Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies 2006 21 (1): 75-110

Filipino Women, Migration, and Violence in Australia: Lived Reality and Media Image

CLEONICKI SAROCA

Abstract. Drawing on interviews with Filipino women, this article explores the relationship between the lives of Filipino women and Australian media images of their migration and their abuse in intimate relationships in Australia. It is particularly concerned with the textually mediated discourse of the "mail-order bride," which positions Filipino women at the intersections of gender, race, and class. My analysis starts with the lived realities of Filipino women, the women's understandings of migration and violence, and their readings of the media images of these processes. First, their narratives illuminate how too often the media reportage neither accurately nor adequately portrays Filipino women, their migration, and their experiences of abuse. Second, they bring into clearer focus the dialectics of discourse—the way the media and other discourses about Filipino women feed into and sustain each other. Third, the women's narratives highlight the social effects of media representation—how images shape the lives of Filipino women and their social relationships and may even contribute to their vulnerability to male violence in Australia. Fourth, the agency that Filipino women exercise within the constraints of their intimate relations is revealed. The article demonstrates that media images do not reflect Filipino women's realities, and are in themselves sites of conflict.

Keywords. Filipino women · migration · domestic violence · "mail-order bride" · media image/lived reality · textually mediated discourse

INTRODUCTION

The official dismantling of the "White Australia Policy" and Marcos's imposition of martial law in the Philippines (1972) led to a rapid increase in the Philippine-born population in Australia over the following decades (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs [DIMA] 2005). This increase is attributable largely to intercultural marriages (Soriano 1995, 97). Migration from the Philippines to Australia is feminized. In the 2001 Census, there were 103,990

people–35,840 males and 68,150 females–originating from the Philippines in Australia, a 1:2 male-female ratio (DIMA 2005). More than 70 percent of Filipino women who migrate are sponsored as fiancées or spouses of Australian male residents (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 1999). In 2003, Australia was the third most popular destination for Filipino women who migrate for marriage after the US and Japan (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2004a). However, according to the New South Wales Filipino Women's Working Party, the sensationalist Australian media's portrayal of Filipino women as "mail-order brides," sex objects, and prostitutes has created a negative perception of all Filipino women, their migration, and their settlement in Australia (Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW 1992, 12). As Cunneen and Stubbs (1997, 113-14) argue, such racialized and sexualized images of Filipino women as submissive yet sexual beings render the women vulnerable to male abuse in Australia. They establish that, aside from indigenous women, Filipino women in Australia are almost six times more likely to be victims of homicide than other Australian women (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 31).

This article, that is based on my doctoral research and dissertation (Saroca 2002), explores the relationship between the lives of Filipino women and the media images of their migration and abuse in Australia. It is particularly concerned with the discourse of the "mail-order bride," which positions Filipino women at the intersection of gender, race, and class. Although my focus is the Australian media, the Philippine media are at times used for comparison. While violence against women takes many forms, here I am mainly concerned with domestic violence. Such violence takes place in the context of a current or former intimate relationship. It can be defined as the abuse and control of one or more persons over others and includes physical, psychological, verbal, and sexual abuse, financial deprivation, social isolation, and control of movement (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 1-2). The starting point for my analysis is the lived realities of Filipino women, the women's understandings of migration and violence, and their readings of the media images of these processes. My approach follows Dorothy Smith who argues that there "is an active subject prior to the subject constituted in the text" and therefore, inquiry should begin there and not at the point of the written text (Smith 1990, 5). Smith's method is a critique of Foucault's discourse analysis, which reads people's lives from the text

by working "within the textual and from the textual, but by implication only, to the actualities of people's lives" (Smith 1990, 4). Crucial here is Smith's concept of the textually mediated discourse. As she argues,

> we must be concerned with the reading or viewing of texts, with how people organise their activities in relation to texts . . . and with how relations mediated by texts and textually determined practices work. Hence our focus investigates a lived world of ongoing social action organised textually. (Smith 1988a, 39)

As a textually mediated discourse, the mail-order bride brings together media reports of Filipino women, public discussion of these texts, and the practices and social relationships that the texts and their discussion mediate and shape.

The article draws on interviews I conducted with twelve Filipino women. Belinda, Georgia, Rissa, Jill, and Fay live in Australia and had previously been in violent relationships with a former non-Filipino partner and now assist other women in crisis. Georgia and Rissa were themselves subjects of negative Australian media reports on Filipino women. Rosa, Ilda, Joan, and Tess work in the area of domestic violence in Australia. Chat, Mavic, and Rina are based in the Philippines. Chat and Mavic work on media and communications issues in relation to women, and Rina is a journalist for a major newspaper in Manila. These women all have a considerable understanding of migration issues and violence against Filipino women in Australia. Their narratives illuminate how too often the media reportage *neither accurately nor adequately* portrays Filipino women, their migration, and the violence they suffer. They bring into clearer focus the *dialectics of discourse* or the way the media and other discourses about Filipino women feed into and sustain each other. The women's narratives highlight the *social effects of media representation*—how images shape the lives of Filipino women and their social relationships. They further reveal the *agency* Filipino women exercise within the constraints of their particular situations.

METHODOLOGY

I used two methods for recruiting participants for my study. First, I approached several organizations in Australia and the Philippines, and these groups then made the initial approach on my behalf to contact people they knew. Second, I advertised through a variety of media, such as Filipino community newsletters in Australia.

I adopted purposive sampling for gathering interviews. The respondents were selected on the basis that they were accessible and willing to discuss issues central to my research. Rather than giving them specific articles to read, I asked these women about particular articles on violence against Filipino women in Australia that they had read. The interviews were conducted as a participatory relationship in a manner consistent with the principles of feminist qualitative research. Such a dialogical approach, as Guerrero (1999a, xi; 1999b, 19) argues, provides a more egalitarian and connected relationship between researcher and interviewees. Using a dialogical approach helped me address the problem of unequal power relations. Frankenberg (1993, 30) explains this strategy,

> Rather than maintaining the traditionally distant, apparently objective, and so-called blank-faced research persona, I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions, at times sharing with interviewees either information about my own life or elements of my own analysis of racism as it developed through the research process.

Unless they requested otherwise, I used pseudonyms to protect the identities of the women and preserve the confidentiality of their responses.

Institutionalized Violence against Women

The representational and discursive practices of journalists are embedded in material structures such as marriage and the family (see Weedon 1987, 106). In particular, the media portrayals of the abuse of Filipino women need to be situated within the context of institutionalized violence against women in Australia. I refer here specifically to what is commonly known as domestic violence. The main perpetrators of domestic violence are men, while women and children constitute the majority of their victims (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 33; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 2, 37). This is not to suggest that all men are violent and women are not, or that every victim is a woman (see hooks 1984, 118). Nevertheless, women are more likely to be assaulted and/or killed by their male partners or ex-partners. Such violence is an exercise of power and control and must be understood in terms of the inequitable distribution of social, economic, and political resources between men and women (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 23, 37). Women's lack of economic

and social power is an important reason why they remain in abusive situations (O'Donnell and Saville 1982, 52). Domestic violence is the most underreported crime in Australia, and domestic homicides constitute the largest single category of homicides (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 1, 2).

Women's experiences of domestic violence are shaped in different ways by other dimensions of their social identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, and age (Radford, Kelly, and Hester 1996, 1-6; Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce 1994, 2; Crenshaw 1991, 1245). Although domestic violence cuts across all social groups, its cultural meanings will often vary (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce 1994, 120). As Easteal (1996, 10) found in her research, domestic abuse is likely to remain unreported among immigrant women who need to send financial support to families in their country of origin or feel pressured to remain in abusive relationships to discourage racism. Sponsored women in particular are likely to be vulnerable to abuse as they are often dependent on their partners for their immigrant status (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 33). Nonrecognition of overseas qualifications exacerbates the isolation and financial dependence of some migrant women (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 39; Easteal 1996, 9). These factors need to be considered when examining domestic violence against Filipino women in Australia.

Particular attitudes, cultural practices, and structural inequalities support men's violence toward women. In Australia, dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity constitute women as dependents and property of men, and as bought through men's breadwinning (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 35; Pettman 1992, 69). In the dominant family ideology, women are nurturing, caring, and "naturally" responsible for their family's happiness and well-being (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 35). This ideology is particularly powerful when combined with victim blaming, which is based on the idea that a woman deserved or provoked violence (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 52)–for being a mail-order bride, for example. Many women may experience shame and embarrassment about being victims of violence and will often keep silent about their partner's abuse (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 35, 38-39, 52). Family ideology and inequalities in such areas as race and class are powerful factors in keeping women in violent relationships. Moreover, fear of male retribution has a power of its own.

"Mail-Order Brides" and Violence

I have shown elsewhere (Saroca 2002, 1997) that the "mail-order bride" is the dominant theme in Australian articles about Filipino women. In such media discourse, Filipino women are an imagined community in Anderson's (1983, 15) sense of the term. That is, they are all mail-order brides and, as such, are likely to be victims of violence. As Rosa comments,

> [The media] perpetuate the same images . . . it's because . . . they're so poor, the Filipino women who marry these hopeless men, that there's no love involved and so it's expected these sort of things would happen. So it's . . . a cause / effect situation . . . they're horrified at this idea of buying brides at the same time, but then it's like it's something that happens to certain people. (July 1999)

A few examples will serve to illustrate how Australian newspapers have (mis)represented violence against Filipino women in Australia. Sensationally titled "Mail-Order Misery," Lowe's article repeatedly uses the term "mail-order bride" to construct identity, practices, and social relationships.

> Nolita is a mail-order bride who left her native Philippines 18 months ago to escape poverty for the chance of a better life for herself and financial support for the family she left behind . . . I met Nolita at a social gathering of former residents of a women's refuge in Melbourne that *caters specifically for bashed and abused Filipina mail-order brides*. Her story of the cruelty meted out by her husband matched in substance . . . the narratives of other mail-order brides at the gathering . . . Her narrative [was] occasionally interrupted by the squeals of the numerous Filipino-Australian children who fill the room at the gathering of abused mail-order brides. (1988, 3; emphasis added)

While ethnic-specific refuges do exist in Australia, none cater to *abused Filipina mail-order brides*. Lowe uses the term "mail-order bride" synonymously with Filipino woman. From the outset, Lowe implies that all Filipino women who marry Australian residents are mail-order brides. Father Byrne, who I interviewed as part of my doctoral research, is cited in the article. In the following passage, Father Byrne is clearly talking about marriages between Filipino women and non-Filipino men. Yet, Lowe (1988, 3) reconstructs these relationships as "mail-order."

> The only major study on the subject shows that not all mail-order marriages end like those of the women forced to flee to refuges. A Catholic

> priest in Brisbane, Father Paul Byrne, believes only about 10 percent of these marriages follow this road to disaster . . . He found that *the mail order bride agencies . . . accounted for only about 30 percent of the marriages. Most couples were introduced by friends and relatives, many of whom had earlier mail-order marriages*. (emphasis added)

This blurring of Filipino woman and "mail-order bride" continued through the 1990s. In 1991, the headline of Dempsey's (1991, 12-13) article, "Filipino Brides: Eleven Killed in Australia," represented the Filipina homicide victims as mail-order brides. Dempsey's (1991, 13) statement that "advertising for brides in the Philippines has been banned but it is still legal in Australia" strengthens the stereotype even though the article indicates otherwise. For example, she refers to Charles Schembri's killing of Gene Bongcodin, "a hairdresser he met in the Philippines" (Dempsey 1991, 13). While the play on "brides" and "killed" in the headline suggests Nenita Westhof was murdered by her husband, Dempsey identifies another man, Antonio Curado, as the killer. Some of the deceased women mentioned had been married for a number of years or separated from their partners and can hardly be called "brides."

Whiting's (1999, 20-21) report, "Click Here for Your Dream Girl," is characteristic of how violence against Filipino women has been portrayed in the Australian media in recent years. The article discusses the Filipino women who were killed or had disappeared in Australia. Whiting continually conflates Filipino woman with "mail-order bride." Her opening statement describes women as "e-mail-order brides." She goes on to further commodify the women.

> Want a bride from the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Russia, Vietnam, Moldova, South America, Mexico or even Kazakhstan? Just click on the country of your choice–there appears to be a "special" on Korean women–and home-shop your way through the images of hundreds of potential partners. (Whiting 1999, 20)

The article suggests all marriages between Filipino women and non-Filipino men are "mail-order" transactions regardless of how the women actually migrated to Australia.

> Of course, business deals involving human transactions are nothing new. Mail-order brides were first brought to the United States from Japan in the early 1900s and, it must be said, many successful and happy unions have been, and continue to be, brokered. According to the Philippines

> Government, for example, about 95 percent of Filipino/Australian marriages are successful. (Whiting 1999, 20)

Moreover, Filipino women are a special category of mail-order brides. While Russian partners are women, "Asian" wives are "girls."

> The demise of the Soviet Union has seen a marked increase in the number of *Russian women* looking for husbands in the West, particularly in the United States. There, the demand for Russian partners is now higher than for *Asian girls*, but in Australia, Asia, particularly the Philippines, continues to be the major supplier of mail-order wives. (Whiting 1999, 20; emphasis added)

Pettman's comments are pertinent here. She argues that women are often represented in ways that suggest they experience dangers because they are "Asian" (Pettman 1992, 35) or "mail-order brides." Cultural difference or race becomes the explanation rather than other factors that locate women socially, such as racism, sexism, and class. Notwithstanding the high homicide rate of Filipino women in Australia, such reporting obscures the widespread domestic violence perpetrated against women of all ethnic backgrounds. Further, it presents a distorted image of marriages between Filipino women and non-Filipinos as inevitably involving violence.

By invoking the mail-order bride discourse, journalists, like those Rosa identified, suggest a contractual basis to a Filipino woman's relationship with her non-Filipino partner. They recast such relationships as commodity transactions akin to prostitution and devoid of romantic love (see also Robinson 1996). In this context, a Filipino woman can be "discarded" or "returned" if she is not up to scratch. Such reporting takes the form of a moral panic. Cohen describes this phenomenon as when a

> condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people. (1980, 9)

The women that I interviewed evaluated the accuracy and adequacy of media images of violence according to their lived experiences and knowledge of Filipino women they knew in abusive relationships with non-Filipino partners. There was a general feeling shared by all the women interviewed that Australian media portrayals failed to resonate

with the lived realities of Filipino women. I am not suggesting that media images bear no relationship to reality. While they often distort the lives of Filipino women, as Jolly (1997, 121) argues in relation to Euro-American fantasies about Islander life, such representations "are not inconsequential, precisely because they are an instrumental part of the processes of colonization, militarism, and neocolonial dependency."

Rissa draws on her own experience as a victim of domestic violence, and on the stories of other abused Filipino women that she has assisted, to make sense of the media's distorted and sensationalized images of Filipino women's migration and their abuse by violent non-Filipino partners. Rissa's comments encapsulate some of the main themes that arise in the interviews.

> It comes across . . . these Filipinas deserved it. That they've done something that's why they were hit . . . [The media] are misrepresenting most Filipinas [as "mail-order brides"] . . . when in fact, like the rest of the women in the world, we are all individual . . . These men think that just because the Filipino women came from a poor country that they will put up with anything . . . the poor women owe them for the rest of their lives because they have been rescued . . . They believed that they have the right to abuse . . . they have to be grateful for being able to come to Australia. And many of these Filipinas think . . . they have to put up with the abuse . . . And if [they] will not do that, then they will be branded as no good . . . And the media tend to play this up or make it worse by writing that this happened because of our race. (July 1999)

The notion that Filipino women should be grateful for "being saved" highlights the dynamics of violence in relationships and is present in media images. Tessa notes,

> Usually it's that same old depiction of the women coming from a Third World country, needing to get out of the country and poverty and the slums. And they are going to educate us and then rescue us.

These images of the Filipina as a poor woman from a poor country needing to be rescued by a Western male have their basis in Western assumptions of moral superiority. Manderson (1997, 142) terms this the "white savior myth."

Georgia saw her "better life" in Australia as finding happiness in a loving marriage. Her ex-husband saw his marriages to Georgia and four other Filipino women as rescuing them from poverty. They, in gratitude, were expected to serve him totally. Georgia discusses her ex-

husband's violence and how journalists often recast Filipino women as the abusive partner when they leave violent relationships.

> He say that you have to serve me . . . Give him a bath . . . "You have to do what you're told to or get out . . . But you have to leave the baby here. You cannot bring it . . ." I can't leave the baby . . . They pretend that they can give you a better life . . . But when I arrive in Australia it's the other way around. A worse life not better life . . . And then the media . . . said, "Oh they're bad . . . because they come here and leave the husband after a while if they are already Australian citizen." (August 1999)

Georgia's story of life with a violent man, and the media's inversion of victim and abuser—blaming the victim for her abuse—display marked similarities with the stories of other abused Filipino women. For the men and the media in these stories, Australia *is* the better life for Filipino women, even if they are subjected to violence.

According to Rina and Mavic, journalists in the Philippines also use the mail-order bride discourse when reporting the abuse of Filipino women in Australia. However, they tend to frame the discourse as a warning to Filipino women on the dangers of marrying foreign men. Such marriages pose a threat to the women's safety.

> From the Philippine media . . . you get an implicit understanding that the woman came there as a "mail-order bride" so that was one of the risks that she had to accept. And that . . . explains her victimization, why it happened to her . . . So sometimes it might even end about the dangers of going there as a "mail-order bride." (Rina January 2000)

> The Philippine media reinforces the image of all Filipinas in Australia as those of the . . . "mail-order bride" . . . these women . . . knew for a fact before they went to Australia that they were taking that risk; getting married to a man that they hardly know, and not even exerting effort to check out the background. (Mavic January 2000)

Sometimes the warning for Filipino women contains two subtexts. First, that intimate relationships with non-Filipino men inevitably end in violence and, second, that Filipino women are in need of protection from foreign men. The warning that Rina and Mavic identify is evident in *The Manila Chronicle* (1993, 4) editorial, "Outrage Is Not Enough":

> The cases of Mila Wills and fourteen other Filipinas killed by their spouses in Australia bring to the fore the plight of thousands of Filipino women forced to settle in strange lands, marry for convenience, and lead lives of total vulnerability because of their gender and nationality . . . Apart from

> actual deaths and mutilations, there are those who have lost sanity or who nurse deep psychological wounds. The situation is particularly severe among the so-called mail-order brides. Women in this category marry foreigners to escape the poverty. It is usual that they agree to marriage before having met their spouses. They build houses where no love is shared–where, more often, there is constant annoyance rather than fondness. The alien cultural milieu merely compounds the social, psychological, and physical burden these women are constrained to bear. Few survive such an arrangement without very deep emotional scars.

Moreover, in the *Manila Bulletin*, de la Torre (1989, 8) pointedly describes Australian husbands as "semi-savage male foreigners" who get insurance for "our Filipino girls" and kill them for money.

Victim-Blaming Discourse

The interviewees described how Australian journalists repeatedly misrepresent the abuse of Filipino women by shifting attention away from the perpetrator and onto the woman's characteristics or behavior, such as sending money to the Philippines and "using" men as a passport to Australia. This is a victim–blaming discourse, the idea that an abused woman not only provoked her assault but also, in many cases, deserved it (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 36, 52). For example, in her article, "Mail-Order Misery," Lowe (1988, 3) suggests that the reason for violence is Filipino "mail-order brides" and their migration to Australia.

> But the problem of domestic violence in mail-order marriages is expected to grow as more Filipina brides are brought to Australia and as their marriages are placed under the stress of time.

As Ilda notes, mail-order brides as the cause of the violence is the dominant victim-blaming discourse in the media.

> There was so much emphasis on mail-order brides and they did not really focus on the . . . actual violence, the suffering the woman has undergone under the husband. It was more like what kind of woman she was rather than . . . she is the victim . . . So they kind of reverse the story making the woman . . . deserving of the kind of violence she was getting from the husband rather than making the husband be the responsible person of the violence toward the woman . . . The portrayal . . . seems to put the onus of the victimization on the women because she deserved it because of where she was coming from but did not put the onus of responsibility on the one who victimized her. (July 1999)

Chat identifies a similar theme in media reports about the abuse of Filipino women.

> First they're poor, they come from rural areas . . . they're not highly educated, and . . . they marry . . . Australian men and take advantage of them . . . These Filipino women really just come over to . . . become Australian citizens. And once they have that they just leave. (January 2000)

Attacking such racist and sexist notions, Joan reinscribes the perpetrator as the source of the abuse.

> The media . . . think that, "Oh this woman will suffer because she got married to one who is much older than her." And that's not true. Age doesn't matter . . . It's really their . . . intolerable behavior . . . If they get angry with someone on the streets . . . they don't beat them up. But then, just for a little thing within the house . . . if they don't get what they want they beat up their wife. So that's actually a very wrong presentation of the media . . . Although I believe that maybe these men are racist because they think that we are black or we are brown so that they can do anything with us . . . (August 1999)

Joan challenges the common belief that only socially inadequate men (like those "old blokes" who marry young Filipino women) are violent toward their female partners. She thus opens up the issue of institutionalized violence against women in Australia.

Sexualizing and Racializing Violence, Poverty, and Victimhood

The women's comments point to Australian media reports drawing on the mail-order bride discourse that tend to sexualize and racialize Filipino women's experiences of violence and poverty. They eroticize victimhood. The articles of Dempsey and Whiting are good examples. They make connections between sex, violence, and poverty.[1] By linking Filipino women who were killed in Australia with sex industries in the Philippines and Australia, Dempsey (1991, 12) constructs the women as erotic victims.

> Melbourne Filipinas were the first to begin protesting about the killings in their state. Melba Marginson, from the Collective of Filipinas for Empowerment and Development, explained her group was lobbying for an end to "sex tours" and the closure of two Filipino-style girlie bars in Melbourne featuring go-go girls dancing in bikinis.

Whiting's (1999, 20-21) opening statement likewise eroticizes victimhood.

> They're young, beautiful, desperate, and caught in a worldwide web. They're e-mail-order brides. And they're yours at the click of a button.

Not only are Filipina victims of abuse eroticized in media discourse, but their country of origin is often similarly portrayed. Manderson and Jolly (1997) call this an eroticization of exotic places. Dempsey (1991) represents Filipino women as both erotic sex partners and traditional wives while simultaneously eroticizing the most recognizable city in the Philippines.

> Originally dubbed "The Thrillers from Manila," most of the women generally settle in well and try very hard with their marriages. (Dempsey 1991, 12)

As a place that produces sexually exciting women, Manila is both desirable and debased. Chapkis (1986, 57-58) makes a similar point when she asserts that split images of so-called Third World countries in popular Western media provoke both lust and moralizing about the debasement of the place. Dempsey's (1991, 12) statement—"in most of the 11 killings, the husband has been convicted or charged with the murder of his Filipino wife—though sometimes it was a lover"—suggests that the Filipina victims of homicide were "thrillers from Manila." Fear is also apparent in images of grasping women "who control the purse strings at home [and] expect to send money back home to their poor relatives" (Dempsey 1991, 12).

Joan and Tessa identify this process wherein Australian journalists frequently set up an association between Filipino women and sex industries in the Philippines. In this terrain, victims of abuse emerge as sexually immoral.

> With violence, the women are portrayed as they deserve it because they are prostitutes . . . they always put those clubs where they have women dancing, naked or half-naked . . . it's always connected to that we deserve it because we prostituted ourselves. So we deserve to be punished or to be killed . . . And they said "mail-order brides." (Joan August 1999)

While Australian journalists often racialize violence, poverty, and victimhood, as Tessa notes, they rarely address the racist dimension of violence against Filipino women.

Cultural Insensitivity in Reporting

Australian journalists were often perceived to exhibit cultural insensitivity when discussing the abuse of Filipino women through the use of certain terms like "mail-order bride," and through their construction of cultural values and practices. Rosa explains,

> The media portray the violence as their fault, why did they come here? Why don't they just go back . . . to their own country? So they don't look at the problem of that even—the loss of face, the loss of hope, the loss of meaning, especially if they've got children, and also if they were thinking of helping their extended family back home . . . why is it that people might think that's not a value they would themselves approve of, or adhere to, but they are valid values for certain cultures. (July 1999)

Reporters often demonize and devalue the woman's act of sending money back home to her family in the Philippines. However, as Rosa indicates, family support and moral duty (*katungkulan*) are significant Filipino cultural values. The act is much more than simply economic. It strengthens ties of kinship and establishes one's place in the family. Moreover, most journalists render invisible the often laborious work Filipino women undertake to earn the extra money that is sent "back home." For example, women may work several jobs to help support their families in both Australia and the Philippines.

Failure to Address Structural Factors

Many Australian articles about Filipino women and violence describe their migration to Australia as simply a result of poverty. Joan and Chat saw this failure to effectively address the structural processes that encourage Filipino women's migration as a major inadequacy in media images of their abuse. The migration of Filipino women must be understood in the context of the political economy of the Philippines and inequitable international relations. The Philippines is one of the largest debtor nations in the world and a major exporter of labor, particularly of women (Israel 2001, 4; IBON Foundation 1999, 6; Ateneo Human Rights Center 1999, 91; San Juan Jr. 1998, 137; Aguilar 1998a; Aguilar 1998b; Nuqui 1998, 68; Abrera-Mangahas 1997, 1; Kanlungan Center Foundation 1997, 1999; Go 1997, 1; Ramirez and Deza 1997, 4; Abrera-Mangahas 1997, 2; Beltran and Rodriquez 1996). Male abuse of Filipino women in Australia needs to be situated in terms of factors such as neocolonialism and international

relations. Cunneen and Stubbs (1997, 2) argue that these factors shape women's positions in the Philippines, encourage their emigration, and constitute their vulnerability to abuse by foreign males. Joan expresses strongly,

> I expect [Australian media] to do a bit of research . . . We were actually taken advantage [of] by so many people who colonized us. And we were already misrepresented as being "Third World"-country people and just being poor, but they did not know how we became poor. It's not only the [natural] calamities that are always affecting us but also the colonization . . . The western countries . . . come to the Philippines and give some capital there or lure us to borrow money from them . . . And they know we cannot repay it . . . So why don't the media give a bit of background on why we are here, on why we are poor, on why we have to come out to Australia. (August 1999)

Chat points out that while there is an overall absence of attention to issues of migration in Australian reports of Filipino women and violence, activists in the Philippines, including herself, have helped raise the consciousness of journalists there about the issues.

Marriage as an Escape from Poverty

There was a strong perception in these women's narratives that the tendency of Australian journalists to frame Filipino women's migration for marriage as an escape from poverty did not capture their realities. Such discourse obscures the diversity of Filipino women, such as their different class positions and the many reasons why they marry non-Filipino men (see Constable 2003; Saroca 2002). For Filipino women, in most cases, marriage and migration are not simply ways out of economic hardship. Like many other women, they love their husbands or fiancés and hope to establish families in a caring relationship. While economics is often a major factor in a Filipino woman's decision to marry an Australian resident, it is never the whole picture (Saroca 2002, 161). Rather, love and economics are often intertwined (Constable 2003; Saroca 2002). Talking about the experiences of other Filipino women, Ilda points out,

> It is true that there is an economic push to some of the marriages and it is very difficult to explain it to other people . . . at the same time not to portray a woman as a manipulator and as a gold-digger . . . It's normal for anybody to want economic stability . . . Middle-class people want to

> be economically secure, let alone poor people . . . There's a lot of poverty in the Philippines, so it's normal for us to want to improve ourselves economically and financially, but that doesn't mean we become manipulators or gold-diggers when we go into a relationship with another person . . . (July 1999)

Nor can migration be understood solely in terms of individual choice, as the decision of Filipino women to go abroad is related to women's familial roles and the needs of their families (Abrera-Mangahas 1997, 2-3). In her research, Roces (1996, 150; 1998, 2) found that Filipino women who marry Australian residents are mainly motivated by a desire to fulfill the traditional Filipino role of wife and mother. The women are often *solteras* or single women who are generally past marriageable age, and they are marginalized in the Philippines where a woman's status is tied to her identity as wife and mother (Roces 1998, 2-3). Migration for marriage allows them to fulfill the goal of traditional Filipino womanhood as well as perform their role as dutiful family members by sending money back to the Philippines (Roces 1996, 150; 1998, 2-3). Fay's comments on female teachers in the Philippines support Roces' argument.

> There are many Filipino women who come here because they are becoming old maids . . . Most of them are teachers. Teachers are so dedicated in their profession that they work seven days a week and they just don't have time for romance. Men don't have time to court them because they're always busy. So . . . they grow old and then their parents worry why they can't get married. So they end up writing to men and men come over and they think, "Oh yes, this is a nice lady. She's educated. She's working. She's decent." So they marry her. (July 1999)

Fay's observations are based on her interactions with Filipino women who have experienced this, and through sharing with her informal network of friends in Australia and the Philippines.

Discourse of a Better Life

The migration of Filipino women for marriage is tied to their hopes for a better life. In the Australian media, this desire for an improvement in their personal and economic situations is often recast as a deviant motivation for marriage (Saroca 1997; 2002). According to Tessa, "it is as if the women just wanted to come to Australia and to have a better life and to get their families over to Australia." The desire for a better

life, however, is presumably present in most marriages and not peculiar to a specific ethnic group. Moreover, it is always assumed that the Filipino women are seeking better lives by marrying a foreigner, but not the non-Filipino men. Journalists tend not to acknowledge that men who marry Filipino women are also, presumably, seeking a better life. Furthermore, the desire for a better life is seen as specifically intrinsic to "Filipino brides" rather than a phenomenon with a long history in Australia. For example, during the 19th century, Caroline Chisholm imported young women desiring a better life into Australia to marry Anglo-Celtic men.

Media Fallacy of the "Poor Filipina"

The interviewees frequently remarked about how the Australian media misrepresent abused Filipino women as helpless victims. This is what I call the media fallacy of the "poor Filipina." Filipino women, like women from other ethnic backgrounds, are sometimes the victims of horrendous abuse, which may severely restrict their opportunities to act. It may even result in their deaths. However, it is erroneous to circumscribe women within a victim discourse–to fix them in a permanent state of victimhood with no other identity, no hope, and no sense of agency. Filipino women struggle in various ways to do something about the oppression they experience at the hands of their abusive male partners. Yet, too often, journalists fail to highlight their struggles.

According to Roces (1996, 145, 150; 1998, 2), while women are often victims, they have other roles and actively participate in the wider society. For example, Rissa, like many women working in women's refuges, was a victim of domestic violence. She uses her knowledge of abuse and survival to organize against violence and empower other women in abusive relationships. In Australia, the Philippines, and other countries, women in and out of crisis establish groups and networks to support each other and exchange information and resources. Belinda, Georgia, Rissa, Jill, and Fay draw on their own experiences of domestic violence to support other women in crisis. Fay and Mavic make clear that being a victim is only part of the picture. It needs to be balanced with an awareness of women's initiatives to deal with abuse. As an outspoken, assertive, and educated woman, Fay conducts information sessions for Filipino women on issues that are

of importance to them, including domestic violence. In relation to the Australian media, Fay states,

> They portray us Filipino women as stupid and not knowing what to do . . . We are trying to educate ourselves. We attend conferences, seminars . . . They play on the idea that we are mail-order brides, that we are hopeless in our country, we come here to use men, and because of that we are prone to domestic violence. Which is not true because many Filipinas who come here are highly educated and have extensive work experience . . . We are capable of defending ourselves . . . we're capable of understanding the law and know how to get about like other women around here . . . Because we speak a different language back in the Philippines they don't realize that we are educated in English . . . So that's not fair when they say that we are the poor Filipina. (July 1999)

Speaking about the Philippine media, Mavic said,

> There's a lack or even absence of attention on the initiatives of women to counter violence. A number of women's groups are already doing work to support or to help the victims or survivors of violence recover emotionally, physically . . . But rarely has this been covered. Like, for example, the work of Women's Crisis Center or the work of KALAKASAN . . . these are very positive initiatives that would change the pervasive sexist patterns that dominate the reporting of women's issues and women's concerns in the media . . . I don't have anything against them reporting cases of violence, but they would need to report accurately and they would need to highlight attempts or initiatives so women could counter this violence. (January 2000)

On the other hand, Chat and Rina noted that while many journalists in the Philippines tend to frame violence against Filipino women in Australia and other countries in terms of the "poor Filipina," they often downplay the abuse that women suffer in the Philippines itself. Rina provides more detail,

> You see a lot of self-righteous anger over the abuse of Filipino women, overseas workers or mail-order brides in Australia . . . because it came from the hands of a foreigner . . . I rarely see a discussion that it's because he's a man and she's a woman or because she is poor and her employers are rich. It's always seen in a racial aspect like, "You know these foreigners how badly they treat our women . . ." There is always that . . . blindness to the local, to the links between the violence abroad and the violence here at home. And I don't think it's conscious. I think they just aren't aware or concerned about the violence that occurs here locally . . . (January 2000)

Many journalists in the Philippines refer to "our women" paternalistically to claim ownership of women who are perceived to be in need of (Filipino) male protection from abusive "other" men. This othering of violence in terms of race–abusive foreign men–suggests that partner abuse happens elsewhere rather than being a daily reality for many women in the Philippines (see de Dios 1999, 157-63; SIBOL 1997, 8-9), as it is in most countries.

Dialectics of Discourse

Earlier in this article, Rissa and Georgia showed us that similar themes of victim blaming underpin both the actual violence Filipino women experience at the hands of abusive non-Filipino partners and the media images of their abuse. Here I expand on the idea that there is a dialectical relationship between the media and other discourses about Filipino women, including discourses of migration, in that they feed into and support each other. The interviewees stated that some non-Filipino men made racist and sexist remarks about their Filipina partners. It was felt that this abuse was related to stereotypical media portrayals of Filipino women, an argument that Australian-based Filipina activists from the Center for Philippine Concerns–Australia, the New South Wales Filipino Women's Working Party, and the Melbourne-based Collective of Filipinas for Empowerment and Development, for example, have long made. It is the point of intersection between media discourse and those of non-Filipino partners, and the particular ways they buttress each other, which often has harmful consequences for Filipino women. Drawing on their own personal stories and their interactions with other Filipino women with similar experiences of abuse, Fay and Belinda highlight this dialectic. They explain,

> And I think it's very common that those women who've gone through domestic violence have the same report. The men, their Anglo partners, always say, "You only come from the Philippines. All of you are the same. You're all stupid." The men . . . believe the media . . . they've got that idea that you go there because you find a slave . . . You don't have to feed her . . . She'll just serve you hand and foot. (Fay July 1999)

> The Australian men . . . say to their mates . . . it is easy to get these Filipinas . . . They are already branded as a mail-order bride. The Australian men are the ones doing the branding in the Philippines. You can hear in their

> conversations when they get together in their Australian Club . . . My husband . . . picks on the Filipina . . . he mixes with Filipino-Australian married couples and these Australian men are the ones who are branding their own wives, "Oh you are not good. You are dopey." The things that my husband had said to me, "you're hopeless" and things like that, that's the same words that I hear from those Filipinas I have helped. And that flows on because this all comes from the media and the portrayal of the men going over [to the Philippines]. (Belinda July 1999)

Belinda's comments point out that the dialectic is not simply between media image and male partners but also involves the talk circulating among men.

Media Effects

Cultural meanings conveyed through media stereotypes have real and significant social effects. As Grossberg, Wartella, and Whitney (1998, 224) argue, stereotypes

> can affect the self-esteem of those being stereotyped, and they can often come close to determining the way some people think of and behave toward members of the group being stereotyped.

As a textually mediated discourse, media images, such as the mail-order bride, shape and regulate people's conduct, but they do not determine behavior. The same media content can be read in various ways and may have different effects on behavior (Grossberg, Wartella, and Whitney 1998, 314). The effects of any portrayal depend on the entire context of social relationships, material structures, and cultural phenomena that help to define and shape the construction of differences (Grossberg, Wartella, and Whitney 1998, 27). The narratives of the interviewees show how media images of Filipino women's abuse commonly stigmatize Filipino women and construct boundaries around and between them. In so doing, they contribute to women's vulnerability to male violence. On the other hand, some women spoke about how some media reports have had more positive effects because they more accurately portrayed their experiences. These women's comments reminded me of the important part that the progressive media have played in contemporary struggles to raise public awareness about the inequities of war, racism, and globalization.

STIGMATIZATION

Journalists who describe Filipino women as "brides" and "gold diggers"—women who use men as a "passport to a better life"—stigmatize them. According to Goffman (1963, 12-13, 15), a stigmatized person is tainted, discredited, and seen as not quite human. Every interviewee said the Australian media stereotyping of Filipino women as mail-order brides had stigmatized all Filipino women and their marriages, even those in relationships with Filipino men. First, such reporting fuels a general assumption that the violence Filipino women experience is not as bad as the abuse other women suffer. Second, it supports the notion that Filipino women will, and indeed should, put up with anything because of their desperation to escape the Philippines for *the better life* in Australia. Third and last, the portrayals strengthen the ideas that Filipino women both deserve and cause the abuse they experience.

Stigmatizing media portrayals of Filipino women and violence affect Filipino women's standing in the wider Australian community. Rissa, who was herself the subject of negative newspaper reports that attempted to downplay the abuse she experienced at the hands of her former husband and reconstruct it as her fault, claims such portrayals discredit the women and invalidate their stories of abuse.

> As a [refuge] worker, I helped two Filipino women from a domestic violence situation and it was reported twice to the police and there was no record [made] . . . When the police came, the husband said there was no problem and everything was okay. The Filipino woman said, "No, no, no, wait I have a complaint ..." The police just left. He didn't even want to listen to her . . . the police sometimes . . . behave the way they do because of what they've heard or what they've read in the media. They don't respect us as much as Australian women maybe because they think that we will just put up with anything . . . No one will believe the women because there's already a stereotype in the community that we deserve it, that we must have done something to be abused. (July 1999)

The media stigmatization of Filipino women as mail-order brides was perceived as a particular problem for Filipino women in abusive cross-cultural relationships. First, such portrayals contribute to the reluctance of many Filipino women to discuss their abuse and the general unwillingness of the broader Filipino communities to acknowledge domestic violence. Tess has encountered this problem in her capacity as an advocate for abused women in a domestic violence resource center.

> Filipinas try to address a lot of the issues. They try to get assistance for the women. But there are people in the community that don't really want to make it too well known because of the stereotyping and the shame involved with being a Filipino woman . . . There are some people who just don't want to talk about the violence being perpetrated on Filipino women because of the stereotyping and the stigma that they experience. (August 1999)

Ilda elaborates on this theme. Public discussion of domestic violence is seen as strengthening the negative image that is already in circulation in the media and other popular discourses. This is analogous to some Aboriginal people's position on the domestic violence in their communities. They are often reluctant to speak out due to a (very real) concern that public exposure would legitimate stereotypes. Ilda explains,

> There was actually a backlash against Filipino workers who kept on harping about the issue of domestic violence on Filipino women because the general Filipino community felt that it was portraying a bad image . . . My employer in the Filipino welfare community himself could not understand why I was paying so much attention to the issue of domestic violence on Filipino women. He felt that . . . the Filipino community didn't need any more information about domestic violence because it was bad news and it was portraying us in a bad light. It has to be put into context . . . with the Filipino value system . . . There are two factors . . . fear, which is "*takot*," and shame, which is "*hiya*." They don't want anything that would put them to shame. They don't want anything that will make them fearful as a community. So the issue of domestic violence on Filipino women was a source of shame for the general Filipino community . . . some of them didn't want to actually have anything to do with the kind of work we were doing to highlight that it was a problem because they wanted to ignore it . . . If the media portrayal wasn't so negative, then the general Filipino community would have been more cooperative in dealing with the issue. But because it was so negative then they preferred to just lie low and brush it aside . . . (July 1999)

Ilda felt that the reluctance to acknowledge the problem posed obstacles to Filipino women seeking and receiving help and

> would put more women in danger. And that would also put more fear into some of these women because if they approach other people for help and then the people would say, "Oh that's not really a problem." Then the woman would not approach people for help anymore because they're

> saying it's not a problem. "Who can I turn to then?" So, yes, it becomes a cycle. (July 1999)

These comments support the research of Woelz-Stirling, Kelaher, and Manderson (1998, 289, 293) which found that the stigmatization of Filipino women limits public discourse on domestic violence and has led to an underreporting of abuse.

The stigmatizing portrayals also contribute to the decision of some Filipino women to stay in a violent relationship. Speaking about Filipino women she has encountered and based on her observations more generally, Tess remarks,

> A lot of Filipino women get self-conscious about being in an [abusive] cross-cultural marriage and being seen to be like one of those women . . . They'd feel a lot of embarrassment and shame if their friends knew about what was happening or whether their friends would even support them leaving . . . Word gets around very quickly . . . the embarrassment and feeling like you're being looked at or being judged by what was being reported in the newspaper. (Tessa August 1999)

This is not to suggest that negative media portrayal is the only or even the major issue here. Many factors encourage women to stay or leave abuse, such as fear of further violence; feelings for the abuser; concern for children; belief in the sanctity of marriage; the racism of courts, police, and housing authorities; and lack of economic support and housing.

Construction of Boundaries

The Australian media's stigmatization of Filipino women is closely related to the construction of boundaries which, in turn, hinges on the notion of being "out of place." Mary Douglas (1966, 36, 160) defines (matter) out of place as a violation of ordered relations and a threat to good order. Images of mail-order brides construct boundaries between Filipino women and other women in Australia.

> The portrayal of women . . . in the Australian media and . . . in some Philippine media . . . The reason why they're good wives is because they're submissive, they do domestic work uncomplainingly unlike Australian women . . . There's this dichotomy of . . . Filipino and Australian women [which] divides women [from each other]. (Chat January 2000)

The interviewees highlight how these portrayals also divide Filipino women from each other. Boundary construction in itself has important social effects. According to Opotow (1990, 1-6) and Erikson (1962, 309-10), human groups construct boundaries to differentiate between experiences that belong within their group and those forms that lie outside its borders. While considerations of fairness and justice apply to those included within the group's boundaries, those excluded are located beyond the scope of justice. Harming or exploiting them thus appears legitimate (Opotow 1990, 1-4), as does inaction to address such abuse. Boundary construction, both external and internal, has particular consequences for Filipino women already in abusive relationships.

Belinda points to the construction of external boundaries. Drawing on her own experience and the testimonies of other Filipino women with similar experiences, she contends that negative portrayals of Filipino women isolate them from other women. Isolation makes it difficult for abused women to seek outside help.

> The media portrayal affects a Filipina in violent situation, that's why they cannot ask for help. Because the neighbor themselves isolate them . . . those of the neighborhood would say, "Oh that's your fault because you cannot speak in English." And that's what other Filipinas said to me, "Oh my neighbour won't even know about me because I'm Filipina." Because they read it in the newspaper and they watch it on the television so they know where we come from . . . that makes the Filipina more isolated and they are very vulnerable to any violence because of the media portraying all of this. They're more vulnerable to be killed by the husband or to take their own life. (July 1999)

Internal boundary construction is the way dominant media images of Filipino women and violence help create divisions among Filipino women. Rosa explained that some Filipino women, particularly those who had come to Australia as independent migrants, practiced social distancing from Filipina victims of domestic violence because they felt a sense of *hiya* (shame).

> I noticed in the '80s that some professional middle-class Filipino women's response [to the media portrayal] is to distance themselves from the victims because what concerns them more is how it affects their social standing in the Australian community in general. They left the Philippines to start a new life. They don't want any development that would be a barrier to their obtaining better . . . employment prospects, and would like that they be held in high esteem by other members of the community. (July 1999)

Speaking about a consultative meeting among Filipino women regarding Filipino women's migration and settlement in Australia in which she took part, Rosa remarked on some of the other participants,

> they were concerned about the image of Filipino women because from a middle class point of view they felt that the criticism of Filipino women as being victims of domestic violence as if they're problems or they're uneducated . . . doesn't reflect their status . . . They probably wanted to help out . . . but I think they were more concerned about the erosion of their status . . . Most . . . just wanted to be invisible because of the racism that existed . . . they would rather not attract attention. So this kind of media publicity was putting them in the limelight because they would be tarnished with the same brush . . . So it's really very hard on the poor victims . . . because they wouldn't get the support from their own people. (July 1999)

The boundaries constructed here obscure the fact that domestic violence occurs in all social classes. The intersection of gender, race, class, and violence in women's lives and media images increases the vulnerability of Filipino women to male abuse.

Chat's story of internal boundary construction reveals how media portrayals of Filipino women and violence divide Filipino communities into two main groups. The first group sees the issue of domestic violence as negative. It avoids discussing abuse and assisting victims. A common refrain here is, "Don't air our dirty linen." The second group wants to address the problem of (male) violence. The Justice for Gene Bongcodin and Justice for Elma Young campaigns around the killings of two Filipino women in Australia are excellent examples of how Filipinos and their supporters have mobilized around domestic homicides and violence. Chat notes that while the media portrayals divided the community, these also helped unite Filipinos in the struggle against domestic violence.

> It has been an issue in the Filipino community . . . and it has divided the community. Some [are] very supportive, but others would say, even the women who are married to Australian men, "Why do you keep talking about negative issues? This provides negativity. It's not true. We are all happy, very happy..." But on the other hand, it has also galvanized the Filipino community in Australia. If it hadn't been for the actions [of] the Filipino women's organizations in Australia, the issues wouldn't have been uncovered. There wouldn't have been that attention to the issues. (January 2000)

This exemplifies the heterogeneity and ambivalence of media effects. Some media tend to influence the limiting of public discussion on domestic violence, while other media incite people to struggle around the issue.

The comments of the women I interviewed highlight how journalists often portray Filipino women as dangerous to boundaries. Douglas (1966, 123-24) describes the dangers to community boundaries.

> The first is danger pressing on external boundaries; the second, danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system; the third, danger in the margins of the lines. The fourth is danger from internal contradiction, when some of the basic postulates are denied by other basic postulates, so that at certain points the system seems to be at war with itself.

First, Filipino women transgress external boundaries by marrying Australian men rather than staying "in place" in the Philippines. They are out of place and their presence in Australia is seen as the source of danger. They threaten cultural order, especially romantic love and "racially pure" White Australia. Second, Filipino women transgress internal lines by engaging in "dubious" cultural practices that could undermine the patriarchal authority of their non-Filipino partners, such as sending money to relatives in the Philippines. Third, Filipino women signify a "danger in the margins" as they may not live up to the subservient stereotype; they "use" Australian men and may abandon their relationships. Fourth, Filipino women are dangerous as they epitomize an inherent contradiction. They are frequently portrayed as abusers of Aussie men as well as traditional wives and mothers (or future mothers).

Raising Consciousness

Some of the women discussed how the media could be a positive technology of information in raising consciousness about violence. Chat felt that the Philippine coverage of Filipino women and violence in Australia had raised awareness about the issue in the Philippines:

> There's now more consciousness around the issues of Filipino women in Australia [in the Philippines] . . . There have been times when I was in the Australian Embassy talking to women there, and asking women who are moving to Australia to marry, if they are aware of the issues, or possible violence. They are aware of the murders . . . If that's an indication, I would suppose that it did increase the consciousness of people here around violence against women in Australia . . . (January 2000)

Heightened awareness could help save women's lives. This acknowledgment of the positive aspects of media reportage of violence, however, was often contextualized in terms of its harmful effects.

> You can take it positively, [if] not positively, but at least the issue is raised in that context that we are not really safe here. I've taken that step in the Philippines that just because you happen to be overseas, whichever country, it doesn't mean that you are safe from domestic violence. Not that it will happen to you, but just be aware of that. That's what I said [in the Philippine newspapers]. And just be prepared and [know] what to do if that happens. So that's the positive aspect of having that in the media. On the negative side was the presentation of domestic violence. The injustice of the presentation, the biased opinion, can also otherwise affect the family and the children. (Jill August 1999)

Jill highlights the way such portrayals have the potential to inform and assist Filipino women but also further stigmatize and harm them.

Agency

Filipino women, like all women, are never total victims. Even when they are victims of extreme violence, other facets of their lives take them beyond absolute victimhood. Filipino women are also mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends, as well as workers, community volunteers, and activists. Smith (1988a, 38-39; 1988b) argues that women make choices and take an active part in the construction of their social world. However, there are structural restraints on the ways Filipino women can act. Male violence and the isolation and alienation Filipina migrants may experience are major factors. The racist and sexist culture of the Australian tabloid press and lack of access to media space are another. Too often, media representations reflect a limited understanding of women's agency and independence within the constraints of their intimate relations. The active involvement of Filipino women with their communities and circles of friends reflects their agency, identity, and sometimes resistance to restrictions imposed by their intimate relations.

Georgia shows through example that media stereotypes of Filipino women and violence are flawed. She is a member of the South Australian Filipino women's theater group, Buklod ng Kababaihang Filipina (Alliance of Filipino Women). Georgia has used media interviews in a positive way to inform Filipino women of their rights,

educate the general public about the abuse of Filipino women, and challenge negative media images.

Joan gives more detail on the remarkable work of Buklod around violence and the media, and the power of theater performance:

> We have to analyze the media portrayal, the domestic violence . . . so we can come up with a theater group to educate people . . . And we have been performing everywhere . . . And we were . . . involved in producing the video film that's being shown in the embassy and also in the Department of Immigration in the Philippines to educate migrants coming to Australia . . . These women . . . decided to plan an educational media because we know that the media . . . are not doing their part to educate people . . . They are very courageous women. They decide this is the only way we can educate . . . on what kind of people we are. So this theater group really is very effective in . . . letting them know that this is how we were abused. So that in itself is a statement of their coming out into the open. And also challenging the media. (August 1999)

While highly critical of the media, Joan emphasized that the media are an important means of educating people and disseminating information. Like Dee Hunt, Melba Marginson, other members of the Center for Philippine Concerns-Australia, and Debbie Wall and the New South Wales Filipino Women's Working Party, Joan negotiates with the media and has developed good working relationships with sympathetic journalists. Her skill in using the media to expose male violence is particularly impressive and effective.

> I said, "Why do you only talk about the woman in the negative way and the man in a positive way?" I would actually challenge that and I would even ask them to also interview the men in their unguarded moments . . . So men actually were interviewed by journalists with our conditions and we involved ourselves also in that interview . . . If you will watch the video of these television interviews you will see how the men get angry. They say that they are very good men. They are kind or they have given so much to the woman or they've been men who were not violent. They are loving . . . very generous. But then in these interviews you will notice that they are not . . . [you] can see on video or in the television that these men are capable of getting very angry and very violent. (August 1999)

Mavic has also cultivated productive relationships with journalists, such as Rina Jimenez-David, in her struggle to counter media images of Filipino women and violence. As part of her work at Isis International-Manila, Mavic educates media practitioners on the need for gender sensitivity in reporting:

> We emphasize the need, especially for NGOs, to establish and cultivate that relationship with the media if you want to really make media an ally . . . It's a very significant social institution that could be used as a tool to advance women's status and at the same time could hinder the advancement of that status. And in the conferences that we've organized . . . we always emphasize that and we always talk of strategies . . . And we even invited people from the media who are at decision-making positions . . . We also encourage them to come up, not only with general gender-sensitive reporting or programming, but with women-focus kind of media productions. (January 2000)

Despite structural constraints, such as the racist and sexist culture of the Australian tabloid press and the difficulties in accessing media space, these women found ways to challenge portrayals of Filipino women and violence. Their efforts make clear that media images do not reflect Filipino women's realities, and are in themselves sites of conflict.

Accuracy and Adequacy

First, the interviewees identified as inaccurate and inadequate the way the mail-order bride discourse is used consistently to describe Filipino women and their experiences. This process conceals the fact that Filipino women are not a homogeneous group but come from diverse class, regional, and educational backgrounds, as do the non-Filipinos they marry (see Constable 2003; Saroca 2002). In contrast, journalists do not generally treat Anglo-Celtic women as a single group, unless they are demonized women like prostitutes. Moreover, the women's means of migration to Australia often differ. Despite the popular perception that the migration of Filipino women is tied to their relationship with an Australian resident male and that every Filipina is a mail-order bride, not all Filipino women migrate to Australia as spouses or fiancées (Saroca 2002). Many migrate independently as nurses or other professionals, or as part of the family reunion system, and have subsequently married non-Filipino men. There has been a discursive continuity in the construction of Filipino-Australian marriages as "mail order" as they are often situated in the context of the introduction agencies and pen-pal columns of the 1970s and 1980s, which advertised Filipino women for marriage. The discourse continues to circulate without radically changing its basic form, obscuring the fact that most Filipino-Australian couples today do not meet through

introduction agencies (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2004b). First, informal networks established by Filipino women who had previously migrated to Australia provide the major means by which Australian men meet female partners from the Philippines (Saroca 2002; Iredale and Castles 1992, 23-24), as Tessa makes clear,

> A lot of the women didn't get into the relationships through pen-pal systems. They met through relatives and friends. So the term [mail-order bride] is even incorrect but it's used to describe a whole range of women. It's just like lumping all Filipino women together . . . and not seeing them as individual. (August 1999)

Second, journalists' use of the mail-order bride discourse to explain abuse was seen as inaccurate because it misrepresented violence as the women's own fault. This is fundamentally flawed since it shifts the burden of responsibility from the perpetrator onto the victim. In other words, it renders male violence as secondary.

Third, every woman I interviewed spoke vehemently about the media fallacy of the Filipina and her migration as the source of violence. Being "out of place" in a racial and spatial sense is identified as the cause of domestic violence rather than (male) abuses of power and control. The women regarded this as a racist and sexist myth that promotes the notion of poor, stupid, submissive, sexually accommodating, and desperate women who will do and put up with anything, even violence, to escape poverty for a "better life" in Australia. As Belinda wryly remarks about abusive non-Filipino male partners, it is "more like the need for them to use that Filipina [to improve] their own lifestyle." Although the interviewees spoke from varying positions of political consciousness, all saw sexism, racism, and the abuse of male power as the root causes of violence rather than the presence of Filipino women in Australia.

Differences between Australian and Philippine Media Images

The differences between Australian and Philippine media portrayals of the migration of Filipino women and their abuse must be seen in light of historical, social, and structural processes. Their points of difference further elucidate the gendered and class-based racism of many Australian journalists. The political economy of newspapers in Australia and the Philippines is insufficient to account for these differences. The media

in both countries share features of globalized media empires. They have foreign ownership, they undergo intense competition for market share and profit, and they use sensationalist news stories about sex and violence as a major marketing strategy.

First, that the Philippines has experienced a long history of migration as well as activism around migration issues is an established part of the country's political landscape. As Chat indicated, activists in the Philippines have helped raise media consciousness about the structural factors that provide the impetus for Filipino migration. This heightened understanding has, on occasions, informed reporting. Thus, journalists in the Philippines tend to see Filipino women's migration in terms of heroism and personal sacrifice. Both Joan and Chat noted the failure of many Australian journalists to effectively address the reasons behind Filipino migration, as evidenced by reconstructions of Filipina migrants as calculating "gold-diggers."

Second, although journalists in the Philippines are often far from gender sensitive, many associate the migration of Filipino women with poverty and the policies of the Philippine government, in particular the institutionalization of overseas labor migration. Biased accounts of Filipino women and violence in the Australian media can be seen as a failure to address the global and structural conditions that affect the Philippines. Instead, they tend to individualize both the women's poverty and the poverty of their country.

Third, the Australian media are themselves a product of a long history of colonialism and pervasive racism and sexism, of which anti-Asian racism and Orientalism are major facets. This milieu has provided fertile ground for the genre of reporting that has developed around Filipino women: as so-called mail-order brides who will do anything to escape the Philippines and/or are in need of rescue by Australian men. This is not to deny the sexism and racism of large sections of the Philippine media, which typically portray Filipino women as victims, subservient housewives, and mothers on the one hand, or sex objects, prostitutes, and mistresses on the other (Tiongson 1999, 7-8; Azarcon-dela Cruz 1988, 4,128).

Fourth, the different expressions of Filipino women as victims in the Australian and Philippine articles are an outcome of differing understandings of the problem of violence against Filipino women in Australia. As Chat and Rina indicated, many journalists in the Philippines use "our women" paternalistically to claim ownership of women who are perceived to be in need of (Filipino) male protection

from abusive "other" men. In contrast, the Filipina victim in the Australian articles hinges on the notion of a poor woman who needs to be rescued from the Philippines by an Australian man.

Conclusion

Drawing on interviews with Filipino women, this article has explored the relationship between the lives of Filipino women and the Australian media images of their migration and their abuse in intimate relations in Australia. As Marshall (1997, 15) indicates,

> The struggle is between the media image of the "Filipina Bride" (whore, victim, manipulator) and the diverse and complex realities faced by individual Filipino women living in Australia (migrant, mother, worker, daughter, wife).

The women's narratives make clear that the media often provide little insight into these processes. They point to a dialectics of discourse in which the media and other discourses about Filipino women feed into and sustain each other. Problems of (mis)representation arise when journalists use racist, sexist, and class-based discourses such as the "mail-order bride" to portray Filipino women. Such images sensationalize the issues and shift responsibility for violence away from the perpetrator. They reproduce notions of difference, of women who are "out of place" both racially and spatially. It is difficult to envisage the possibility for change in media practices while journalists continue to use the mail-order bride discourse as both the framework and explanation for understanding Filipino women's migration and abuse. When reporting violence, there is a need for cultural sensitivity and respect for cultural differences, rather than sensationalism and sexualization of those differences. Racism- and sexism-awareness training, and cross-cultural communications training for the media as well as police, judiciary, lawyers, advocates, social workers, and educators, are vital. Clearly, practitioners in these institutions require more education regarding domestic violence and all its manifestations, and how to treat victims with respect and dignity.

As a textually mediated discourse, "mail-order bride" images have social effects. They shape the lives of Filipino women and their social relationships and may even contribute to their vulnerability to male violence in Australia. The tendency of journalists in both Australia and the Philippines to construct a victim paradigm that does not adequately

account for the initiatives of Filipino women in countering male violence was noted. In addressing the ways Filipino women struggle in their own homes, organize against domestic violence in their communities, and establish support networks, the media could help empower other Filipino women in abusive relationships. This would also inform and educate men about their behavior. The development of networks in which media practitioners and Filipino women have ongoing dialogue and consultation could help ensure that reporting accurately reflects these women's lives and is culturally sensitive. The narratives of the women in this article demonstrate that although the relationship between lived reality and media image is often one of misrepresentation, it also involves struggle and conflict. It is a site of contested realities.❁

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Dee Hunt from the Center for Philippine Concerns-Australia, Brisbane Branch, for her insightful commentary on my PhD dissertation, on which this paper is based. I am also grateful to Kathryn Robinson for her helpful comments. I appreciate the constructive criticisms of the two anonymous reviewers and the editors' suggestions.

Note

1. One of the more disturbing examples of the sexualizing of violence and poverty I came across during my doctoral research was in *Australian Penthouse*, a pornographic magazine. It involves the juxtaposition of two articles titled "Lust: Battered Husbands" (Bentley 1988, 18, 144) and "Smoky Mountain" (Allen 1988, 79). Bentley's (1988, 18, 144) article on the battered "mail-order grooms" of Filipino women connects poverty and sex with the women's "abuse" of their non-Filipino partners. In talking about "abusive" Filipino wives, Bentley (1988, 18) states "marriage to a foreigner *does* offer escape from an impoverished country where social welfare is a bad joke." In the middle of his article is the piece on Smoky Mountain. Allen (1988, 79) writes, Smoky Mountain "is a rubbish dump, and the Earth's most squalid human habitat–home to more than 3000 Filipinos." It is also a very violent place where "death is close" (Allen 1988, 79). Pages of glossy pictures of human misery are a major feature and they highlight the poverty Bentley mentions. While poverty is sexualized by its very appearance in a pornographic magazine, the juxtaposing of the two articles further strengthens the nexus between sex, violence, and poverty.

REFERENCES

Abrera-Mangahas, Alcestis. 1997. Violence against women migrant workers: A Philippine reality check. Paper presented at the First National Convention, Philippine Migration Research Network, Quezon City, Philippines.

Aguilar, D. 1998. *Toward a nationalist feminism.* Quezon City: Giraffe Books.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* London: Verso.

Allen, Larry. 1988. Smoky mountain. *Australian Penthouse*, April.

Ateneo Human Rights Center. 1999. *The Philippine-Belgian pilot project against trafficking in women.* Makati City: Ateneo Human Rights Center.

Azarcon-dela Cruz, Pennie S. 1988. *From virgin to vamp: Images of women in Philippine media.* Manila: Asian Social Institute with the World Association for Christian Communication.

Beltran, R. P., and G.F. Rodriquez, eds. 1996. *Filipina women migrant workers: At the crossroads and beyond Beijing.* Quezon City: Giraffe Books.

Bentley, David. 1988. Lust: Battered husbands. *Australian Penthouse*, April.

Chapkis, Wendy. 1986. *Beauty secrets: Women and the politics of appearance.* Boston: South End Press.

Cohen, Stanley. 1980. *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the Mods and Rockers.* Oxford: Martin Robertson.

Commission on Filipinos Overseas. 2004a. Number of fiancé(e)/spouses of foreign nationals by major country of destination, 1989-2003. Manila: Commission on Filipinos Overseas.

——.2004b. Number of filipino fiancées/spouses of foreign nationals by manner of introduction, 1989-2003. Manila Commission on Filipinos Overseas.

Constable, Nicole. 2003. *Romance on a global stage: Pen pals, virtual ethnography, and "mail order" marriages.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review* 43:1241-1299.

Cunneen, Chris, and Julie Stubbs. 1997. *Gender, "race" and international relations: Violence against Filipino women in Australia.* Sydney: Institute of Criminology Press.

de Dios, Aurora. 1999. Hidden no more: Violence against women in the Philippines. In *Breaking the silence: Violence against women in Asia*, ed. Fanny M. Cheung, Malavika Karlekar, Aurora De Dios, Juree Vicht-Vadakan, and Lourdes R. Quisimbing, 152-173. Hong Kong: The Equal Opportunities Commission of Hong Kong.

de la Torre, Cesar. 1989. Not all bed of roses: Girl's wanting to marry foreigners get warning. *Manila Bulletin*, August 19.

Dempsey, Shelley. 1991. Filipino brides: Eleven killed in Australia. *Sun-Herald*, July 14.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia. 1999. *Help for new migrants: Filipino-Australian marriages and migration.* Belconnen: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

——. 2005. The Philippines-born community. Canberra: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Dibben, Kay. 1995. Murder by mail-order. *The Sunday Mail*, February 26.

Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Easteal, Patricia. 1996. *Shattered dreams: Marital violence against overseas-born women in Australia.* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Erikson, Kai T. 1962. Notes on the sociology of deviance. *Social Problems* 9: 307-14.

Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales. 1992. *Filipino women: Challenges and responses, 1989-1991*. Sydney: Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales.

Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce. 1994. *Family violence: Everybody's business, somebody's life*. Revised edition. Sydney: Federation Press.

Frankenberg, Ruth. 1993. *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness.* London: Routledge.

Go, Stella. 1997. Toward the 21st century: Whither Philippine labor migration? Paper presented at the First National Convention, Philippine Migration Research Network, Quezon City.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Grossberg, Lawrence, Ellen Wartella, and D. Charles Whitney. 1998. *Media making: Mass media in a popular culture*. London: Sage.

Guerrero, Sylvia H. 1999a. Preface. In *Gender-sensitive and feminist methodologies: A handbook for health and social researchers*, ed. Sylvia H. Guerrero, xi-xiii. Quezon City: University Center for Women's Studies, University of the Philippines.

——. 1999b. What is feminist research? In *Gender-sensitive and feminist research: A handbook for health and social researchers*, ed. Sylvia H. Guerrero, 15-20. Quezon City: University Center for Women's Studies, University of the Philippines.

Hooks, Bell. 1984. *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Boston: South End Press.

Ibon Foundation. 1999. Filipinas as global slaves. *IBON Facts & Figures* 22 (5-6): 1-12.

Kanlungan Center Foundation. 1997 *Destination: Middle East; A handbook for Filipino women domestic workers.* Quezon City: Kanlungan Centre Foundation.

——. 1999. *Fast facts on Filipino labor migration.* Quezon City: Kanlungan Centre Foundation.

Iredale, Robyn, Jane Innes and Stephen Castles. 1992. *Serial sponsorship: Immigration policy and human rights.* Wollongong: Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong.

Israel, Lorna Q. 2001. The troika of class, gender and sexuality: Shame and women's labour migration. Paper presented at the Sixth Women in Asia Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

Jolly, Margaret. 1997. From Point Venus to Bali Ha'i: Eroticism and exoticism in representations of the Pacific. In *Sites of desire, economies of pleasure: sexualities in Asia and the Pacific,* ed. Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, 98-122. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Manderson, Lenore. 1997. Parables of imperialism and fantasies of the exotic: Western representations of Thailand–place and sex. In *Sites of desire, economies of pleasure: sexualities in Asia and the Pacific,* ed. Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, 123-44. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Manderson, Lenore, and Margaret Jolly, eds. 1997. *Sites of desire, economies of pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Manila Chronicle. 1993. Outrage is not enough. April 15.

Marshall, Larry. 1997. The representation of Filipino women in Australian film: The case of "mail order bride." MA thesis, School of Arts and Media, Latrobe University.

Nuqui, Carmelita. 1998. Birds of prey: The feminization of migrant labor. *Lila: Asia-Pacific Women's Studies Journal* 7:67-75.

O'Donnell, Carol, and Heather Saville. 1982. Domestic violence, sex and class inequality. In *Family violence in Australia,* ed. Carol O'Donnell and Jane Craney, 52-66. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Opotow, Susan. 1990. Moral exclusion and injustice: An introduction. *Journal of Social Issues* 46 (1): 1-20.

Pettman, Jan. 1992. *Living in the margins: Racism, sexism and feminism in Australia.* Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Radford, Jill, Liz Kelly, and Marianne Hester. 1996. Introduction. In *Women, violence and male power: Feminist activism, research and practice,* ed. Marianne Hester, Liz Kelly, and Jill Radford, 1-18. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ramirez, M.M. and A.B. Besa. 1997. *When labor does not pay: The case of Filipino outmigration.* Occasional Monograph 9. Manila: Asian Social Institute.

Robinson, Kathryn. 1996. Of mail-order brides and "boys" Own' tales: Representations of Asian-Australian marriages. *Feminist Review* 52:53-68.

Roces, Mina. 1996. Filipinas in Central Queensland: Gender, migration and support services. In *Futures for Central Queensland,* ed. Denis Cryle, Grahame Griffin, and Daniela Stehlik, 145-152. Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press.

——. 1998. *"Kapit sa patalim"* (Hold on to the blade): Victim and agency in the oral narratives of Filipino women married to Australian men in Central Queensland. *Lila: Asia-Pacific Women's Studies Journal* 7:1-19.

San Juan, Epifanio. 1998. *Filipina insurgency: Writing against patriarchy in the Philippines; Selected essays.* Quezon City: Giraffe Books.

Saroca, Nicki. 1997. Filipino women, sexual politics, and the gendered racist discourse of the mail order bride. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* 2 (2): 89-103.

Saroca, Cleonicki. 2002. Hearing the voices of Filipino women: Violence, media representation and contested realities. PhD diss., Newcastle, School of Social Sciences, University of Newcastle.

Soriano, Grace. 1995. Filipino families in Australia. In *Families and cultural diversity in Australia,* ed. Robyn W. Hartley, 95-120. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin.

Smith, Dorothy. 1988a. Femininity as discourse. In *Becoming feminine: The politics of popular culture,* ed. Leslie G. Roman and Linda K. Christian-Smith, 37-59. London: Falmer Press.

——. 1988b. *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology.* Toronto: Open University Press.

——. 1990. *Texts, facts and femininity: Exploring the relations of ruling.* London: Routledge.

Sama-samang Inisyatiba ng Kababaihan sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan (SIBOL). 1997. *Women's health and the law.* Quezon City: Women's Legal Bureau.

Tiongson, Mari Luz Quesada. 1999. The state of women and media in Asia: An overview. Paper presented at the High Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Bangkok.

Weedon, Chris. 1987. *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Whiting, Frances. 1999. Click here for your dream girl. *The Sunday Mail,* January 24.

Woelz-Stirling, Nicole A., Margaret Kelaher, and Lenore Manderson. 1998. Power and the politics of abuse: Rethinking violence in Filipina-Australian marriages. *Health Care for Women International* 19 (4): 289-301.

Women's Coalition Against Family Violence. 1994. Blood on whose hands? The killing of women and children in domestic homicides. Fitzroy: Arena.

———————————————

Cleonicki Saroca is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University in Australia. Send correspondence to the author at cleonicki.saroca@anu.edu.au.