

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Figures of Migration Gender, Kinship, and the Politics of Representation

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Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 60 no. 4 (2012): 513–54

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Figures of Migration Gender, Kinship, and the Politics of Representation

This article examines differences in the discursive representations of male and female overseas Filipino workers. Men have less discursive visibility than females, but men are seen as responsible breadwinners, virile, and/or threatening socioeconomic and international hierarchies, while women are contradictorily portrayed as heroines and bad mothers. These representations result from migration's tensions and contradictions with historically established gender and kinship norms. Because these norms are central to Philippine class and status hierarchies, elite and middle-class anxieties thus mediate migrants' representations. Further, the state and global political economy shape these representations. This examination compels a rethinking of Philippine migration flows as feminized.

KEYWORDS: MIGRATION · KINSHIP · GENDER · DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION · FEMINIZATION OF LABOR

Beginning in the 1990s, the proportion of newly hired female overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) increased relative to their male counterparts, reaching as high as 74 percent in 2004. Significantly, most female migrants occupy lower segments in the labor market, including domestic and entertainment work. The trend continued until its reversal in 2007 and 2008, when comparatively more male workers left the country, only for the previous trend to resume the year after.¹ Accordingly “feminization” has gripped the imagination of observers of Philippine migration. Some have even suggested that the female migrant is emblematic of the country’s marginal position in the world (Tadiar 2004; Tolentino 1996). Beyond the academe, the discourse of feminization has shaped popular culture, the state, and civil society.

This article contributes to a “postfeminization” perspective on Philippine migration by examining representations of male and female OFWs in Philippine discourses. By postfeminization, I do not refer per se to a quantitative shift in migrant patterns (i.e., the end of the predominance of female migration), but to a perspective critical of how women’s (and, consequently, men’s) migration has been interpreted. Specifically, it does not assume what it means to be female or male in the context of overseas work, but problematizes how notions of femininity and masculinity are defined and deployed in various discourses. This perspective is in contrast with how the feminization discourse takes the predominance of female migration as its starting point and interprets it via the optics of established gender and kinship ideals. As I argue in this paper, the discourse of feminization, by drawing upon hegemonic ideals, serves to replicate elite, middle-class, and state conceptualizations of what families are and what motherhood and fatherhood entail.

The approach this article takes is underpinned by the premise that social phenomena, including migration, are not simply brute facts, but the products of signification or representation, such as ways of knowing, political acts, and creative works. These practices, always embedded in time and power, compose discourses or “relational systems of meaning and practice” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 6). Representations therefore are historically and culturally constituted and politically determined.

Using materials drawn from news accounts, popular cultural productions, and academic studies, I argue that representations of migrants must be understood as the effects of gender and kinship norms that are tied

to the formation of the Philippine nation-state and its political economic structures. Representations of migrants reiterate extant ideals of kinship and gender, but also register anxieties regarding these ideals’ status in the context of increasingly prominent migration flows. Furthermore, these representations are mediated by apprehensions over class and status, and are shaped by state policies.

The Contradictions of Female Migration

Female OFWs are caught up in a discursive explosion, albeit one that puts them in a contradiction. While praised as the sacrificing saviors of the economy, their absence is simultaneously interpreted as dangerous for the family and the nation as it threatens the social fabric (Parreñas 2003). At the heart of this contradiction are assumptions on women’s role within the family.

Suffering Heroines

Overseas Filipino workers (both land- and sea-based) are today often referred to as *bagong bayani* (new heroes), although such a label originally targeted women.² In April 1988, in a meeting with Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong, then Pres. Corazon Aquino hailed them as “heroes of our country’s economy” (Mydans 1988).

Migrants’ purported heroism often pertains to their remittances that, in recent years, have become a major socioeconomic force. “Aquino’s appellation,” Gibson, Law, and McKay (2001, 369) tell us, “arises from a specifically economic calculus and an unquestioned belief in the national developmental potential of this income stream.” The association of female OFWs with heroism is at times justified by women’s supposed dependability when it comes to sending remittances, a supposition that requires further empirical investigation,³ but one that fits with perceptions of women as more reliable and astute when it comes to finances (Blanc-Szanton 1990, 351), an observation that has been made elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Brenner 1998; Errington 1990, 4).

Beyond economic reasons, female OFWs’ heroism is also informed by a notion of suffering that reflects the political culture of the immediate post-Marcos years (Rafael 2000, ch. 5). Crucially, what allowed the discourse of heroism to gain traction was the Singaporean government’s execution of Flor Contemplacion in 1995. Causing uproar in the Philippines and the frosting

Endangering the Family and the Nation

Notwithstanding the heroic status accorded to female migrants, women's migration is perceived as endangering the family and the nation by virtue of the migrants' physical separation from their kin. In 1995, in the aftermath of the Contemplacion case, then President Ramos described Filipinas' migration as "a threat to the Filipino family" (Agence France-Presse 1995, 11). While not against migration per se, he conveyed a negative opinion toward "overseas employment at the cost of family solidarity and the personal safety of the worker" (ibid.). Such an idea has continued to have currency more than a decade later, as can be gleaned when the head of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) "expressed alarm" over the predominance of female migrants as this has led to "millions of Filipino children" growing up "without their mothers" (Balana 2006, A11). Recently a POEA chief has expressed the belief that "the social cost of labor migration can be more substantially diminished if there are more male OFWs—more fathers landing jobs overseas—than women" (Dioquino 2011).

While celebrating women's migration's economic benefits, the mass media also present female migrants as bad mothers. Parreñas (2003, 30) notes that media accounts often portray female OFWs' children as faring "poorly," prone to vices, and as such are "social liabilities." This is exemplified in the commercially successful movie *Anak* (Child, 2000) where the female migrant-protagonist's daughter engaged in risky behaviors like premarital sex and the taking of prohibited drugs. Less pronounced in media accounts is the concern that, by being away, mothers render daughters vulnerable to sexual abuses from their fathers and other male caretakers (Jimenez 2008).

Civil society organizations are also partly responsible for female OFWs' negative portrayal, mainly by harping on migration's perceived negative effects on family life. Such a discourse is actively circulated by some organizations, framing female overseas work as "economically necessary, but socially unnecessary" as it results from the government's failure to generate local jobs (Ogaya 2004, 180).

Academics too are complicit. Aganon (1995), writing at a time when female migration was starting to become dominant, conveyed apprehension over broken families as a "likely result" of overseas work, despite admitting the absence of official accounts of the number of marital separations caused by labor migration, and despite conceding that the physical presence of both parents does not automatically equate to "quality" parenting. More than

a decade later, a prominent psychologist would describe female migrants' physical distance from their families as "BIZARRE" (Carandang 2008).

Inconclusive Data

Strikingly, discourses portraying female migration as ominous circulate despite the absence of conclusive evidence. There are, to begin with, no data that isolate the effects of women's migration from those of other social processes; most existing studies are constrained by nonprobability sampling and cross-sectional design (ECMI-CBCP, AOS-Manila, SMC, and OWWA 2004). Ogaya (2004, 180) points out that, while discourses on female migration usually focus on women as mothers, "official data on marital status of overseas workers are not available and that the limited evidence available suggests that there are more single than married migrant Filipina women."⁵

Moreover, these discourses circulate despite the fact that migration does not automatically result in marital dissolution; that overseas work may be a practical solution to troubled marriages given the absence of divorce in the Philippines; that women, even when overseas, continue to perform their roles as mothers and daughters; that the children of OFWs are generally doing well despite the absence of parents; and that new technologies facilitate transnational family ties (Aguilar et al. 2009; Arguillas and Williams 2010; Asis 2006; Constable 2003; McKay 2012; Tacoli 1999; Uy-Tioco 2007). All the more striking is the contrast with discourses in the 1980s that emphasized women's increased autonomy and decision-making power that resulted from the then dominant male migration (Ogaya 2004, 181). This suggests that marital separation due to overseas work is not the issue per se, but the fact that women are the ones who are leaving.

Migration and the Demands of Manhood

In contrast with their female counterparts, male migrants are rarely the subjects of discourse but, when they are, are often presented as responsible breadwinners and/or hypersexual men. At the same time, discourses disclose challenges to masculinity brought about by overseas work.

The Defeminization of Migration

Migration's defeminization in 2007 and 2008 afforded male migrants discursive presence and provided leads to the construction of male migrants. Defeminization was interpreted as conforming to views of men as stronger

and more resilient. One of Rivera's (2008) interviewees in Qatar, a Filipina overseas worker, exemplifies this stance when she welcomed the reversal of the trend on the premise that "men should go abroad since women are prone to abuses." This perspective, articulated by a lone OFW, resonates with and reflects wider views.

The POEA in fact has attributed the reversals of 2007 and 2008 not only to shifts in demand and host country regulations but also to the stricter deployment requirements on domestic helpers that formed part of the "supermaids" policy (Uy 2008), which as mentioned above was designed to decrease female domestic helpers' vulnerabilities and upgrade their skills and wage levels. No similar steps have been instituted for male-associated categories, suggesting women's identification with vulnerability. This view has remained current, with an administrator of the POEA citing "women workers' vulnerability to abuse" as a compelling reason for planning to deploy more male OFWs (Dioquino 2011). This view is also not just fairly recent, for as early as 1988 then Pres. Corazon Aquino justified the temporary banning of the deployment of female domestic helpers by virtue of their gender amid reports of exploitation: "We feel that the men are capable enough of protecting themselves. It is really the women who need extra protection from our government" (Ocampo 1988, 11).

The reversal was also interpreted in terms of men's oft-acknowledged role as breadwinners. Ubalde (2008), in reporting the reversal, cited a leading psychologist's study indicating that male migration, in contrast to that of women, "left only a little dent" on families because "fathers are generally perceived as income providers." This is precisely the frame of mind that led a wife-informant, "without ambivalence," to tell DeParle (2007, 2), "a good provider is someone who leaves." From the state's perspective the increase in male migration was economically preferable, as it involved a shift to occupational categories with higher wages, including those dominated by women, such as health care (Nieva 2008).⁶

This brief spell of defeminization affirmed established conceptions of manhood. Yet, seeing migration as consistent with manhood and its demands renders male migration as "natural," hence unproblematic, and therefore not a compelling subject of discourse. Tellingly out of the sixty-one or so movies produced locally since 1980 that feature and/or tackle overseas workers, only seven deal squarely with the lives of male migrants.⁷ Newspaper accounts, while more varied, feature female workers, given that

for the most part male OFWs are mentioned in the context of geopolitical conflicts, seafaring and piracy, or undesirable medical migration that leads to brain drain (e.g., *Business World* 2004; Contreras 2004a, 2004b; *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2004a; Santos 2007). Activists, unless they are dealing with the concerns of seafarers or male laborers in the Middle East, rely on images of female OFWs in pushing their agenda. Academics are not exempt, as there is a paucity of works that deal with male OFWs.⁸ Male migrants thus largely vanish from the public imagination.

Masculinity under Attack

Despite the association between masculinity and migration, conditions overseas make it difficult for migrants to hold on to idealized notions of manhood. These include, in the case of land-based OFWs, circumstances that prevent them from congregating and exchanging jokes or stories, as well as punishments and procedures designed to ensure obedience (Margold 1995). With seafarers, it has been demonstrated that the maritime industry constructs Filipinos as physically weak, subordinate, and at times sexually questionable (McKay 2007). In contrast, seafarers of other nationalities are deemed physically strong, learned, and hegemonic. The Philippine state's efforts to market them as skilled, pliant, hardworking, and cheap reinforce this perception further (ibid., 623–24).

Outside of work, male OFWs face other forms of violence, including sexual abuse, as attested to by Margold's (1995, 276) respondents who often alternated stories about strict rules and punishments with "confessions of their fears of homosexual rape by employers" in the Middle East. Moreover, male OFWs have been subjected to abduction and threats of death. Exemplary are the 2004 kidnapping of Angelo de la Cruz in Iraq and the capture of seafarers by pirates in North African waters, with about 769 Filipino seafarers captured since 2006, 61 of whom remain in captivity (GMA News Online 2012).

Defending Masculinity

One reaction to these conditions is to downplay them in favor of migration's benefits. The celebratory attitude by which state officials welcomed the 2007 and 2008 defeminization of migrant labor manifests this response, as it was premised on the increased opportunities represented by the new trend. Similarly, the media seldom report instances of male rape. Male OFWs

themselves seem to be complicit as they refrain from sharing with their kin details of the drudgery of their work, preferring instead to depict the fulfillment of their dreams (Margold 1995, 292; McKay 2012, ch. 5).

Another response is to reinforce migrants' masculinity via quotidian practices. This is demonstrated by how migrants in the Middle East sport moustaches, in some cases for the first time. One former OFW describes this as "a way of showing everyone that you are macho, especially to the Arabs . . . you are not a man if you don't wear a moustache" (Camacho 2006, A20). Failure to wear a moustache in fact carries the risk of attracting propositions from gay Arabs, being thought of as gay, or being subjected to sexual abuse. Moustaches also allow male OFWs to approximate Arab exemplars of masculinity, such as the religious police (ibid.).

At the extreme end is the representation of male OFWs as hypersexual. Their sexual activities with women are portrayed as providing relief, even if only fleetingly, from the difficulties of work. In some instances, such as of those working in Saudi Arabia, hypersexuality is seen as requiring creativity and willingness to contradict the gender and sexual norms enforced by state and religious authorities (Torres 2005), thus symbolically endowing male migrants not only with virility but also agency vis-à-vis oppressive structures. Meanwhile, seafarers are repeatedly pictured as womanizers who indulge in a "girl-in-every-port" practice (Sison 2002). The foregrounding of women as the "solution" to male migrants' predicament harks back to the 1970s when male migration was at its peak (Manalansan 2003, 10). Notably, while Filipino migrants' promiscuity is sometimes seen as endangering the family, there is an equal tendency to see it as a "natural" outcome of male sexuality, albeit compounded by conditions abroad.

These images are reinforced in popular culture. The wearing of moustache has been immortalized by the comic strip *Pugad Baboy*, in particular by the OFW character Kules (fig. 2). The comic strip's creator, himself a former OFW in the Middle East, based the character of Kules on his personal experiences and observations (Camacho 2006). As fig. 2 indicates, Kules himself faces the menace of male rape, which in this instance, is shown to have shaped discourses and perceptions on migration to the Middle East back in the Philippines, and at the same time, is something that Kules validated through his own interaction with Saudi men, represented in the illustration by a taxi driver whistling and looking rather mischievously at him. Meanwhile, *Dubai* (2005), one of the very few commercially produced



Fig. 2. *Pugad Baboy's Kules*. Reprinted with permission from Medina (1997, 9).

films that tackle male OFWs' experiences, revolves around a protagonist who is a womanizer; the plot is driven by a love triangle among two brothers and a woman. Similarly, the perception of seafarers as womanizers led to the commercial success of a song that posits the equivalence of "seaman" and "*si manloloko*," roughly "the one who fools around," but also "trickster" (De las Alas 2004).

Manhood as Always Already Heterosexual

These responses reinforce manhood's link with mobility, and affirm male OFWs' masculinity as inextricably tied to heterosexual norms and practices.

The emphasis on the possibilities offered by migration shores up men's image as breadwinner, which is an image male migrants themselves actively replicate (McKay 2007, 2010). By highlighting male OFWs as breadwinners, they become unimaginable outside the family and their roles within it. This mentality has even influenced public policy, as reflected in how seafarers are compelled to remit at least 80 percent of their wages to the Philippines, ostensibly to protect themselves and their families from vices (McKay 2010, 5).⁹

In reinforcing OFWs' masculinity, homosexuality is portrayed as a threat. This shapes migrants' behavior, as evinced by their need to grow moustaches so as to avoid same-sex rape. This practice precludes the recognition of same-sex desire among male OFWs, or even of the fact that there are gay Filipino migrants (cf. Manalansan 2003, 2006). It is also striking that this construction of homosexuality is in contrast with the way gay men in the Philippines are "rarely the targets of hatred or prejudiced violence" (Cannell 1999, 214).¹⁰

This comparison is indicative of the fear that is due not to homosexuality *per se* but to the precarious status of the male OFWs' masculinity overseas.

Finally, male migrants' hypersexual portrayal posits women as men's object of desire. No other forms of desire are rendered present, and women are depicted as passive objects of masculine desire, as if they cannot, on their own, possibly instigate sexual entanglements with men. Men themselves are characterized as weak and easily overpowered by sexual desire.

Engendering Mobility and Domesticity

As the discussion suggests, two sets of cultural ideals underpin the representations of migrants: (a) notions of what it means to be a man or a woman (specifically, to be a husband/father and wife/mother), and (b) normative assumptions of how families should be like, in other words, gender and kinship presuppositions. Male migrants are deemed performing their duties as fathers, are stronger and less prone to abuses than their female counterparts, and quite virile and secure with their heterosexuality in the face of demasculinizing conditions abroad. Female migrants are portrayed as reliable heroines who suffer from exploitation and thus require the state's protection, but whose absence violates norms of domesticity and threatens the family. In turn, marriages are expected to be permanent unions, and the family's well-being is seen as inseparable from the nation's survival. Representations of migrants draw upon these ideals, but also register anxieties on their contemporary status.

In practice, kinship and gender ideals are unevenly shared and not always conformed to. Three sets of examples illustrate this point. To begin with, the very notion of the Filipino family as defined by the nuclear unit, albeit numerically preponderant—composing 74.6 percent of Philippine households in 2006 (NSO 2008)¹¹—needs to be qualified as it may not necessarily reflect actual practices, even if ordinary Filipinos are exposed to and speak in terms of such a notion. Ethnographic evidence indicates that even where nuclear families exist at present, they are “nodes” that constitute broader networks (McKay 2012) and are inseparable from broader ties of kinship and reciprocity (Aguilar et al. 2009). In this context Castillo (1979, cited in Jones 1995, 189) speaks of Filipino households as “residentially nuclear but functionally extended.” Moreover, Stoodley's (1957) much earlier description of the family as a “rather adventitious unit” (238) with

a predilection for “splitting into conjugal groups at marriage” suggests that the nuclear household arrangement must also be seen in the context of the family lifecycle, i.e., an outcome that even if considered desirable may not be achieved. Indeed, previous studies suggest that nuclear families are more likely to be present in rural areas (Stinner 1977), and in urban areas are more likely to occur among the upper classes (Liu 1977).

In contrast with the distinction between domesticity and productivity that the ideals delineate, men and women share domestic and productive activities: childrearing is not an exclusively female domain, as husbands (and other kin) may be involved in the process; productive activities are not men's monopoly; and marital relationships tend to be egalitarian (Angeles 2001; Blanc-Szanton 1990; Cannell 1999, 52; Gibson 1986, 78, 94; Illo 1995; Jocano 1994, 42; Macdonald 2007, 134; Pingol 2001, 4; Rosaldo 1980, 102; Xenos and Kabamalan 2007, 264; Yu and Liu 1980, 170–75, 207).¹² Children's socialization partly reflects this egalitarian character as gender differentiation is introduced only by middle or late childhood, is not accompanied by strict boundaries, and coexists with gender-neutral aspects of socialization (Liwag et al. 1998).¹³

Finally, in performing their productive responsibilities women have been migrating, culminating in the present condition of out-migration regions “sending women disproportionately” (Xenos 1998, 54).¹⁴ Likewise, even if a Hispanic “double standard” (one that demanded premarital chastity from women but encouraged sexual adventurism among men) managed to permeate contemporary notions of sexuality, this is frequently not followed, with conformity depending on one's socioeconomic class (Yu and Liu 1980, 53–72; Xenos and Kabamalan 2007).¹⁵

The plurality of practices presents a caveat to efforts to ascribe homogeneity to gender and kinship, which, as the succeeding discussion indicates, come from state, political, and religious elites. Instead of seeing the family, masculinity, and womanhood in essentialist terms, these categories must be understood as complex and hybrid fields of meaning that provide models as well as constraints to actual practices. How actors draw from, live out aspects of, and contest models and constraints requires in-depth and context-specific investigation. Likewise, the plurality of practices calls attention to how definitions and models are constituted and attain authoritativeness.

Historicizing Gender and Kinship

Far from being natural facts, kinship and gender have been the subjects of regulation and codification (but also of appropriation and deployment) by the state and by elites. In turn, discourses on gender and the family have been implicated in the constitution of particular orders, including colonial hierarchies, postcolonial statehood, and class structures.

The Philippines in Southeast Asia

The cognatic kinship system and the cosmological emphasis on unity prevalent in Southeast Asia are responsible for the absence of rigid gender hierarchies in the region, as manifested by “women’s high status” (Errington 1990). The broad pattern is to see men and women as generally similar and whose roles are complementary, if not identical. Thus, even if there exists a sexual division of labor, such is “not enforced by social or mystical sanctions” as individuals may “perform tasks normally assigned to members of the opposite sex” (Gibson 1986, 40).

Women’s high status does not mean the absence of gender differences in the past. Gender did matter in politics, hunting, and warfare where men were deemed to have an advantage (Andaya 2001; Atkinson 1990; Tsing 1990). Also, while women were not prevented from embarking on long-distance journeys, the general tendency was for them to remain close to their houses (Andaya 2008, 110; Atkinson 1990; Siegel 1969; Tsing 1990). Significantly, the ability to engage in long-distance travel was correlated with prowess and the acquisition of potency (Anderson 1990; Errington 1990; Wolters 1999).

Relative gender symmetry was observed in precolonial Philippine societies, as indicated by women’s property rights, their significant role in ritual, agriculture (especially in rice planting and harvesting), alliance building, and conflict resolution, as well as their unencumbered sexuality and their ability to effect divorce (Andaya 2001, 4–7, 2008, 64; Aguilar 1998, 27; Blanc-Szanton 1990, 356–58; Scott 1994, 24–25, 38–39, 84, 185, 239).

However, attempts among the precolonial elite to solidify hierarchy within an otherwise fluid social structure focused on the regulation of their women’s marriages, a fact that Cannell (1999, 49–76) reads as signifying incipient patriarchal tendencies. Gender also made a difference in warfare, which was a largely male affair, albeit women participated via rituals and practices surrounding actual raids (Andaya 2001).

The Beginnings of Tradition

Spanish policies deepened and institutionalized preconquest gender differences, and produced ideals pertaining to mobility and domesticity. Colonial officials sought to create a public sphere dominated by educated elite men tasked with local administration and taxation. These men were expected to control their wives and daughters, even if there were also efforts to directly educate women (Blanc-Szanton 1990, 359; Camacho 2007). Central to these efforts were the notions that women should be chaste and sexually modest, be subservient to their husbands, and on the whole confined to the domestic sphere.

Parallel to these efforts was the emergence of the nuclear, monogamous, permanent, and heteronormative “family.” This was a reckoning of relatedness distinct from the preconquest kinship system that was more encompassing and fluid, defined by siblingship rather than parenthood, and indifferent to lineage (Cannell 1999; Errington 1990; Wolters 1999). The “family” was also in marked contrast with the easy dissolubility of unions, the nonproblematization of adultery, the absence of discourses on sexuality, and the nonpathologization of homosexuality and transvestism in preconquest society (Blanc-Szanton 1990, 357–58).

The “family” played a crucial role in the beginnings of class formation. Aguilar (1998, 57–58) describes it as a “conscious ideological category” that was linked to elite attempts “to preserve wealth ‘within the family,’” stimulated in part by the introduction of surnames and the colonial state’s regulation of inheritance. Whereas preconquest elites did not inherit power and wealth, colonial-era elites sought to accomplish otherwise.

Elite families sent their daughters to *beaterios* (religious institutions for women) to learn proper behavior, largely in preparation for marriage (Camacho 2007), whereas young elite men attended educational institutions in the Philippines and in Europe. The young men (i.e., the *ilustrados*), responding to racism, sought to recast themselves in modern masculine terms (e.g., through comportment and intellectual forays), and considered it imperative to reform their compatriots, especially bourgeois women. While they wanted to liberate women from the Catholic Church’s conservatism, they believed that women’s proper place was in the domestic sphere and that women’s sexuality should be restrained. As “society’s bearers of honors and virtue,” women for them “acted as ‘balm’ to soothe the rigors of men’s lives,”

and as daughters of the nation were tasked to “raise future generations of patriotic sons” (Reyes 2008, 257).

Seen in the context of the uneven effectiveness of Spanish efforts to shape indigenous practices, the elites’ participation in the transmission and reproduction of colonial gender and kinship norms attains greater significance. A number of precepts, such as masculine honor, the Immaculate Conception, and the suffering mother¹⁶ failed to resonate among the colonized; female autonomy and power continued to persist; and women did not stop exercising their sexuality (Blanc-Szanton 1990; Camagay 2010a). Women continued to act as spiritual brokers by becoming devout Catholics, and interestingly by pursuing sexual relationships with friars (Aguilar 1998, 42–43, 50). Women too pushed for education reforms and were involved in the revolution (Andaya 2001).

Moreover, even if marital unions were deemed indissoluble, nonelite families faced labor requirements that promoted extended (and at times permanent) separation (Andaya 2008, 109, 135). Church-sanctioned marriages were less common among lower-class women who “could not even afford morality,” and thus resorted to common-law marriages (Tiongson 1977, 1785, cited in Blanc-Szanton 1990, 368). Nonelite women in the nineteenth century were also engaged in productive activities (Camagay 2010b), and migrated to Manila for economic opportunities and sexual/marital reasons (Doeppers 1998). Lower-class women were engaged in prostitution, and at times ended up as mistresses of foreigners as well as Filipinos from the upper classes whose involvement with prostitutes and mistresses demonstrated their socioeconomic power and virility (ibid., 149–50; Reyes 2008, 19–20).

Coming to Terms with Modernity

The association between elites and gender and kinship norms was strengthened under American occupation, with the consolidation of a national class structure that occurred at this time. This consolidation is often attributed to political-economic factors, particularly the introduction of legislative elections; but, as Anderson (1988, 11) points out, the birthing of the elite qua ruling class was also dependent on the family, specifically the formation of strategic marital and familial ties with other elites. In utilizing marriages for pragmatic ends, the incipient ruling class extended the logic noted above of Spanish-era attempts at wealth preservation via the family.

Amid all of these, women had a contradictory role. On the one hand, Hispanic gender norms were certainly no longer secure; having established

possession of the Philippines, the American colonizers presented new opportunities to women, albeit framed in the imperial discourse of civilizing Filipinos. Women were “modernized” through the public education and health systems, and employment and professional opportunities became available as a result of urbanization and incipient industrialization. Such prospects were skewed for upper- and middle-class women, as women from the lower classes were eventually limited to the informal sector or to household activities (consequently reinforcing women’s domesticity); enacted were policies that ostensibly sought to protect female workers but were actually restrictive and that stereotyped women as mothers, physically different, and weaker (Blanc-Szanton 1990, 370–72; Feliciano 1994, 550).

On the other hand, the association of the public sphere with elite men was retained for the most part. When elections were introduced, only landed and educated men could participate, but in 1937 women attained suffrage. Women from the upper and middle classes pushed for female suffrage notwithstanding opposition from elite men who depicted women’s suffrage as anti-nationalist, pro-American, and contrary to women’s domestic role. Proponents of women’s suffrage succeeded, but only by interpreting political equality as consistent with precolonial gender relations that Spanish colonialism eroded (accordingly resonating with nationalist sentiments at that time), and by not rejecting notions of womanhood focused on the domestic realm (hence reducing resistance from male political elites) (Roces 2004). Such a strategy, while effective, did not challenge women’s association with domesticity.

During this time too the Americans permitted absolute divorce. However, conviction for adultery or concubinage was required, standards for which were biased for men (Feliciano 1994, 550; Reyes 1953, 45). It was not until 1941 that a more liberal divorce law was introduced by the Japanese-sponsored government.

Politics and the Return to Tradition

If Spanish colonialism involved the genesis of “traditional” gender and kinship ideals, and if the American colonial period witnessed partial deviation from such ideals, the years surrounding decolonization involved their appropriation and deployment at a time when Philippine society was undergoing transformation. These ideals were also at the center of political struggles.

The soon-to-be-independent Philippine state strived to build a national army, and in the process disseminated gender and kinship constructs (McCoy 2000). Men were imagined by political elites as endowed with strength and virility, and burdened with the task of defending the nation; women were seen as weak, in need of defense, and charged with the duty of staying home and rearing the next generation (*ibid.*, 324–26). Echoing the earlier debates on female suffrage, some elites also expressed concern over how American-introduced modernity endangered aspects of traditional life, including womanhood. Yet, as Blanc-Szanton (1990, 373) points out, traditional womanhood was the one shaped by Catholicism.

Absolute divorce was also repealed during this time despite efforts to liberalize requirements. This “return to tradition” was attributed to Catholic forces’ “vigilant and militant” efforts (Reyes 1953, 49, 55). Furthermore, the passage of the Civil Code in 1949 formalized restrictions on female autonomy and mobility prior to and during marriage,¹⁷ codified uneven standards for legal separation that were similar to those set for divorce during the American period, and assigned to husbands the responsibility to support wives and children (Feliciano 1994, 551–54).

This rearticulation of ideals occurred at a time when peasants fighting for national liberation and class struggle challenged the elite-led socioeconomic order. Combined with the universalization of suffrage, this unrest amounted to considerable pressure from below (Anderson 1988, 14–15). In contrast to state and elite constructions of femininity, women from the peasantry participated in the armed struggle (Lanzona 2009).

Change and Continuity: Martial Law and Beyond

In its bid to centralize state power, the Marcos regime deployed “traditional” gender and kinship norms for political ends. The Marcoses presented themselves excessively and spectacularly as exemplars of Filipino masculinity and femininity, specifically as father and mother of a putative national family (McCoy 2000, 333–35; Rafael 2000, ch. 5; Tolentino 2003, 2009). Imelda combined established notions of femininity (e.g., beauty, charm, grace) with the modern woman’s ambition and autonomy, although in the last instance her independence and aspirations were subordinated to her husband’s; Ferdinand, in turn, portrayed himself as courageous, physically fit, and virile.¹⁸

The Marcoses’ opponents drew upon the same set of constructs when criticizing the regime, as when Benigno Aquino Jr. remarked that politics is not the proper place for a woman such as Imelda (Rafael 2000, 151–52). Seemingly oppositional, such a discourse affirmed received understandings of kinship and gender. “Tradition” indeed found greater saliency in the post-Marcos period, with Corazon Aquino’s popularity anchored on her positioning as feminine (as opposed to Ferdinand’s hypermasculinity) but of a particular kind (as opposed to Imelda’s modern/empowered/ambitious womanhood): suffering, pitiful, inexperienced, religious, and domesticated (*ibid.*, 211–12).

Albeit consistent with popular understandings of nationalism and heroism (cf. Iletto 1979), and although a departure from the dominant association between masculinity and politics, this deployment of femininity was also a return to constructs articulated during the Spanish conquest and revived at decolonization. Furthermore, it enabled the reconstitution of masculine (i.e., sovereign) state power, whose logic Marcos was an embodiment of, and which would continue to manifest itself in the Aquino years and beyond (Tadiar 2004, 183, 219–24; Tolentino 2009, 81). This usage of femininity also facilitated the discursive linking of overseas workers with heroism, which, as we have seen, is a key way of representing migrants.

A similar interplay of change and continuity informed post-Marcos legal constructions of the family. The family was recognized in the 1987 constitution as having a foundational role in society, and the state was mandated to strengthen and develop it. Moreover, women were given the responsibility of ensuring the nation’s biological and social reproduction. In consonance with these mandates, a new Family Code took effect in 1988. Ostensibly a modernization of family-related provisions of the 1949 Civil Code (via expanded grounds for separation and annulment, for instance), the Family Code drew from Catholic canon law partly as a response to the Catholic Church’s opposition to divorce; it likewise framed marriage in terms of heterosexuality, cohabitation, and sexual loyalty; and cemented women’s domesticity through provisions regulating mother-child separations (Aguiling-Pangalanan 1995; Feliciano 1994, 555–59).¹⁹

In articulating its view of the family and women’s role in it, the law reembedded women in an ideology of domesticity that traces its origin to as early as the Spanish conquest. Notably such reembedding occurred at a time

when state power and the national class structure were being rebuilt, thus revealing once more gender and kinship's role in "formal" politics.

Such reembedding could only be partial at best, for women, following Imelda and Corazon, have attained increased visibility in various public institutions, including electoral posts, civil society organizations and social movements, the judiciary, and even the military, although in some cases female participation is premised on taking on masculine practices (cf. Roces 2000). Beyond public institutions, women continue to participate in the labor market, both at home and abroad. Female entrepreneurs and business leaders have also become prominent.

Gender and Kinship Today

Hence, at the turn of the present century, we find "traditional" definitions of gender and the family comingling with more recent articulations and operating in the context of the bilateral kinship system that predates such definitions and articulations. This situation has been described as involving "considerable structural tension" (Xenos and Kabamalan 2007, 264) between reified rules and an otherwise flexible system. This, however, is not a case of norms competing with one another on equal terms, for social and political institutions privilege particular definitions of gender and kinship. Manhood is demarcated by its location (i.e., the public sphere), characteristics (i.e., strength, virility, mobility, autonomy), and obligations (i.e., defenders of the nation, providers for the family). Similarly, the household/social reproduction, chastity, physical weakness, immobility, and dependence delineate femininity. In turn, the family is designated as a heterosexual and permanent institution characterized by parenthood and the physical copresence of spouses. These are precisely the definitions of family and gender from which representations of migrants draw, reproduce, but also expose as precarious in the face of overseas work.

The Anxieties of Status and Class

The historical analysis pursued above indicates that the gender and kinship ideals that underpin representations of migrants are inextricably tied to colonial and national histories, having been shaped and propagated by political and economic elites. Today class and status continue to be salient in the context of overseas migration, as class and status anxieties emanating from the Philippines's upper and middle classes inform representations

of migrants. These anxieties are partly responsible for the negative representations of overseas migrants, both male and female, and accordingly bear testament to how migration provides material and symbolic challenges to prevailing socioeconomic hierarchies. More generally, these anxieties index how structures of class and status may be shifting in contemporary Philippines.

Selling Out, Giving In

For male migrants, class and status anxieties bring about discursive presence that disrupts the association between manhood and transnational migration. This is clear in the case of Elmer Jacinto from Lamitan, Basilan, who topped the medicine licensure examination in 2004 but opted to pursue a nursing career in the United States (his premedicine course was nursing).

Unlike the generally positive attitude toward male migration, Jacinto's case was met with indignation. His decision was framed as a "sellout," given the need for medical professionals in the country (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2004b, A12). Instead of responding to the demands of the nation, Jacinto was seen as giving in to "the dictates of commerce" (ibid.). The supposed preeminence of the nation gives way to material and pragmatic considerations, with migration resulting in "brain drain" or, as a Secretary of Health puts it, "brain hemorrhage" (Associated Press 2007).

Jacinto is among thousands of Filipino doctors who opted to work as nurses abroad, a phenomenon that reached its peak in the mid-2000s but has since subsided as a result of decreased global demand for nurses.²⁰ What made Jacinto's case highly prominent, however, was his having placed first in the medical licensure examination and, equally important, his class background. The son of public school teachers, he was born in a village populated mostly by coconut farmers where the comforts of modernity were barely present (electricity was available "only about once a week" and "they had no telephone, drew drinking water from an artesian well, and would receive the newspapers from Manila 'one week late'"), and where violent clan wars and skirmishes between state forces and insurgents and bandits periodically erupted (Contreras 2004a, A22).

By deciding to become a nurse in the United States, Jacinto called attention to the state of public health in the Philippines, in particular, to the plight of doctors. As Jacinto himself explained, his decision to pursue nursing in the United States stems from the lack of economic opportunities in the

country: “the pay here is no longer commensurate to what [doctors] have attained in the profession” (ibid., A1). The lack of appropriate economic rewards is particularly pronounced in the case of doctors working in state hospitals who contend not just with low pay but also heavy workload, conditions traceable to the lack of state support for social services.

The contemporary state of doctors is a significant deviation from their historical construction. As a profession in the Philippines, medicine was associated with elites traditionally (Choy 2003, 18), but has also come to include the middle class over time (cf. Seki 2012), and has often served as a marker of modernity. Doctors in fact often command power and respect in local communities. Moreover, access to medical services has served to stratify Philippine society, with high-end institutions and prominent physicians attending to the upper class. The lower classes make do with public hospitals that often lack facilities and personnel, do not obtain medical attention at all, or alternatively seek the services of folk healers deemed traditional and unscientific.

Nursing, however, is a popular profession for the middle and lower classes as it provides numerous opportunities for overseas work, sometimes to the horror of elite Filipinos who take pains to distinguish themselves from their underclass compatriots (Benedicto 2009, 295–98). In this regard, it certainly did not help that Jacinto did not come from an elite class background. Moreover, by electing to be a nurse, Jacinto and other similar doctors experienced a reduction of professional prestige, thus reflecting a contradictory aspect of class mobility in the context of migration (cf. Kelly 2012). Among the middle class, professional prestige is a particularly potent way of distinguishing themselves from other classes, most especially the lower class. For both the elites and the middle class, therefore, the massive conversion of doctors into nurses represented a challenge to hegemonic hierarchies of class and status.

The popularization of nursing as a profession, it must be noted, stems partly from the state’s weak regulation of education institutions, which as Ruiz (2007) explains is a factor, along with the resulting surplus of graduates, in the formulation of the government’s overseas employment program in 1974. In the case of nursing, requirements for nursing schools were relaxed in 1966 leading to a growth in the number of such schools, an outcome due in no small part to the relative power and strength of nursing school

owners vis-à-vis regulators (Choy 2003, 111). Regulatory weakness has since persisted, and nursing schools have mushroomed anew in the past decade, leading to the present surplus and diminished quality of nursing graduates (cf. Masselink and Lee 2010). While the government has sought to rectify this situation (e.g., CHED 2011), efforts were halted in the past by pressure from politicians who represented the interests of owners of nursing schools (Overland 2005). It is also notable that attempts to regulate nursing schools are framed by government officials in terms of deregulation’s negative impact on nurses’ employability (Masselink and Lee 2012). Amid all of these, the Philippine state is unable to prevent medical doctors from enrolling as nurses, much less from working abroad. Thus, a senator addressing Jacinto’s cohort of newly licensed medical doctors could only say “we cannot begrudge you but only appeal you to stay” (Contreras 2004b, A4). In this sense, Jacinto’s case does not only call attention to the ills of the health system, but also underscores state weakness and cooptation in general.

Indeed, state weakness and cooptation surfaced again when Jacinto and some 27 fellow nurses accused their recruitment agency in 2006 of failing to comply with the terms of their employment, including agreed wage rates, benefits, and work schedule (Lirio 2006). Investigation revealed that Jacinto and company were victims of illegal recruitment as their recruitment agency modified their employment contract (i.e., who the actual employer was) to the detriment of the group. To complicate things further, while the recruitment agency was suspended briefly by the POEA, the suspension was eventually lifted upon the pressure of the then Presidential Chief of Staff who, it was alleged by an opposition senator, was acting on behalf of the recruitment agency (Philippine Senate 2006, 245–49).

Thus Jacinto’s decision to migrate, interpreted in the media as an act of betrayal of one’s country, might also be read as simultaneously the product and a critique of the very elite-led order that endows the medical profession with prestige, but does not invest adequately on the health sector, and disenfranchises the majority of its population health-wise. This same order is responsible for the marginality of areas such as Lamitan, Basilan, while benefiting from and perpetuating the weakness of state institutions. Jacinto recognized as much when he made this statement in the United States three years after the issue erupted in public discourse: “Patriotism is a two-way process. . . . It’s not only you as a citizen. It’s also

about the government that should also give you work, or something for yourself, to be able to live a dignified life” (Associated Press 2007, A17). In response to this and other similar critical views from doctors—perhaps best summarized by another doctor-turned-nurse’s remark that he does not “see any future in this country” (Agence France Press 2005, A2; cf. Seki 2012)—then Pres. Macapagal-Arroyo framed the migration of doctors and other professionals as an indication that “Filipinos are in demand and are world-class” (Cabacungan 2006, A7).

Seemingly in opposition to one another, the negative reception accorded to Jacinto by the media, as well as the critical view of Philippine society expressed by Jacinto himself, actually result from the very same middle-class consciousness that swings from identification with the Philippine nation-state to a disavowal of its existing hierarchies (Seki 2012). In other words, Jacinto’s case, including its interpretation in mass media, embodies the middle-class conundrum of wanting several things at once, including effecting change in Philippine society, maintaining a distinction between themselves and the elites and the lower classes, and achieving social mobility at a time when such mobility can perhaps be realized only by working overseas, a process that potentially entails going against established views of what are to be considered valuable, including professional prestige. It is this conundrum that unsettles the seeming compatibility of manhood and overseas work.

Transgression and Shame

As hinted above, the role of class in discourses focusing on female migrants is best gleaned through a comparison with househelps in the Philippines. While female OFWs (especially domestic helpers) have generated anxieties among the elites and the middle class, as manifested by how reports of abuses suffered by them abroad receive journalistic attention and lead to diplomatic activities, househelps barely make it to the limelight. Until recently, cases of abuse against househelps do not merit much public attention (Dumont 2000, 123) and their separation from their families is not subjected to scrutiny. Coming mostly from poor, rural backgrounds, househelps are deemed “backward,” “undignified,” and “non-essential” even if they are markers of status and modernity (Aguilar 2003, 140) and enable middle- and upper-class women to outsource part of their social reproductive duties in the family. Siapno (1995), writing in the context of the *Contemplacion*

case, pointed out this hypocritical stance by noting that most of those who complained of the violence accorded *Contemplacion* belonged to the elite and “most of these same Filipino elite treat their own women servants like animals.”

In popular culture, the marginal position of househelps in Philippine society is registered and rehearsed by the general tendency to portray househelps as relatively oppressed and powerless vis-à-vis cruel employers, as needing the salvific intercession of more powerful others (at times through romantic relations), or as objects of laughter and ridicule. In the comic strip mentioned above, *Pugad Baboy*, one encounters the character of Brosia, a Visayan househelp who is presented as simple-minded, with poor English language skills, and always the target of her employer’s unkind remarks, albeit able at times to retaliate with ripostes.

The comparison with househelps suggests that the attention given to female domestic helpers is not due to a universal concern for the family or human rights, but is informed, even if partly, by unease over social class and status. In a sense, this is not surprising because transnational labor migration is often anchored on promises of social mobility, and ultimately as Pinches (2001, 196) notes is “an attempt to escape the degradation of class in the Philippines,” especially among those coming from the lower classes.

On a quotidian level, this is demonstrated by how migrants and their kin, through investment, consumption, and related activities (e.g., building of houses; sending of children to private schools; investing in entrepreneurial activities), perform familiarity with the “modern” and enact socioeconomic mobility. This mobility comes, however, at the price of local resentment and the continued snobbery of the elite and the middle class that is often hinged on critiques of migrants’ excessive consumption that supposedly betrays their lack of cultural sophistication (Pinches 2001, 197, 206).

Migration’s broadly transgressive potential has also been noted, with one prominent sociologist even claiming, perhaps with undue exaggeration, that overseas workers constitute the “fulcrum” of the Philippines’s “transition to modernity” (David 2006). More thorough analyses indicate that labor migrants have challenged the elites’ erstwhile monopoly to represent the Filipino nation internationally. More geographically dispersed and numerically superior than elites and professionals, but systematically marginalized, these migrants have disrupted the hegemonic national imagination that privileges

the Philippines's relationship with the United States and constructs the nation as sovereign and at par with other nations of the world. Outnumbered and with no control over how "Filipinoness" is interpreted by the world, elite and professional Filipinos have responded through a discourse of "national shame" (Aguilar 1996; Rafael 2000, ch. 8).

Female migrants, particularly domestic helpers, are especially vulnerable to this discourse because of their sheer number and the marginality of their occupation. For instance, when the deployment of domestic helpers was temporarily banned in 1988, the then Secretary of Labor defended the government's decision by noting that the country has "virtually become a country of maids, cheap domestic labor to clean up after the rest of the world," a situation that he claimed "not only adversely affected the morale of Filipino women but the country's image as well" (Mydans 1988). This discourse has persisted over time, and when the Supermaids program was launched in 2006 a criticism raised against it was that it worked to keep the Philippines "a nation of servants" thus demeaning its citizens (*Philippines Free Press* 2006, 14).

However, the recent attention given to local househelps, mostly in connection with the passage of the proposed *Kasambahay* bill (the Magna Carta for househelps) appears to indicate that not all is hypocrisy when it comes to the status of maids in public discourse, especially among the middle class. The passage of the bill, while partly traceable to international pressure (i.e., the need for the Philippines to ratify and implement an International Labor Organization convention on the rights of domestic workers) (DOLE 2012; Gonzales 2012), is also the result of lobbying done by local civil society organizations, many if not most of which derive their constituency among the middle class.²¹ Also noteworthy is the fact that efforts to address the plight of househelps occur at a time when the public has been thoroughly exposed to the conditions that Filipina domestic helpers face abroad, thus suggesting that the attention given to the latter (especially in the aftermath of controversial cases such as Contemplacion's) may have led to a transformation in how househelps are valued in the Philippines or, at the very least, to the emergence of multiple and competing discourses on maids. This indicates that earlier discourses on domestic helpers as victims and suffering heroines may have transcended their original class and political contexts and are now working to transform class relations. The extent and the impact of this discursive shift remain to be seen however.

The State and the Political Economy of Migration

Representations of overseas migrants are shaped not only by historical constructions of gender and the family and status and class anxieties, but also by state policies and priorities that have contradictory effects on how migrants are imagined in various discourses.

Facilitating Remittances

Remittances act as a major incentive for the state's facilitation of labor migration. For 2012 alone, it is estimated that remittances will grow by 5 percent to US\$21.1 billion from US\$20.12 billion in 2011 (Chipongian 2012). The sheer amount of remittances has allowed interest rates to remain low and provided the country with a stable and sizeable source of foreign exchange, thus improving its balance-of-payment position, an outcome highly encouraged by international financial institutions and which post-Marcos governments have pursued unrelentingly. A relatively stable economy has allowed sitting governments, even if unpopular, to maintain power. In addition, remittances enable state elites to postpone crucial reforms, thus acting as what economists call a "moral hazard" (Pernia 2006, 7). Given the country's political economic structure, such a postponement accrues to the elites' benefits.

Thus, while overseas migration was initially conceived as a stop-gap measure, the political economic significance of remittances has allowed the policy to continue into the present. In enabling overseas migration, the state has utilized gender and kinship norms, despite its legal commitment to the institution of the family and notwithstanding elite and middle-class Filipinos' concerns over status and class. The state, as we have seen, has framed male migration as consistent with masculine ideals even if working conditions abroad may compromise migrants' masculinity. The state has also enabled men to take up jobs in fields otherwise identified as feminine (e.g., nursing), and has marketed particular groups (e.g., seafarers) in ways that deemphasize their manhood. Similarly, the state promotes female migration and praises female migrants for their sacrificial contributions to their respective families and to the nation, but presents these same migrants as endangering family and society.

Crisis and Sovereignty

By facilitating migration, policy makers and state officials do not only compromise extant kinship and gender norms and arouse class and status anxieties, they also place the state in a precarious position. Specifically, the Philippine state's constrained ability to protect its migrant citizens has led to the exposure of what Aguilar (2003, 152) terms its "political emasculation." This is demonstrated in cases such as Contemplacion's in 1995, the 2004 abduction of Angelo de la Cruz, and the continued spate of piracy in North African waters. Unable to protect OFWs, the Philippine state has become the target of criticisms and protests. Migration thus puts state sovereignty into crisis. The emasculation of the Philippines is hardly a new phenomenon for it has been historically embedded in highly unequal global relations of power. What is new is the extent to which Philippine sovereignty is bared as fictive.

Emasculation, however, is just one side of the story. Instances of OFWs' suffering have triggered the formulation of additional state policies that ultimately discipline migrants. As discussed above, this is the case with the Supermaids policy and the passage of the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act. State officials have also responded with performances of state power, such as attempts to save and repatriate migrant workers. In so doing, they portray a masculine and salvific image for themselves and the very state they purport to represent. In some instances, these performances are addressed not just to Filipinos but also to the international community, and may even trigger a recalibration of the Philippines's diplomatic relations. Strikingly efforts to depict state power have largely depended on the image of the suffering and victimized female migrant, thus suggesting, as I have noted above, congruence between state power and a discourse that has been used to critique state policies.

In the case of male migrants, assertion of state sovereignty may actually contradict dominant representations of them. Deemed victims who need to be saved by state action, male migrants lose their discursive invisibility and perceived invincibility from the challenges of overseas work. This representation is amply demonstrated in the De la Cruz incident, when the Philippine government decided to withdraw from the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq so as to secure De la Cruz's life. This decision dismayed the country's international allies, including the United States of America, long considered

to be the country's binary opposite in the global arena (Aguilar 1996; *Business World* 2004), but was justified by conjuring the image of a government "that cares" and which prioritizes its citizens' life "more dearly than international acclaim" (Macapagal-Arroyo 2004). The government's action shored up domestic support for the Macapagal-Arroyo presidency, which at that time was suffering from questions of electoral legitimacy. A leading newspaper even claimed that De la Cruz, "a lowly driver," was able to unite an otherwise "divided nation" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2004a, A1, A6). By deciding to choose De la Cruz's safety instead of international commitments, political elites purchased a veneer of autonomy for the state and enabled the continued survival of a regime that at several points was on the brink of collapse.

The State of the State

Overall the Philippine state's predicament is illustrative of two points. One, while migration flows highlight key weaknesses of the state, these flows also provide occasions for staging myths and narratives regarding its power. In the context of global asymmetries and a postcolonial predicament of uneven and at times ineffective state power, the assertion of sovereignty is heavily dependent on rituals and symbolic acts (Hansen and Stepputat 2005). Through these rituals and acts, statehood is consolidated and reproduced. Postcolonial statehood, in this respect, may be described as exhibiting a parasitic relationship with crises of sovereignty. For the Philippine state, the performance of statehood takes on a gendered characteristic for it depends on the discursive production of weak and subordinated (hence feminized) subjects who need the state's intervention, hence reinforcing stereotypical views of female migrants as suffering victims while reversing the image of male migrants as consistent with the ideals of manhood.

Second, even if the state may in fact uphold particular norms via the law, pragmatic considerations may generate policies inconsistent with these ideals. While the elite and the middle class may prefer such norms, material and political constraints could possibly prevent the active pursuit of these ideals by the state. Instead, the state may simply enact token and/or formal recognition, while leaving the task of reproducing and circulating these norms to other social institutions such as the media, the church, and schools. Moreover, the translation of elite and middle-class sentiments into state policies is a political act that depends among other factors on which

elite faction is in power, as well as the broader policy environment, which may constrain or enable particular policy directions. In the contemporary world, external conditions and actors increasingly circumscribe state policies.

Conclusion: Rethinking “Feminization”

This article has sought to problematize the discourse of feminization (i.e., offer a postfeminization perspective), which has dominated discussions of Philippine migration, by accounting for the differences in the way male and female transnational labor migrants are represented in various Philippine discourses. The representations of OFWs, this essay has averred, are at one level the consequences of historically established and institutionalized gender and kinship ideals that are part and parcel of the Philippines’s colonial and postcolonial experiences, including the structuring of its political economic hierarchies. These ideals normatively map men and women into the public sphere and the domestic domain, respectively. Class and status, however, mediate the relationship between representations of migrants and kinship and gender ideals. Representations of migrants are also shaped by the state, including its political and economic goals and the contemporary structure of its power.

In the case of male OFWs, because dominant ideals posit congruence between masculinity/fatherhood and productive work, these norms lend legitimacy to but may relatively invisibilize labor migration. In turn, migration reinforces constructions of gender and family life. Contradictions between manhood and overseas work are downplayed and OFWs’ masculinity is symbolically reasserted. Class and status anxieties from the upper and middle classes, however, may reverse the generally positive attitude toward male migration. The state, for its part, helps perpetuate the congruence between manhood and overseas work by portraying male migration as preferable. At the same time, it deepens this contradiction by marketing male OFWs as pliant and docile, as in the case of seafarers. When state sovereignty and national identity are compromised, male OFWs become subjects of state intervention, and thus help reconstitute the state’s power.

In the case of female migrants, because institutionalized and codified ideals identify femininity/motherhood with the domestic sphere, women’s migration attains high discursive visibility, albeit one marked by a contradiction. Female OFWs are portrayed as endangering family and society despite the absence of conclusive evidence, notwithstanding their

identification as saviors of the country’s economy. Moreover, partly because of women’s historical construction as subjects of the state’s protection, female migrants tend to be depicted as victims. The state plays a significant role in this contradictory portrayal of female OFWs as, on the one hand, it facilitates and enables their migration, while, on the other hand, continuing to uphold their domesticity. Also, by portraying female migrants as victims, the state is able to assert its power and authority. Class also shapes representations of female OFWs, as the concern over women’s transnational migration contrasts sharply with the eclipsing of their internal migrant counterparts, including househelps working for elite and middle-class households in the country.

When migration is perceived as possibly challenging existing relations of power, gender, and kinship norms (as well as other discourses, including nationalism) may be invoked to discursively contain these threats. However, while prevailing gender and kinship norms have elite origins, the elite’s (as well as the middle class’) deployment of and fidelity to such norms appear to be variable, depending on the broader consequences at stake. Migration itself is the result of policies fostered by sections of the elite and has enabled elite dominance to continue despite the challenges posed by OFWs. State elites rely on gender and kinship ideals in deploying OFWs, but in doing so actually put these ideals in a state of crisis. Moreover, particular representations of OFWs (e.g., as victims) enable the state to effect material and symbolic assertions of its sovereignty.

An analysis of discursive representations of OFWs highlights transnational labor migration’s centrality to contemporary experiences of social change. Representations of OFWs track the unsettling of the existing social order, as well as efforts to stifle such transformation. Gender and kinship, in other words, are battlegrounds in which broader struggles over social order—including class conflict, nationalism, and national identity, and the role of the state in a globalized economy—are played out. Gender and kinship are particularly crucial to these fundamental tussles given their close and seemingly obvious articulation with what is deemed “natural.” The invocation of gender and kinship during episodes of momentous social change is not isolated to the present moment of transnational labor migration, for as we have seen, this also occurred during other significant historical moments, including conquest and decolonization.

The analysis presented here alerts us to how the discourse of the “feminization of labor” deployed by scholars and activists in their critiques of the Philippine state’s labor migration policy, actually unwittingly recapitulates class-inflected and state-sanctioned images of gender and family life. Privileging the figure of the female OFW, in particular the domestic helper, the feminization discourse reproduces dominant constructions of femininity and domesticity that are inconsistent with the lived experiences of most Filipinos. Critique in this instance attains a conservative dimension. By obscuring the plight of male OFWs, the feminization discourse disables a thorough understanding of how migration differently affects men and women. A relational and comparative study of male and female OFWs, for instance, will allow a nuanced analysis of “oppression,” the conditions that give rise to it, and how it is experienced and challenged by OFWs in different settings.

Thus, in studying the role of gender and kinship in a given political economy, such as that of labor migration, one can neither simply focus on women nor talk about how political economic processes entail “feminization.” Instead the task from a postfeminization perspective is to understand how categories like “male,” “female,” and “family” have been defined historically, and how these enable and at the same time are transformed by given political economic processes. In the specific case of Philippine migration studies, this entails paying more attention to men and masculinities (heretofore understudied) and crafting critical histories and anthropologies of gender and kinship, especially those that do not conform to privileged norms. This also requires examining how gender and kinship norms are lived out, resisted, or transformed by migrants and their families. By focusing on this interplay, one begins to illuminate the power of social norms to govern and transform processes of global import.

Notes

Much shorter and earlier versions of this article were presented at the Philippine Political Science Association (2–3 April 2007) and the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (26–27 July 2007). This paper bears the traces of mentors and colleagues who encouraged and supported its writing. I am particularly indebted to Prof. Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. who introduced me to the field of migration studies and whose scholarship on the Philippines and Southeast Asia is something one hopes to emulate. My two other mentors, Oscar V. Campomanes and Benjamin T. Tolosa Jr., gave generous feedback on an early and raw version. Gino Trinidad and especially Zy-za Nadine Suzara commented on drafts. Kazuki A. Yamada encouraged me immensely as I

revised the paper and helped gather materials at the last stage of revision. I also acknowledge the two anonymous reviewers who provided extremely helpful comments. All errors and omissions remain my responsibility.

- 1 I derive these figures from the “Deployment per Skill per Sex” reports for the years 1992 to 2010 posted on the OFW statistics webpage of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (<http://poea.gov.ph/stats/statistics.html>). See also Uy 2008.
- 2 For an account of male seafarers’ subjection and response to the discourse of heroism, see McKay 2007.
- 3 Tacoli’s (1999) survey among migrants in Rome revealed that, while on the whole men send more money than women, the latter send a bigger percentage of their income and at a more consistent pace over time. Across countries, this appears to be the pattern, as reported by the International Labor Organization (David 2008). However, Semyonov and Gorodzeisky (2005) present contrary evidence based on a survey of four sending regions in the Philippines. Their analysis indicates that male migrants send more remittances despite controlling for income differentials.
- 4 This additional regulation is not necessarily effective. On the contrary, there are indications that it has encouraged increased illegal recruiting, and that training programs are ineffective. See Jimenez 2011.
- 5 Figures published by the POEA on its website are disaggregated by destination, sex, and skill category. Its figures are based on the OFW information sheets submitted by labor migrants prior to securing an Overseas Exit Clearance, which is required prior to departure. Information sheets do contain a field for civil status, but this field is not included in the various data series that POEA publishes. On the part of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, which provides stock estimates of Filipinos worldwide (including temporary migrants and immigrants), figures are by country only.
- 6 While in 2007 female migrants dominated health care occupational groups, such as caregivers and caretakers and professional nurses, male outflows for these categories increased compared to the previous year. I refer here to the figures on the top ten occupational groups among new hires by sex contained in POEA (n.d. a, b) (Table 17 for both reports).
- 7 Of these seven, three are commercially produced, while the rest are independent productions. Only one (*Dubai*, 2005) is a commercial success. This estimate is based on a (nonexhaustive) list of movies with elements pertaining to overseas Filipinos. John Estanley Z. Peñalosa, a former colleague at the Ateneo de Manila University’s Migration and the Family Research Group, did the original compilation, although I have updated the list to include several other films. Karl Fredrick M. Castro likewise helped update the original list.
- 8 Significant exceptions include the studies of Margold 1995; Manalansan 2003; McKay 2007, 2010.
- 9 In 1982 the Marcos government issued an executive order requiring OFWs to remit 50 percent of their earnings via Philippine banking institutions, an order that has since been repealed due to protests from migrants (see Gibson et al. 2001, 369). In contrast, the regulation of seafarers’ remittances continues to be in place.
- 10 This is not to deny the presence of violence or discrimination against gay men in the Philippines, but only to highlight how, by and large, Philippine society is tolerant of gayness.

- 11 This is based on the NSO's Family and Income Expenditure Survey, which defines "single nuclear families" as "composed of a father and mother with unmarried children or a parent with children," although the survey also considers single-person households and households composed of unmarried siblings as nuclear households (Erica and Fabian 2009, 31).
- 12 Earlier reports include Nydegger and Nydegger (1963, 854) and Stoodley (1957, 244).
- 13 Gender differentiation exists in aspects such as play behavior, household demands, behavioral restrictions, and responsibility training; to the extent that differences are pronounced these are linked to women's domesticity (e.g., girls more than boys are expected to stay home and do household chores) (Liwag et al., 1998).
- 14 At best, male dominance of migration streams holds true only for specific places and periods in time, such as the outflow from the Ilocos region before the 1950s and the inflow to Metro Manila from about 1896 to the 1920s (Doeppers 1998; Xenos 1998). At present, women may actually be preferred as migrants due to extant cultural expectations that women should contribute more to the household (Tacoli 1999).
- 15 Among Yu and Liu's (1980, 66) respondents in Cebu, 25 percent reported experiencing premarital pregnancy. Xenos and Kabamalan's (2007) more recent study based on a national sample, meanwhile, indicates that conformity to ideals regarding marital union and sexual behavior appears to be stronger among the upper and middle socioeconomic strata.
- 16 But see Ilete 1979.
- 17 Also, husbands were given the right to fix the family's place of residence, not to mention the right to object, under certain conditions, to their wives taking on jobs or professional commitments.
- 18 Aspects of the presidential couple's self-portrayal linger on in Philippine political culture years after the collapse of the Marcos regime. Varieties of courage and virility, for instance, also mark the Ramos and Estrada presidencies; future and would-be first ladies end up being compared with Imelda.
- 19 The Family Code stipulates, for instance, that in the event of a marital separation children below 7 years old are to remain with their respective mothers, unless the mother is found unfit to be a parent.
- 20 Estimates indicate that in 2005 about 4,000 doctors were enrolled in nursing schools (in addition to the 3,000 that have completed retraining between 2001 and 2003), and that in 2004 80 percent of government physicians were enrolled in or have completed retraining (Galvez-Tan 2005, Pascual et al. 2003, and PHA 2005, all cited in Lorenzo et al. 2007). The decreased demand for nurses is due to the increase in nursing graduates in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom (Evangelista and Alave 2008; Martel 2012).
- 21 A leading organization lobbying for the passage of the bill is the Visayan Forum Foundation (VF n.d.). It is interesting to note that, aside from their advocacy on the bill, the organization has been working on the protection of overseas workers, mostly in the area of antitrafficking campaigns.

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