprocal schemes that Filipinas initiate show a similar uncertainty, ambivalence and tension. While employees are fulfilling their part of the relationship, employers usually do not. They fail to observe workers’ body behavior, face expressions, sound production (e.g., lack of singing during work, stop smiling, lowering heads), they fail to figure out employees’ problems (lack of salary raises, absence of vacation leaves, family, and health issues) and they fail to restore balance. After long-lasting relationships of failed reciprocity Filipinas realize that their exchange model does not work and quit in complete silence: without a word, without disturbing domestic space in any way, after cleaning and tidying up, they literally disappear from the lives of their employers [71].

In the INC, the “caring” model in domestic work is considerably transformed. Members of the INC do not mainly expect employers to reciprocate, but, rather, to “change” and to show a tendency for conversion to a new identity. Like in the American Evangelicals who consider Christianity and “changes” in people’s hearts the solution to racial hierarchies ([72], p. 119), members of the INC consider the church and its “changes” in employers’ hearts the solution to work hierarchies. To reciprocate is only a most welcomed consequence of this deep “change”. According to Harding (1987), fundamentalist Baptists in the U.S.A. tend to conceptualize proselytism as ‘a change in the heart’, while officials place the change of faith on the Word of God ([49], pp. 168–70). In the INC, “change” is important and highly involves, both, the church and words (if not The Word). Filipinas of the INC attribute employers’ “changes” to persuasive dialogues and singings for them:

¹¹ Smith (2003) describes a similar situation in Antebellum America where alternative definitions of sound and noise were produced by slaves and masters. Masters were trying to keep slaves quiet and considered the plantation a peaceful, quiet and harmonious place. For the slaves, though, the plantation was considered full of noise of slashing and whipping ([70], pp. 144–45).

They know about the church. [...] And one time during her birthday we went to her with a group of the choir, some of the choir we went there, and we sing, we sing, and they were so happy. For two weeks I have not seen her so happy in her life. I think that, something changed in her and it's the song that we sang.

This centering on words and their transformative power brings us closer to what Merleau-Ponty calls the "speaking language". By singing and speech motives that produce "changes", women get some of the minister's speech quality: they both reach out and connect with God. There is a sense that "changes" happen because God is singing through them, that it is their calm, quiet, devoted body that manages to transfer God's power. "Changes" in employers' life involve the body in its entirety, and demonstrate a language which has not lost track of its origin in an expressive experience; or, to put it in Merleau-Ponty's words, a language composed of spoken words that "make a gesture" [4]. The cemented 'spoken language' of "obedience" to the employer is left behind and is transformed by the flexibility and originality of songs and mild, calm discussions with the employer. Women describe vividly, through physical movements and pantomimes, their continuous, calm 'speaking' (or 'singing') to the employer and her reactions to it showing that the meaning of their words (as of gestures) does not come from a disembodied subject. This 'speaking language', not yet sedimentated into the 'spoken language' of the church, but still interacting with it, creates the fluid and transformative environment inside which strict working power relationships 'change' into something else. Moreover, "changes" (or shape shifting from a body state to another, from an ethical stance to another, and, finally, from a religious tradition to a new one) is a fundamental aspect of religious transformations *per se*, an entry to another religious universe of social relationships.

An emphasis on the flesh and sound of the body as well as conceptualizations of it are rare in the INC (in contrast to Filipinas of other faiths). In these rare occasions, the leading role in the working relationship is assigned directly to the individual rather than her church. When Filipinas silently pray for employers and adopt calm bodily responses to their aggression *they* become, rather than their church, responsible for employers' "changes". An informant says:

In the first time we are not yet got used to each other. Before, every time that she needs something, eh...from her wardrobe, clothing, there are many clothes... "Give me that!!!" And if you cannot give that she will come and grab it. She was so arrogant in the beginning. But, I did not react, I did not react. I gave all patience; I gave her all the respect. And that made her change. Yes, that made her change because maybe she said that this is a helper who is calmer than me and I am an employer. So, maybe in the night she is thinking about it because there was a time that she said to me "yes, I know we are not talking too much, but our minds do, do the talking.

In domestic work, silence is a common Filipino body state and practice, independent of religious affiliation. This technique of the body awareness augments as it moves in the cross-cultural context. Women 'have to' speak about their bodies and their bodily intentions in order to reveal the realm of reciprocity they are trying to create. Women of the INC, facing the double hierarchies of both church and work, also abandon the ambiguity of silence and resort to the power of words. These words, though, seem still a rather spontaneous act of the body as they transfer original, emotional bodily experiences of religion to that of work. For all Filipinas, though, it is the performance of extreme forms of body silence that directly question the non-reciprocal character of power relationships and defy employers. It is through the overwhelming gesture of silence that they confront the rigidity of static, asymmetrical relations.

4. Conclusions: The Relational Power of Silence

In this article, I focused on the micro-level to discuss body and its silence(s) in religion and work. Even though the texture of data on body practices and silence(s), collected mainly through participant observation, strongly resist schematized models of analysis (which, as a result, may seem exaggerated), they lead to some interesting conclusions. The first concerns the mediating role of silence in religion and work. According to Taussing, “sound provides a perfect vehicle for absent presence. Sound is like a metasecret or the “skin” of the secret, announcing, but concealing its content, and it is precisely this skin that represents the mysterious line of transgression, which has to (yet must not) be breached” ([73], p. 357). Silence, as the thinnest and most malleable of sounds, makes the mysterious line of transgression fainter and its mediating role stronger. The multifaceted character of silence(s) lies between body rules and norms produced ‘from above’ and individually produced models of relating, all realized through this Filipino body practice. In both contexts, silence(s) works as a hidden transcript and simultaneously as a public transcript, to use Scott’s terminology. The second concerns the type of transformation such a mediating body tool, as silence, creates. The mediating character of silence, just described, is transferred to the relationships it builds. Thus, the mediating and dynamic qualities that silence carries are affecting the strict relationships of asymmetry on which it is applied. As a consequence, stable and all-powerful structures of INC and domestic work become or point to fluid, dynamic, reciprocal engagements. The third, and last, conclusion, concerns transformation *per se*. Transformation in religion has been defined “as the capacity to change bodily form at will” ([74], p. 982). Even though Smith was referring to gods and spirits’ ability to change their body shape, here we have an example of changes of people’s body shape and sound. Silence makes this transformation of bodies incomplete, never-ending, always subverting its subversive power. Lawrence claims that “by subverting transformation in its overtly evolutionary, determinist sense [...] one can reclaim its validity for religion and religious studies” ([75], p. 346). Body and its silences seem to offer a good example of such transformations where female agency never forms a concrete and complete code of emancipation or even a method of resistance.

For Mahmood, agency is “a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable” ([76], p. 210), while Qureshi questions such an approach that places agency outside the self on the grounds that agency inheres in the women themselves ([77], pp. 122, 133–34). In the case of Filipinas in Greece, migration plays a crucial role as graduations between reflective and unreflective practices of silence clearly depend on encounters with alterity. Layers of reflectivity are constructed both relationally and situationally and cultural awareness is enhanced under the gaze of various Others. The (dis)placement of people that migration entails makes specific forms of agency more overt, active and, thus, easily connected to the self. Homo-ethnic contexts, also filled with encounters with alterity, make similar agential practices seem more detached from the self, oscillating between traditions, discourses and disciplines. However, all of the above center on reflective thought(s) and presuppose a subject that is a product of discursive relations. Reaching far beyond active or docile agents, there is the bodily being and its immediate sense of the world that Merleau-Ponty describes. There, an embodied agency is already present. Sometimes, for a Filipina it is just silence and it is at this point too that nuanced transformations of female selves, relationships, and the world have already taken place.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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