Transnationalism and the Politics of "Home" for Philippine Domestic Workers

Pauline Gardiner Barber *Dalhousie University, Halifax*

Abstract: Gendered labour migration and transnationalism have become part of the ideological fabric of Filipino culture and nationhood. Local livelihoods and the meanings of "home" are being socially, politically and spatially recast through the unprecedented scale of women's migration. This article explores the cultural politics of Philippine labour migration and offers a critique of victimizing representations of Filipina. Homogenizing cultural idioms portray Filipina as dutiful daughters in families and of the nation, yet migrants' narratives reveal their agency and indicate their differences. Questions are also raised about whether the idea of a travelling culture accommodates the contradictory experiences of migrants. From their perspective, political aspects of travel, culture and economy are elided through a discourse of travelling, flux and the fetishization of the in-between mode.

Résumé: La migration de genre des travailleurs et le transnationalisme sont devenus un élément de la matière idéologique de la culture Philippine et du statut national. Les gagnes-pain locaux et les significations de «foyer» sont socialement, politiquement et spatialement reconsidérés tenant compte de l'étendue sans précédent de la migration des femmes. Cet article explore les politiques culturelles de la migration des travailleurs Philippins, et offre une critique des représentations des Philippines comme étant des victimes. Les idiomes culturels homogénéisants décrivent les Philippines comme des filles dévouées aux familles et à la nation, pourtant les récits des émigrants révèlent leur agence et indiquent leurs différences. Des questions sont également soulevées pour savoir si la notion de culture itinérante contient les expériences contradictoires des émigrants. De leur point de vue, les aspects politiques du voyage, de la culture et de l'économie, sont élidés tout au long d'un discours de voyage, de changement continuel et du caractère fétichiste de cette situation «d'entre-deux cultures».

Introduction

Dependence upon Philippine labour migration is sufficiently important to the Canadian economy and imprinted on middle-class urban Canadian consciousness that a recent column in *The Globe and Mail* (September 18, 1997) included having a Filipina nanny, along with the gas-guzzling four-wheel-drive, as one of the status symbols associated with the "thirtysomethings of the world." In the Philippines there is also an emergent taken-for-grantedness that women—young and old, poor and middle class—might, could and even should seek work overseas. In this work I discuss some of the processes which underlie the scale and form of what is best viewed as the exporting of Philippine gendered labour from the Philippines, how labour migration is constituted in the Philippine development policy and the gender and cultural politics that sustain migration. My main concern is to examine some of the implications of the globalization of "home" for Filipinos, or what can be called Philippine "ethnoscapes" in Appardurai's sense.

This article has four main parts. First, I discuss ethnoscapes and transnationalism which comprise part of my theoretical argument for how labour migration is transforming gendered cultural politics in Phillipine society and, indeed Philippine transnationalism. Next, I discuss the contours of Philippine labour migration and its gendered qualities. Then, I provide examples of the negotiation of gendered femininity in Philippine social spaces and most importantly, how labour migration narratives reflect agency and the changing politics of place in migrants' homes. In conclusion, I draw from the circumstances of Filipina cultural politics of travel and place to direct some critical questions to the literature on travelling.

My research in the Philippines to date spans five years and has been based in the Visayas. Most important was my initial research on gender and livelihood in Bais, a coastal community outside of Dumaguete, the capital

city of Negros Oriental in the central Visayas. There, I first encountered remittances from overseas labour migration as one aspect of household livelihood.[1] Subsequently I have commenced preliminary research (in 1996) on gendered identities and the cultural politics of Philippine transnationalism building upon my research in Bais and by conducting interviews on university campuses and in communities near the city of Iloilo, Panay in the western Visayas.[2] I also draw upon several interviews conducted in Canada with Filipina from the Visayas who are working in Nova Scotia.

Transnationalism as Theory and Practice

I use a transnational perspective to analyze how gendered Philippine labour migration is shaped through the forces of global capitalism, the gendered cultural and class processes negotiated by migrants both within the Philippines and in the countries of destination, and through the "social fields" created by migration flows. Anthropologist Roger Rouse (1995) argues that transnational capital formation has transformed cultural and class identities in the U.S. to predispose people towards evermore individualized subjectivities and modes of consumption. Arjun Appadurai (1991), with less attention to capital formation and more interest in deterritorialized, travelling culture, offers the concept of ethnoscape to refer to new configurations of identity made possible by the forces and flows of late capitalism. Both of these models apply to Philippine labour migration.

Transnational anthropology, Appadurai proposes, can reveal how migrants and other displaced groups frame their identities in terms of common historically and politically situated perspectives, even as they also experience socio-spatial-cultural dislocation, deterritorialization and perhaps, disjunction. This means that for migrants we cannot read off their identities in simplifying bipolar, hyphenated terms (for example, as Filipino-Canadians). Instead, Appadurai envisions migrants' identities as composed of several deeply meaningful, fluid attachments, akin to landscapes. Within these multistranded "scapes," each distinguished by a primary organizing principle—such as the trope "ethno" which connotes shared ethnic identity—people negotiate their social experiences mindful of their culturally diverse and complex social, political, economic and, most importantly, spatially transposed affinities. Thus, shared ethnoscapes can be seen to constitute larger social formations, regardless of the actual location of the places called "home." Ethnoscapes, but one of a series of scapes, become the "building blocks" of "imagined worlds"—in Anderson's (1983) sense—spreading around the globe. Moreover, ethnoscapes can have an unprecedented effect upon the politics of (and between) nations, as is certainly true for the Philippines. In his model of globalizing spatially reconfigured local cultures, Appardurai also allows for the possibility of historically more stable human communities and experiences. However, again relevant to contemporary Philippine society: "the warp of . . . stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move, or the fantasies of wanting to move" (1990: 297).

In one sense, my paper is about the contrarieties of the particular kind of mobility which Appardurai (1990) casts as "tragedies of displacement," in this case for the migrant Filipina who become domestic workers overseas. But I also suggest that women's agency is a crucial aspect of their displacement. Because of this, tragic may be too harsh as a term for their circumstances. Politically, I emphasize the role of the Philippine state in encouraging migration and remittances even as it smooths over the negative implications of the transnational positioning of so many of its citizens. Theoretically, I question tendencies in the burgeoning recent cultural studies literature on travelling which invoke a generalized alterity (or "othering") and appeal to the seductiveness of travel. This is all part of postmodernism's widely orchestrated celebration of late, fast capitalism's hypermobility, globalization and subject fragmentation, as described by Harvey and others (Harvey, 1989: Massey, 1994; Pred and Watts, 1992; Urry, 1995). In addition to the important questions about culture, gender and class politics that arise from their circumstances, I address whether current theories of mobile culture and cultural displacement adequately accommodate the experiences of Filipina whose travels follow a particular model of gendered labour and familial obligation.

Transnationalism addresses cultural and social processes which span nation-states and in fact deterritorialize emergent forms of nationalism (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994). Two decades of escalating Philippine gender labour migration have transformed Philippine ethnoscapes, the ways in which people in various Philippine communities imagine their personal futures in different social and geographic locations. Emergent Philippine ethnoscapes do in fact disarticulate the tidy fit of culture, space and place so prominent in earlier models of migration. As Tyner (1994) and others have demonstrated, conventions in the mainstream academic literature on migration are more inclined to see migration in terms of structural forces, like push and pull

factors and/or experiential ruptures, and their statistical representation. Tyner goes on to note that outside of policy and advocacy discussions, the gendered labour migration of Asian overseas contract workers, particularly Filipinas, remains undertheorized. Moreover, I suggest, the cultural politics and agency of labour migrants are also overlooked.

Within national contexts, the complexity of transnational cultural politics in immigrant experience is sometimes sociologically recast in reductive nationally specific discourses, as in Canada where Philippine labour migrants become a category of workers (domestic service workers), a type of immigrant—immigrant woman in feminist writing—or members of an "ethnic" community. The promise of transnational anthropology is to forge a course through reifying structural explanations, tendencies towards cultural essentialism, and/or unfettered postmodern subjectivities. The challenge is to explore the complexities of lived experience where culture is neither conflated with place nor rendered static, coherent and outside of time and the workings of capitalism; to reveal how culture is articulated through the lived experience of political economy. For Filipina labour migrants, transnationalism allows for discussion of how historically produced, gender and class identities and subjectivities collide and sometimes collude with state policies.

It is precisely this intersection that I trace next in my review of the Philippine state's promotion of gendered labour migration through the direct manipulation of historically resonant, gendered cultural idioms in Philippine culture—dutiful daughters, migrant mothers—women who are cast and recast alternatively as heroines and victims. Shifts in the meanings accorded migrant Filipina reveal political struggles over the reliance of the state upon the economic contributions of overseas workers and other migrants, and the social complexities of emergent practices of gender and class identities in Philippine society. Furthermore, Philippine labour migration, as orchestrated by the Philippine state and on occasion challenged by social activists and, sometimes, individual women, is becoming normalized within the culture of daily life in the many historically, culturally and socially distinct localities which make up Philippine society.

My argument is that the cultural meanings accorded contemporary Philippine labour migration and the emergent Philippine transnationalism it inspires are transforming gender and class practices within the Philippines. Hence gendered labour migration resounds in the cultural politics of place. Politically this situation is paradoxical and contributes new spatial dimensions to Philippine nationalism (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc,

1995), predicated as it is on migratory transnationalism. Despite and because of political interventions and discourses which alternatively "heroine-ize" or victimize the lives of women labour migrants, the labour flows continue. As I will show later in the article, women who migrate reject both of these characterizations about contemporary Filipina identity. Instead, migrants embrace experiential contradictions. They give and accept multiple readings of their experiences. They may well be dutiful daughters, and many of them are migrant mothers performing surrogate "motherwork" in other people's families; nonetheless, the public discourses about Filipina victims and heroines actually flatten migrants' experiences in politically expedient ways.

The Contours of Labour Migration

The export of Filipino workers overseas was initiated under Marcos's government during the 1970s, aided by a World Bank-sponsored telecommunications infrastructure which facilitated the subsequent increased scale of migration (Sussman, 1995). In the post-Marcos period, labour migration has escalated and changed both in terms of the composition of the migrant labour force and in terms of the destination countries to the point where it has become central to the state's debt management strategies (Chant and McIlwaine, 1995). The number of Filipinos working abroad, legally and illegally, is staggeringly high. In 1995, the Philippine Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration estimated there were 4.2 million migrants. Feminization of Philippine international contract labour migration is relatively recent. During 1992, approximately half of the officially recorded first-time contract workers were women; by 1994, women made up 60 percent of neophyte migrants (Go, 1997).

Asian regional labour markets have increased the scale of their deployment of Philippine contract workers. Hong Kong exemplifies this trend. In late 1995, of the 150 000 foreign women workers resident in Hong Kong—one of the primary regional labour markets for Filipina—120 000 were domestic workers from the Philippines. This situation compares with the total number of 38 000 foreign domestic workers reported in 1987, up from several hundred in the early 1970s (Constable, 1997). Other prime destinations for migrant Filipina contract domestic service workers—euphemistically termed "overseas contract workers" by the Philippine state and known as "OCWs" or "DHs" (domestic helpers) in Philippine communities—are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait in the Middle East and Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia in Asia (Go, 1997). Canada

and the United States provide a different case because of immigration policies which can lead to permanent migration. In labour-receiving countries that provide employment for large numbers of foreign domestic workers with limited work contracts, Filipina comprise the most prominent Southeast Asian labour force, followed by Indonesian and Sri Lankan women. Middle Eastern states have seen the greatest recent increase in officially executed export visas for Filipina (Heyzer, Lycklama and Weerakoon, 1994).

Philippine contract labour migration is subject to rapid changes arising out of the peculiarities of Philippine political economy which Sussman (1995) describes as dependent-integrated. Philippine foreign policy machinations and regional instabilities affecting destination countries also produce sudden changes. For example, the Gulf War saw the repatriation of many thousands of foreign workers (Heyzer, Lycklama and Weerakoon, 1994). As with many groups of foreign workers, large numbers of Filipinos work illegally, a situation which renders them particularly vulnerable to abuse from their employers and makes all official statistics subject to qualification. The Philippine Overseas Workers Welfare Administration estimates that in 1995, of the total labour migrant population (4.2 million), 42.7 percent went undocumented (Go, 1997). Various commentaries also concur that over half a million relatively well-educated women leave the Philippines each year to take up employment (or rather, under-employment) in foreign labour markets (Arao, 1991; Beltran and De Dios, 1992; CIIR, 1987; Eviota, 1992; Heyzer, 1986; Heyzer, Lycklama and Weerakoon, 1994; Tacoli, 1995). One recent analysis of the international labour market dynamics which cheapen Filipina's labour both within the Philippines and overseas, characterizes Filipina as "Women of a Lesser Cost" (Chant and McIlwaine, 1995). Gendered ideologies about domestic labour, care-giving, mother work and Philippine aptitudes, within the Philippines and in countries where Filipina are sought after as domestic service workers, sustain this migration flow and belie its economic origins (Bakan, 1995; Bakan and Stasiulus, 1997; Beltran and de Dios, 1992; Macklin, 1994; Pineda-Ofreneo, 1991; Silvera, 1983; 1993).

In keeping with the scale of gendered labour migration, Philippine foreign investment and foreign policy are negotiated with a view to the country's economic dependence upon remittances from overseas workers and other migrants (Sussman, 1995; Hernandez and Tigno, 1995). The displacement of Filipino women has become politically contentious globally, as international media carry stories on the plight of individual migrants, the

most well-known being Flor Contemplacion and Sara Balabagan. Since the execution of Flor Contemplacion in Singapore in March 1995, Filipinos have become quite militant in calling for government officials to be more assertive about the welfare of Philippine overseas workers,[3] but particularly domestic workers. For example, in May 1997, the Philippine ambassador in Singapore acted quickly when a Filipina domestic worker resident in Singapore was arrested on a murder charge. Government officials called for people to remain calm and were quick to communicate that the woman had confessed to the murder. Clearly, these actions were contrived to prevent any public perception that yet another travesty of Singapore injustice to a Filipina was about to unfold.

At other times, however, when the Philippine state has been more proactive on gendered migration, protests about the curtailment of Filipina's rights have flared up. This happened in 1988 when President Aquino's administration restricted exit visas for select destinations with the expressed intention of forcing labour-receiving countries to implement certain basic labour policies for contract domestic workers.[4] A cartoon in the *Far East Economic Review* on March 17, 1988, captured the social conflict by representing President Aquino reversing the Cinderella metaphor. The president, as the fairy godmother, waved her wand over a tearful Filipina domestic worker down on her knees clutching a scrubbing brush. The caption read: "No. You Can't Go (to) the Ball!" The contradictions manifest in this struggle over the conditions for the exporting of labour versus workers' rights to sell their labour, are underscored by the state's dependence on migrant Filipinos and the transnationalism this spawns. Over the last five years there has been an escalation in Philippine public discussion about the experiences, both positive and negative, of women overseas workers. To counteract protests, articles in Philippine newspapers routinely also draw attention to the sacrifices of Philippine overseas workers, and Filipinas working overseas are particularly lauded for their contributions to the national economy.

My research reveals that migrants have different reasons for leaving the Philippines and that they draw upon sources of knowledge and social networks that are quite varied. Nevertheless, there is now a certain "taken for grantedness" about the possibilities and pitfalls of labour migration expressed by people of quite different social backgrounds in the Visayan communities I visit. For example, people are not at all surprised that Philippine transnationalism would be the subject of my research, nor that I would expect them to have direct knowledge from friends and relatives, if not firsthand

experience, about women leaving the Philippines to work overseas. Likewise the return of Filipinos from overseas destinations punctuates the routines of daily life in many Philippine communities. In these ways migration and transnationalism have become part of the ideological fabric of Filipino culture and nationhood. In what follows, I suggest some of the ways in which the escalation in scale, the gendered character of Philippine labour migration and the public discourses surrounding this exodus of women are transforming local culture in Philippine communities. Again, my argument is that politically this situation is paradoxical in that gendered labour migration is constitutive of a new form of nationalism, but one which is predicated on migratory transnationalism; such are the cultural politics of place in contemporary Philippine society.

Constituting Gendered Femininity

In February 1996, in commemoration of the 1986 "EDSA revolution" which ousted Marcos from the Philippines, President Ramos acknowledged the significance of Filipino migrant workers by praising what he called their "exemplary acts of heroism." Citing the case of one women who had rescued the children she cared for from a house fire, he offered commentary on the great courage shown by all Philippine overseas workers whose labours contributed to the well-being of their families and the nation as a whole. I characterize such women as dutiful daughters, who are often, themselves, also migrant mothers engaged in maternal sacrifice for the well-being of their families and nation.

The cultural potency of such exalting—and homogenizing—claims about the bravery of domestic service workers was emphasized for me during my most recent stay in the Philippines in May 1997. During a one-month period of residency on an Iloilo university campus, I encountered a different strand of Philippine gendered culture, one positioned within the Philippine middle class. The gendered representations and practices of the women and men in Bais coastal households who first introduced me to the realities of their less urbanized cultural economies and gendered labour migration were less consistent—and insistent—about gender proprieties. Bais women migrate but they do so for different reasons. In Bais, gendered labour practices and ideologies accorded privileges to males but they also afforded space for women's negotiated autonomy (Barber, 1995; 1996). This may be less true for more middle-class urban women in Iloilo, where normative gender boundaries and familial expectations seem more restrictive. And in fact, the literature reveals quite clearly that issues of familial

control and "escape" figures prominently in how the decision to leave the Philippines gets constituted in migrant narratives about leaving (Parrenas, 1997).

In an intensive intersession university course for approximately 20 women teachers and development practitioners, ranging in age from 22 years old to "50-plus," I and the two Philippine colleagues with whom I collaborated posed an exercise to encourage reflection on the acquisition of gendered knowledge in Philippine culture. In response to our request for completion of the sentence "As a Filipina I must...," all the course participants positioned themselves exclusively within their familial relations without mention of wage work, careers or the extensive community service performed by most middle-class women, often in the context of their churches. They described their culturally based understandings that as women they felt they were expected to get married and devote themselves to serving their husbands and other members of their families whilst maintaining a neat, peaceful, well-run household. Self was to be realized through meeting the needs of others, if not sublimated.

The group had had limited exposure to feminist critiques of gendered inequities in Philippine society, hence their attendance in the course. Striking to me was the number of women who spoke openly about their interpretations of the dictates in Philippine gendered ideology for women to submit themselves to familial male authority and to maintain expressions of femininity in accord with male desire and pleasure. This ideology dictates that Philippine women should, as one woman put it: "be slim, sexy, faithful, do the household chores, be beautiful, wait for a male companion, have a baby, and be taken care of by her husband; she must be a martyr."

Not surprisingly, our further discussions clarified that the women were demonstrating their understandings of the anthropological distinction between normative and actual cultural expectations. Subsequent discussions exposed numerous contradictions and complexities in this starkly sketched, somewhat stereotypical pastiche of "martyred" Philippine femininity. This is not how these women actually live their lives but, importantly, that they believe that other women do follow more closely the norms prescribed by Philippine culture. Several women were also forthcoming about the creative avenues through which they, and other women they knew, circumvented and at times subverted these cultural ideals. Ironically, for the younger women of the group, overseas work remained one possible means of retreat from the more onerous aspects of gendered submission within Philippine middle-class families. This

shift spatially transposes the familial (patriarchal) control into a new location—that of commodified domestic labour in a different familial, national and cultural context. The nexus of control over women and their labour process is transacted in globalized labour markets which are mediated through the kinds of state-to-state relations discussed previously. The Philippine state oversees this migrant labour contract; indeed it facilitates it. Dutiful daughters in the family context become dutiful daughters in the wider social field, the new—to them—spaces and places of international domestic labour markets.

From the point of view of middle-class Filipina labour migrants (the majority of the legally registered migrants), the important point to be made here is that this move can be construed as a form of resistance to restrictive cultural and familial controls. While research indicates that to view such a shift as liberating is problematic because of the severe exploitation of Filipina migrant labour (by employers and states), some women see it this way nonetheless. The search for personal autonomy through wage labour overseas remains one paradoxical aspect associated with the agency of young middle-class women. There are others. Little research on Filipina overseas workers leaves space for what we might construe as "agency"; that is, seriously addresses their modes of dignity and resistance, without discounting exploitation and abuse. However, one study of women working in Japanese entertainment-sector labour markets reports a somewhat controversial finding, perhaps politically efficacious to state agendas: "There is little doubt that the female workers had derived significant benefits from their labor migration" (Osteria, 1994: 55). Moreover, while this study and others suggest familial duty is part of the motivation to seek overseas employment, the young women in Japan also expose the contradiction that working overseas frees them from the constraints of familial control. Working in restaurants and night clubs in Japan clearly provides some Filipina with well-paid overseas jobs, even if such jobs are filled by a relatively small minority of Filipina labour migrants. Such examples provide some insights into the migrants' agency and move beyond the polarized discourses of victims and heroines promoted by the Philippine state. For the women who are successful in establishing themselves in well paid (and personally "secure") contracts, and who do not feel compelled into desperate measures to retain their jobs, work is construed as both helpful to their families and, potentially, as a vehicle for greater personal freedom.

Other research, most of it also survey based, for example on domestic workers in Hong Kong, places greater conditionality on women migrants' experiences. One study links women's "job satisfaction" with their overseas employment to factors, ranked by degree of statistical significance, such as salary, the nature of their personal accommodation, the nationality of the employer and the number of relatives in Hong Kong (French and Lam, 1988). Another, later survey challenges any use of the discourse of "job satisfaction" as descriptive of the disadvantages faced by Hong Kong-based Filipina, who serve the financial needs of their families and the labour needs of the industrializing Hong Kong economy (Lane, 1992), and I would add, the needs of the Philippine economy. All this literature points to familial relations and ideologies—what I here embrace with the ideologically suggestive trope of "dutiful daughters"—as key to the complexities of how gendered migration is sustained in the politics of place in local communities and as part of transformative, transnationalized national culture.

Thus, the simple profile of normative gender ideologies, as described in the seminar class, affirming as it did some core values about femininity in middle-class Philippine culture, also confirmed that official Philippine policies and discourse on migrant Filipina domestic service workers strike a cultural chord which resonates deeply. Indeed, such discourse has transnational repercussions when it collides with ideologies about Philippine gendered culture in receiving countries. For example, in Canada, Filipina are considered to be particularly patient care-givers and childminders (cf. Bakan, 1995). It is striking that they also share this view of themselves. Further, as one Filipina working in Halifax suggested: "it is natural for Filipinos, especially women, to know housework" because of the relatively low level of technological support in Philippine families, where people of her generation typically were members of large families.

In terms of entertainment sector workers, the market for Filipina is also partly sustained through misplaced assumptions about the docility and sexual submissiveness of women from the Philippines. This image was fostered through the period when Philippine communities and Philippine women provided a focus for the recreational designs of a succession of occupations by colonizing agents and their military forces (Illo, 1996). Most important, in current Philippine dialogues on this topic, were the Japanese who captured "comfort women" for their sexual purposes during World War II. Americans, who have only recently vacated U.S. bases in the Philippines, perpetuated similar images of Filipina (Constable, 1997; Illo, 1996). Now, in the period following the base closures, the Philippine tourist industry, including eco-tourism, struggles against yet also sustains and is sus-

tained by images of compliant Filipina, some of whom are available for the paid sexual servicing of tourists (Barber, 1998).

While overseas migration was not presented as central to culturally bound stereotypes of contemporary Philippine femininity in our seminar, our conversations about gendered understandings and practices soon turned to overseas workers. In this subsequent discussion about actual cultural processes and practices, migration was evidently part of the seminar participants' immediate experiences. They confirmed how it is becoming entrenched in the ideological fabric of gendered Filipino culture, a "fact of life" which is manipulated by the state and supported through the cultural and religious idioms surrounding gendered selfhood, family, community and nation. State initiatives such as President Ramos's EDSA address and the setting up of various enquiries into the circumstances of well-known cases of abuse,[5] serve both to normalize labour migration and the transnationalism it spawns and to secure the loyalty of all types of migrants and their kin to the nation. To leave and return has become typically Filipino, a means to self and cultural realization. For many Filipinos compelled by economic circumstance and these more invidious cultural incentives, being here, or there, or in-between is an ever-present possibility; spatial, social, economic and emotional ties are indeed fragmented, if not dislocated as postmodern perspectives would suggest. But why, how and to what end? And, how do the contemporary modes of labour migration differ from earlier forms? To ask such questions is to reveal historical trajectories which link so-called postmodern experiences with the social consequences of political-economy and the imposition of capitalistic modernity, in this case in Philippine society.

For women from the central and western Visayas, employment contracts as domestic workers in Hong Kong remain—even with the uncertainties of the 1997 shift in governance—a more desirable work location than Middle Eastern countries, where personal freedoms appear to be quite restricted because of the dictates of religion, custom and repressive state attitudes. For example, Eva, from the summer course, met some younger women students while visiting an Iloilo bank. Conversation turned to the purpose for visiting the bank, where Eva learned her friends were in the throes of negotiating employment contracts in Hong Kong. She asked: "Look what happened to Flor Contemplacion and Sara Balabagan, aren't you afraid?" Their answer was a resounding "No." They said that they doubted Hong Kong would change quickly and, significantly, whatever happened: "It would be their fate!" These young women and indeed

many other Filipina contemplating labour migration appeal to the Filipino cultural idiom of *"Bahala na,"* which communicates not only a sense of fatalism but also that: "It's in God's hands." Still, fate is negotiated with agency.

Christina's Agency

Working with the social knowledge that circulated amongst her circle of friends, about the constraints associated with various foreign labour markets, a woman I call Christina negotiated an employment contract to work in a hotel in Dubai. Thirty years old, and herself the daughter of an Iloilo-based domestic "helper," she made the decision to apply for the Dubai contract after a period of underemployment in Manila. In selecting employment with a five-star Dubai hotel, which she described as hosting a more Westernized clientele, she calculated that she would be less subjected to some of the more exploitative and degrading employment scenarios she had heard about in Middle Eastern countries; for example the utilization of hotel staff to provide sexual services to hotel guests—an ever-present possibility in her view—in lesser-ranked hotels.

Christina uncritically accepted violations of her personal privacy and her body as routine aspects of overseas employment. Discussions with friends and state-sponsored seminars for overseas workers prepared her to accept that she would be subjected to routine pregnancy and stool tests and could be arrested if she were suspected of consorting with men. In fact, she told me that one Filipina who had worked in her hotel had developed a relationship with a male Filipino also working in the hotel. Rumour had it that this woman had become pregnant and had been jailed for the duration of the pregnancy. Christina believed stories that the woman's child would be taken from her at birth and the woman would be deported upon her release from prison. However, Christina's greatest sympathies were reserved for illegal Russian immigrants who were forced to sell their bodies and were extremely vulnerable to excessive male violence, even death, in Dubai society. With such comparisons at hand, Christina considered herself extremely fortunate in her employment and did not acknowledge having any regrets about the restrictions on her sociability in Dubai. When I met her she was happy to be home in Iloilo for a visit lasting several months and she was delighted to bring luxury gifts home to relatives, such as gold jewelry and leather goods.

After graduating from university with a Bachelor of Science, Christina had relied upon Manila-based social contacts to help her secure employment as a secretary.

Her salary of 4 000 Pesos barely covered the expenses necessary to maintain herself in the Manila economy. Frustrated with her situation precisely because "she was working for herself and not her family," Christina accepted the advice of two friends of hers who were knowledgeable about jobs in Dubai and initiated negotiations with a job recruitment agency for an employment contract. The employment contract cost nearly three months in wages with payments spread over several months. In addition to the cultural risks of Middle Eastern employment, Christina took a calculated economic risk that she would recoup these costs, be able to return money borrowed from kin and would have some left over to share with her family. Christina is the seventh "dutiful" daughter in a family of 12 children. She is not the only overseas worker in her family. Her 37-year-old sister is completing her first two-year contract in Malaysia with apparently benevolent employers, while her brother works in the boiler room of a Norwegian-owned ship under employment conditions and wages that are satisfactory to him. All the siblings plan on renewing their contracts with their current overseas employers, yet they remain committed culturally and economically to place and kin in the Philippines. The remittances Christina and her family send home are used by their parents to educate their younger siblings and the children of yet other siblings. They also provide emergency funds for kin when called upon. While Christina's Dubai wages are only 1 000 Pesos more than in Manila, her employer provides her meals, accommodation and a work uniform. Like many other Filipina migrant workers, her dream is to start a business, in her case a piggery.

Cultural Politics and Capital: Beyond Agency and Bahala Na

I did not tell Christina that the literature on Filipina return migrants reports that aspirations to start businesses with the capital acquired from wages earned overseas are typically not realized (Cruz and Paganoni, 1989; Lane, 1992; Osteria, 1994). Instead, return migrants are more likely to use up any capital they have acquired through repayment of debts arising out of employment and recruitment related costs and debts they feel obliged to pay on behalf of kin. Capital is also sometimes exhausted in meeting the increased consumption aspirations of the kin the overseas workers felt compelled to support in the first place. I see this as one further aspect of the "dutiful daughter" familial ideology that is fuelled by gift-giving conventions in Philippine culture. It is also a form of social capital that becomes more deeply commodified

through the increased exposure to foreign consumption styles in travelling. Televisions, one material indicator of the receipt of remittances in Philippine households, also feed aspirations for increased levels of material goods. Educating kin, as a means to self-reliance for that relative but also as a form of social capital for oneself, appears to hold a top priority in the allocation of remittances to the families of migrant Filipina. This is true both for the temporary overseas contract workers like Christina and for more permanent immigrants like Ima Tiangco and Portia, described below.

I will now provide further examples of how culture travels, and people are not really where they want to be in these here, there and in-between modes. The women whose travels I represent in short vignettes below are deliberately selected to capture the variability of the mobile cultural politics which comprise contemporary Philippine ethnoscapes, in each of the three modes, beginning with the Canadian "here." I will then offer some concluding remarks about the theoretical implications of the gendered political consequences of Filipino travelling.

How Culture Travels

Eufracia (Ima) Tiangco's obituary appeared in August 1995, in one of Halifax's daily newspapers. Ima was born in Tarlac province in the Philippines 81 years ago. She died in a large provincial hospital in the Philippines. Her obituary does not describe the circumstances surrounding her migration to Canada, nor her departure from Canada and her homecoming. As is the case with many Filipina who migrate to Canada, Ima was employed on the housekeeping staff of a large public hospital, in her case in Halifax. One of Ima's surviving seven children resides in Halifax, the other six live in the Philippines, no doubt under improved material conditions because of her overseas work and residence. The life sketched in the obituary spans two countries and cultures. Filipinos in Nova Scotia knew her as a member of their organization, suggesting that her desire was to maintain contact with transposed Filipinos like herself, as part of her Canadian cultural environment. But her family in the Philippines, the cultural environment of "home" and the place where she died and was buried, also clearly retained a powerful emotional draw in her life.

Portia is in her late 40s and has lived in Halifax for just over 10 years now. Portia lives in Canada but her cultural affinities and social orientation remain firmly tied to the Philippines and Filipino travelling culture. Like Ima Tiangco and many respondents in overseas contract

workers' surveys (Cruz and Paganoni, 1989), she muses about returning to the Philippines when she becomes elderly. She also visited the Philippines two years ago and plans to go again in the next few years. For now, she considers her job difficult, mostly because she provides care to an elderly person for whom she is solely responsible on a day-to-day basis, but she also considers herself fortunate to trust and have the trust of her employer. As she reconstructs her motivations for leaving the Philippines to live and work in Halifax, initially on temporary labour contracts, she casts her desire for travel and her curiosity about the world, the broadening of her ethnoscape in Appardurai's terms, as one of the main factors underlying her decision to leave:

> I was a wide reader. I read pocket books and magazines when I was in the family store. These pocket books are sometimes very descriptive . . . and I said to myself when I was still a kid, I want to go to places. But when my friend asked me if I wanted to come here to work, I said I don't know what to do. I know I can do the work and I have friends there so that will help . . . I had doubts, yes, but my employer kept my job open for me in the Philippines.

Family obligations and economic necessity played a lesser role in Portia's decision to migrate from her home community in the Visayas, in part because she felt secure in having a steady, if relatively poorly paid retail job to return to. As it turned out, Portia did not feel the need to return to her old job in the Philippines. Instead she renewed her employment contract and completed educational "upgrading" courses to facilitate her transition to Canadian landed-immigrant status. In Halifax, Portia has developed a circle of friends and built a sense of community for herself through friendships with other Filipinos living and working in Halifax, including the childhood friend who recommended her to her current employer and her niece, now working as a nanny in Halifax. While Portia's account of her life indicates her pragmatism and personal resilience, ambivalence marks her discussions about her earlier life in the Philippines and her loss of the deep, personal church-based friendships there. She contrasts these past affinities with her present circumstances where her social nexus remains planted firmly in a transposed form of Philippine culture; a constructed transnational place, an "over there but set up here." When Portia is homesick she telephones friends and family in the Philippines, and when she sees unfamiliar Filipinos on the streets of Halifax, she approaches them to assess their interest in identifying with herself and other "displaced" Filipinos, perhaps by joining them for one of their regular monthly outings. As she puts it: "I have two lives now . . . I can choose if I go there or here." It is the institutionalization of the elderly in Canada that compels her to see her future as being located in the Philippines, an imagined repositioning of herself into the familial context where she will be socially and spatially located within generations of her kin. Constructing a familial ambience for herself in Halifax has been possible up to a point, but she is constrained in this by the demands of her job and by the geographic dispersal of her North American friends and relatives, some of whom reside as far away as Florida.

Returning from the Philippines on a flight from Manila to Hong Kong, I recently met Ruth, a Filipino woman in her late 60s. I was curious about Ruth because she seemed older than many of the Filipina who become my fellow travellers to Manila. Actually, Ruth represents another face of mobile Philippine culture. She was sitting over the aisle from me carefully balancing a rather large, obviously very precious and lavishly dressed replica of El Santo Niño. We struck up a conversation in which I learned we were both to travel on the same flight from Hong Kong to Toronto. I helped with her bags as we negotiated the departure formalities at Hong Kong before boarding our Toronto-bound plane. The figurine in Ruth's care was approximately three feet tall and stood with arms outstretched, palms turned outward. Ruth was transporting the replica of El Santo Niño as a gift for her daughter, who had immigrated to Canada through the domestic worker's programme some 10 years ago. Ruth was to visit with her daughter in Toronto for three months. The daughter had not been feeling well, and Ruth hoped the presence of the holy icon, combined with her own skilful healing therapies, religiously inspired, would settle her daughter's ailments. Ruth also hoped to contribute to the costs associated with her stay in Toronto by extending her therapeutic services to needy Filipinos living in Toronto, members of her daughter's church congregation. As Nagata (1987) has shown, Christian churches provide one main institutional framework supporting the integration of Filipino immigrants living in Toronto. Ruth's affiliation with her daughter's church-based social networks eased Ruth's accommodation to Toronto while sustaining her daughter's (gendered) Filipina cultural sensibilities.

Where Ruth calls the Philippines home, even in travelling, Sarah lives in a more in-between mode, in an expensive condominium complex in Hong Kong's Discovery Bay. Sarah, also a Filipino domestic worker, considers herself fortunate to have part-time work as a nanny with several foreign families. She is paid what she feels is a

good hourly wage and has control over her time. She is also pleased not to be living with her employers because she is able to economize on her accommodation costs through sharing a modest apartment with other Filipino domestic workers. When Sarah's Canadian employers recently took a trip to Canada to introduce their baby to his grandparents, her employers encouraged her move into their condominium unit during their absence. They also assisted her in making arrangements to have her 10-year-old daughter visit with her from the Philippines at this time. The daughter in the Philippines remained in the care of Sarah's parents during her absence. Sarah accepted her employer's offer because her own living space is so cramped. This situation of being emotionally inside her employer's "family" yet spatially and culturally separate is not without tension for her, as she said: "They want to visit my place which makes me ashamed. They say we are all friends and I shouldn't worry, but I do. They cannot really understand my life."

Again, I learned of Sarah's circumstances through a conversation which began casually between myself and a fellow traveller in the Hong Kong airport. My research to date places Hong Kong as a key labour market for women from the Philippines who seek contact with foreign employers, themselves temporarily resident in Hong Kong. Filipina who make contact with actual or potential foreign employers often use those contacts to facilitate their entry into more distant, comparatively better-waged labour markets, such as those in Canada. Maria Perez, now a citizen of Canada living in Ottawa, whom I first met in Bais during one of her several trips home, represented this trajectory known as "cross-countrying" in her life history narrative.

In 1996, when I last visited the coastal community in Bais Bay, Negros Oriental, where I have been doing research since 1992, Maria Perez's son was preparing for his imminent departure to Canada to join his mother and aunt. Approximately 10 years ago, Maria moved to Canada in the employ of Canadians she first met in Hong Kong. When she became eligible to apply for Canadian landed-immigrant status, Maria resigned from her job as a domestic worker and sought employment as a community nurse with a private-sector agency. This career move provided Maria with a better hourly wage and some flexibility in her hours of work. She devoted her spare time to upgrading her educational qualifications through a course of study at an Ontario community college. Maria's previous employers, with her assistance, subsequently contracted her sister to take care of their children.

With the anticipated arrival of her son, Maria is about to accomplish one of her primary goals in coming to Canada, that of providing her son with greater economic opportunities then he would have in the Philippines. The son, now a young man in his 20s, has been raised by his maternal grandparents during his mother's absence. He has been a constant worry for his mother, in part because she feels that her material support for him and her natal household has led him to become rather self-indulgent. As she put it "he lacks a work ethic and is only interested in having a good time." Because he had ready access to cash through the remittances she sends home, Maria also feared that her son was a desirable suitor in the eyes of his female companion's parents. She feared an accidental pregnancy would produce pressure for the son to marry at a young age. In her view, these pressures upon her son will dissipate in the Canadian environment once he settles in and embarks upon some kind of educational training programme. Maria, then, is intent upon establishing a broader representation of family on the Canadian side of the places she calls "home."

These examples should really be balanced by an example of daily life which is not fractured by the comings and goings of migrant travellers. Susan and Luciano Lopez provide one such example (see Barber, 1995). Their livelihood practices include fishing on Luciano's part, as well as Susan's enterprise in a range of activities including vending, sewing and raising livestock. Although not wealthy by any means, Luciano is one of the more "successful" fishermen in the barangay, and the Lopez family is relatively better off than many other Bais fishing households. But even here, on my most recent visit to the family in April 1996, I learned that May, the eldest daughter in the family, a graduate from a community nursing programme, is working in Manila in a small shop owned by her uncle. Such a move was not projected during my previous visit with the family some four months earlier. Wages from this job, for which she is overqualified, are preferable to those for domestic workers in Manila. Luciano asked me about his daughter's employment prospects in Canada as a domestic worker, revealing that even in this previously stable household, consideration is being accorded to labour migration.

The desire for greater economic security for three younger children in the family motivates the Lopez discussion about Canada. While May Lopez would probably migrate to Canada if she could, in fulfilment of her duties to the family (and through this, in Ramos's own words, "duty" to the nation), she is also drawn by the promise of opportunities for herself in Canadian society. The experiences of her "neighbour" Maria Perez, who now lives in Canada, are well known locally in the Philippines. Maria's modest Canadian wages as a nursing assistant

appear high in comparison with Philippine wages. Thus, the Lopez family have now planted Canada firmly in their shared ethnoscape; the imagined and longed for, local and globalized configuration of home(s).

The Cultural Politics of Travelling

Do theories of mobile culture and cultural displacement accommodate the experiences of this group of women travellers? For example, the concept of "travelling culture" has been posed by Clifford, Appardurai and others as a vantage point for consideration of displacement and migration, mobility and hybridity, globalization and root-edness. "Travel" in such arguments, is said to invite reflection about historical, material and spatial processes and practices. It is also claimed in this literature that travel subverts the conflation of culture with locality, what Appadurai calls "ethnographic essentialism" (1991). As noted earlier, there is questionable lack of attention in this literature to historically specific modes of travelling and the social class dynamics which compel this. But in addition, my research questions the persis-tent reductionism implied in tropes like travelling. Can the idea of travelling culture, which is deliberately con-trived to avoid binarisms, adequately accommodate the paradox for Filipina (Christina, Ima and her kin; Portia, Ruth, Sarah and Maria Perez), whose lives are marked by the contrast between the "home" they have left but still support economically and the "home" where they work and live. Also, in the example of the Lopez family, there are the "homes" they wish to constitute for their chil-dren in Bais, and for May in Canada. Along with such multiple locations of "home" go numerous imperatives to travel back and forth.

Many further examples of the multiple cultural, social, economic and political ties in migrant's lives sug-gest to me that this form of divided attention, experien-tial and material, temporal and spatial, has become one significant feature of contemporary Filipino culture. Fil-ipino local loyalties are expressed through the idea of returning, often in a transient mode. Thus it is not with-out significance that many Filipino home comers, *balik-bayans*, choose their originating *barangay* fiesta month for their routine yet symbolically charged homecomings; in such moments we see the symbolic inversion of the Lopez's current dilemma. For the Lopezes the hope for a future better life is associated with Canada. For the homecoming *balikbayans*, "home and the local" are asso-ciated with the better life, a paradox that I am proposing must be theoretically accounted for. From the perspec-tive of Filipina, important questions about the political

aspects of travelling cultures are subsumed within no-tions of travelling and flux, getting there rather than being there, what we might term the fetishization of the in-between mode. Certainly Filipinos travel, but since culture, all culture, is constituted through material and symbolic practices, culture retains connections to dis-tinctive locales even as experiences, ideas and practices from globalized exchanges transform culture. The Philip-pine state's approach to Filipino mobility acknowledges as much.

In conclusion, I would suggest that there are very real political and social consequences associated with the exodus of gendered migrant labour from the Philippines. My argument is that migrant Filipina incorporate local and global experiences into their cultural politics; a dou-bleness pervades their experience as they straddle bor-ders and draw upon comparisons from more than one cultural and class location. The meaning of the local, key in which is the idea of "home," shifts with new more globalized experiences. In our rush to prioritize the com-plexity of experience and valorize individual subjectivi-ties and identities, fragments and fluxus, novelty and mobility—all important principles in what has come to be called postmodern theorizing (see Knauft, 1994)—we should not overlook the commonality in experiences shaped by historical political economy and gendered class and racialized relations. Nor should we allow formal the-oretical discourse to stand devoid of content. To do this is to valorize travelling without specific travellers, which is a tendency in some of the recent interdisciplinary travel writing (for example, Chambers, 1994).

In his well-known essay on travelling culture Clifford begins his discussion of travel encounters with a com-mentary on writings about hotels, surely one site of Western gendered (male) class privilege and a prime example of the treatment of travel as generic. In the locating of travel experience in hotel rooms and in the absence of a more full-blown discussion of the social rela-tions of travel, travel as a trope becomes pure form minus content. Later in the essay, the locus for reflecting the travelling culture problematic shifts more towards cultural power and politics, but perhaps this is too little too late. He asks, in what could well be a research agenda for the Philippines:

> How are national, ethnic, community "insides" and "outsides" maintained, policed, subverted, crossed— by distinct historical subjects, for their own ends, with different degrees of power and freedom? (Riding, at times on the same planes . . .). (Clifford, 1992: 108)

Travel and writing about travel can indeed provide a lens into how Western hegemony is constituted and reconstituted in a globalized mode (Nash, 1994). On one side of the frame sit those elite travellers who luxuriate in being away from home, whether temporarily as tourists, anthropologists and other writers, or as temporary residents, in the case of members of the management strata in business, development and state bureaucratic agencies (Hannerz, 1990). Displaced persons such as labour migrants and refugees take up the remainder of the space. That one group regards the other as part of the novelty of their experience is a curious feature of contemporary travelling dialectics, which much of the literature on travel writing fails to grapple with adequately. As in Clifford's case, migrants and displaced persons are positioned on the periphery of the discussion. They are read off or added on in much the same way gender and race used to be appended to class in earlier, pre-feminist and proto-feminist sociological discussions (Moore, 1988; di Leonardo, 1991).

In later work on diasporas Clifford (1994) more directly acknowledges the class and cultural layering of travelling. How could he not, given that displacement is central to diasporic lives? But much cultural studies writing on travel continues to valorize the experiences of the wilful, self-indulgent, curious traveller, more often than not as an unclassed, ungendered, ethnically unspecified traveller, more so than the displaced and migrating; the tourist, the cosmopolitan and the expatriate, rather than the overseas worker or refugee. The travel literature also indulges the Western audience for these narratives. In this, postmodern treatments of travel—either as experience or encounter—paradoxically obscure the still-potent structural foundations of their theorizing. The very modernity that so-called postmodern theorizing seeks to transcend persists unscathed, if not implicitly bolstered. Along with this goes the denial of the political economy of all forms of travel, past and present, imperial and imperious, and the historical continuities people such as the migrant Filipina described here must contend with and contest as they reconstitute their means of livelihood through familiar (Illo and Polo, 1990) and novel social and spatial fields (Barber, 1995).

There is nothing particularly new about labour migration from rural to urban settings in Western and non-Western countries (Smith, 1989), or internationally as revealed in the history of North American migration (Wolf, 1982). However, the current scale of Philippine migration, its gendered character, and the structural dependency of the Philippine state on the economic nexus generated through migration is relatively recent

and quite dramatic. Also different is the pace of contemporary travel and the nature of contemporary transnationalism which are facilitated through and facilitating of the technologies of late 20th-century capitalism. All these features may well be novel, but historical precedents and preconditions in Philippine and other modes of travelling should not be overlooked.

As Appardurai correctly projects, the legacies of Philippine colonial history combine with current capital flows and their political and ideological trappings to inspire seemingly novel cultural accommodations and politics. Filipinos(a), and other moving groups, must weave their fantasies and define their needs against this backdrop of political economy and the constantly shifting terrain of policies regarding emigration and immigration; they "can never afford to let their imaginations rest too long, even if they wished to" (1990: 297). For them travel is never merely experiential. It is always strategic and inevitably political. Travellers have histories and are the bearers of class, ethnic and gendered relations as they constitute the politics of places. Just how truly politically contentious gendered labour migration can be was revealed by the official responses to the well-publicized brutalization of Sara Balabagan in the United Arab Emirates and the death sentence against Flor Contemplacion in Singapore in 1995. In the Philippines, the public debate and social protest over these tragic events provides part of the explanation for the current political discourse of heroic overseas workers and the cultural ideology of travelling.

Notes

laborations, research expertise and friendships without which my research would not be possible.

3 Over one year after the death of Flor Contemplacion publicized the difficult circumstances of migrant Filipina domestic workers in headlines all over the world, an article in the *Philippines Free Press*, June 15, 1996, reporting on a Manila-based United Nations conference on violence against women migrant workers bore the title "Sweet and Damned." The article is flagged with the subheading: "Pushing for a World Conference on Violence against Women Migrant Workers Has Yielded No Results."

4 President Aquino's initiative was partly in response to the policy deliberations of an international conference in Quezon City in 1987 on women's migration. This conference was organized by the Asia and Pacific Development Centre's Gender and Development Programme (Heyzer, Lycklama and Weerakoon, 1994).

5 For example, the fact-finding commission investigating the conduct of Alice Ramos, the Philippine ambassador to Singapore at the time of Flor Contemplacion's death (Saspa, 1995), and the rumoured diplomatic controversies associated with the delay in releasing the movie, "The Sarah Balabagan Story" (Ramos, 1997). In the case of the former, the suspensions initially accorded to senior diplomatic officials from the Philippine embassy in Singapore were lifted within five months of the death of Contemplacion, too soon for some critics. In the latter instance, Ramos (1997), writing for the *Philippine Press*, speculated on the possibility that the United Arab Emirates had applied diplomatic pressure to the Philippine government to prevent the release of a film potentially critical of its labour relations. The plight of other Philippine workers resident in the United Arab Emirates and accused of unlawful conduct rendered this process of negotiation fraught with ambiguities for Philippine officials, at pains to appease Philippine critics and foreign states.

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