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THE ABSENT AND SILENCED VOICE IN NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS OF FILIPINA VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

This article explores the absent and silenced voice in Australian newspapers through case studies of two Filipino women – Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton, who were victims of homicide in Australia. It draws on a feminist discourse analysis of newspaper articles and interviews conducted with their families and friends. While raising particular conceptual, methodological and ethical concerns, the method used is one way we can hear the stories of those who do not have a voice in the present. Analysing newspaper representations in light of the interviews provides an entirely different, more accurate and just reconstruction of the women's lives. Media representations of Nenita and Marylou bore little resemblance to their 'lived reality'. In most instances, journalists did not acknowledge that the women were victims of domestic violence. Further, sexist, racist and class-based discourses constructed Nenita and Marylou in accordance with dominant representations of Filipino women in Australia. They were held accountable for their deaths, while their abusive male partners were frequently portrayed as victims of women who abused them. The article argues such representations sensationalise the issues, misrepresent violence as the women's fault and shift the responsibility from the perpetrator onto the victim. In the process, they silence women's voices.

Introduction

Numerous authors have highlighted that the absence of the victim's voice is a major problem when analysing homicide and, in particular, domestic homicide (Morgan 1997; Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 102; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence, 1994, 138). Dead women cannot speak on their own behalf (Morgan

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1997, 238; Mahoney 1991, 71-72). They are not alive to tell their stories. Thus, their first-hand account of their lives, including their intimate relationships, is not available (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 102; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 138). Drawing on the stories of others, it is possible for journalists to provide insight into how female victims of homicide lived their lives. In media coverage that portrays women's experiences in sensationalist, selective and biased ways, however, their voices are absent and silenced.

This article explores the absent and silenced voice in Australian newspapers through case studies of two Filipino women – Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton, who were victims of homicide in Australia. It draws on a feminist discourse analysis of newspaper articles to explore how violence against Nenita and Marylou was represented – or put into media discourse in Howe's (1997) words – and interviews conducted with the women's family members and friends. As I will demonstrate, newspaper discourses of Nenita as a 'mail order bride' and Marylou as an exotic sex object and predatory 'gold-digger' position the women at the intersections of gender, race and class. They constitute a racial and sexual "othering" of the women. Central to my analysis is how Nenita's and Marylou's families and friends address the absence and silencing of the two women in newspaper accounts. The interviews of the families and friends are important media that also have the power to represent. In doing so, they counter the newspaper accounts. Analyzing the newspaper images in light of the interviews provides an entirely different, more accurate and just reconstruction of the women's lives. The paper is organised into two parts. In the first part, I discuss the conceptual, theoretical, methodological and ethical issues that are central to feminist research on Filipina victims of homicide. The second part explores the absent and silenced voice through the case studies of Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton. This exploration highlights the ways gendered, class-based racism is constructed in Australia and provides a powerful critique of the media in which representations of Filipino women and violence are articulated as sites of contest over meaning. In summing up the major themes of my argument in the conclusion, I outline what I consider should

have been journalistic practice in reporting the homicides of Nenita and Marylou. My comments in this section, as in the article as a whole, have a broader application to media (mis)representation of other women, and they provide a basic framework for the work that journalists and other media practitioners reporting violence against women need to do in addressing media sources and interviews.

The Absent and Silenced Voice

This section delineates two crucial and interrelated concepts that are central to feminist research on Filipina victims of homicide—what I call the absent and silenced voice. I use the notion of absent voice to refer to that which is not present, what the text cannot say, while the silenced voice refers to a failure to mention or what the text refuses to say. As Macherey (1978, 87) argues:

> What is important in a work is what it does not say. This is not the same as … 'what it refuses to say', although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of measuring silences, whether acknowledged or not. [W]hat the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey into silence.

Further, I link the absent voice with normalised absence and the silenced voice with pathologised presence. Pettman (1991, 1992) and other feminist authors (Carby 1982, 212; Grosz 1988, 55; Riley 1985, 63) use similar concepts to capture how dominant discourses represent minority women. As Pettman (1992, vii) argues, these women are often absent within western discourses and when they are visible "… it is often as problems or victims, in ways that deny them agency and purport to explain their experiences within culturalist frames."

The absence of the woman's perspective can clearly be seen when a previous history of domestic violence is not reported and in the way women are represented in the media. Domestic violence can be best understood in terms of Foucault's nexus of power/knowledge, as both material relations of power and discourse (1972, 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1980, 1982). 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, emotional and verbal abuse, sexual assault, financial deprivation and social isolation (Dobash and Dobash 1979, 1998; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994). The main perpetrators of domestic violence are men while women and children constitute the majority of their victims (Dobash and Dobash 1979, 7; Wallace 1990, 72-73, 83; Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 33; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 2, 37). This is not to suggest all men are violent and women are not, or that every victim is a woman (hooks 1984, 118). While not diminishing the pervasive problem of men's abuse of women, it must be acknowledged that women can also be perpetrators of violence. Women are more likely to be assaulted and/or killed by their male partners or ex-partners than by anyone else (Dobash and Dobash 1979, 7, 17, 75; Wallace 1990, 72-73). Such gendered 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 (Dobash and Dobash 1998, 145, 153; Dobash and Dobash 1979, 15, 33; Polk 1994, 56; 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 relationships (Wallace 1990, 105; O'Donnell and Saville 1982, 52). Domestic violence is the most under reported crime in Australia and domestic homicides constitute the largest single category of homicides (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 1, 2). Significantly, a history of domestic violence often precedes a domestic homicide (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 29; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 3).

Representation refers to the way meaning is produced and circulated through forms of language, such as words, images and discourse (Hall 1997a, 1, 5; Lidchi 1997, 153). For Michel Foucault (1972, 129; 1978b, 14-15), discourses are formations of power and knowledge which constrain and enable what can be meaningfully spoken, thought and written about people, objects and practices in specific historical periods. Discourses shape our sense of reality, what counts as the "truth" – of the world, people, practices and

events (Hennessy 1993; Foucault 1972, 1978a, 1978b). Foucault (1972, 49) argues that discourses are productive: they constitute social reality by systematically forming '… the objects of which they speak'. Subjects constitute themselves and others and are constituted as particular kinds of people in discourse (Foucault 1978a), as "mail order brides" and exotic sex objects for example. Lived experience, such as domestic violence, is always interpreted and represented through discourses (Hennessy 1993, 75). The abuse of Filipino women, for example, is always made sense of and represented from a multitude of various positions. Abusive men often construct their actions as their right to "keep their women in order" while abused women may feel they deserve or caused the violence they experience because they "failed to live up to" their partner's expectations. People construct meaning and communicate about the world to others using systems of representation (Hall 1997b, 25; Lidchi 1997, 153). Hall (1997b, 25) and Lidchi (1997, 162-163) argue a distinction should be maintained between reality— people and things—and the symbolic practices of representation through which meaning is produced. Media representations are major sites of struggle over definitions of the "real" (Gledhill 1997, 348). They define the "normal" and mark boundaries (Bonwick 1996, 63).

For Filipino women, in particular, the significance of their absent and silenced voices in Australian newspaper accounts arises in the way they are represented in a context of fear and desire – as insatiable, grasping, manipulative women and as perfect partners for sex and marriage (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 102, chapter 6). In short, Filipino women are typically depicted as so called "mail order brides" with its subtext of exotic, submissive, traditional, and poverty-stricken women and/or opportunistic gold-diggers who will do anything to escape the poverty of the Philippines (Saroca 1997, 2002, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2007; Powsen 2001; David 1991). In this sexist, racist and class-based discourse, Filipino women use Australian men as passports to Australia. This view has gained currency in popular Australian imaginings of the "Asian Other". According to the New South Wales Filipino Women's Working Party, the sensationalist Australian media portrayal of Filipino women as "mail order brides", sex objects and prostitutes

has created a negative perception of all Filipino women, their migration and settlement in Australia (Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW 1992, 12). A recent Australian film, The Wannabes (2003), demonstrates the endurance of the Filipina 'mail-order bride' stereotype. It features two sex crazed Filipina characters, one a Rose Hancock clone who married her elderly sick husband so she could live in Australia and then tries to kill him with rough sex.

The issue of the absent and silenced voice in newspaper representation is particularly problematic when we consider the power of the media, especially in light of the claim they merely reflect reality. As McEvoy (1996, 182) points out, however, although news is presented as 'natural', unmediated reality, it is socially constructed. The media is the major source of information about Filipino women in Australia, and also about domestic violence. The media are a powerful ideological arena and site of social control (Grossberg et al. 1998, 182; Davies et al. 1987, 2-6) and discourse. Media shape social life, enabling and constraining beliefs, perceptions, identities and social relations, including gender, race and class (Scott 2001; Grossberg et al. 1998, 206, 292; Jakubowicz et al. 1994, 3; Davies et al. 1987, 2-6), through representations. As Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney argue, cultural meanings conveyed through media stereotypes have real and significant social effects:

> They 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 (1998, 224).

Although newspaper representations, such as violence against women and children, shape people's conduct and how they make sense of their social world, they do not cause behaviour (Boyle 2005, 1-27; Grossberg et al. 1998; Jakubowicz et al. 1994). While media practitioners construct particular narratives, audiences actively construct their own meanings (Jakubowicz et al. 1994, 133). The same media content can be read in various ways and may have different effects on behaviour (Grossberg et al. 1998, 314). The effects of any portrayal depend on the broader context of social relationships, structures and cultural phenomena in which the representations take place (Boyle 2005, 15; Grossberg et al.

1998, 27). Particularly in the realm of human rights violations such as homicide, it is important to explore how newspapers and other media represent Filipino women in order to understand the way image and discourse mediates reality.

Gender, Race and Class

Filipino women, like Nenita and Marylou, are positioned at the intersections of gender, race and class in terms of social relations, including relations of violence, and newspaper representations. My usage of class follows Aguilar (2000, 7) who argues that the situations of oppressed women in the so-called 'third world' '… calls not only for a class analysis but also for the comprehension of the glaring inequalities that characterise international relations'. Intersectionality highlights both the different locations of women within race and class categories (Mohanty 1991; hooks 1984, 4; 1989), and the ways these categories of difference intersect with gender to shape the structural and representational dimensions of violence against women of colour (Crenshaw 1991), including Filipino women. Difference here is understood as relations of power and not simply multiple forms of subjectivities (see Aguilar 1998, 37-38; 1998, 63-64). I am indebted to the work of Cunneen and Stubbs (1997) who use an intersectional approach to examine how structural factors together with racialised and gendered stereotypes constitute Filipino women's vulnerability to violence in Australia.

Crenshaw uses structural intersectionality to identify how the location of women of colour at the intersection of gender, race and class shapes their experiences of domestic violence and the responses of others, such as police, courts and media (1991, 1245; Radford et al. 1996, 1, 5; Radford and Stanko 1996, 65; Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce 1994, 2; Mama 1989, 31). For example, Easteal (1996, 10) argued that domestic violence is likely to be invisible 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). Non-recognition of overseas qualifications exacerbates the isolation and financial dependence of some migrant women (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 39; Easteal 1996, 9).

Representational intersectionality is the cultural construction of women of colour through intersecting narratives of gender, race and class (Crenshaw 1991, 1245; 1283). This is the terrain of stereotypes. As Hall (1997c, 258) argues, stereotypes seize a few '… characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them …' Hence, the so called 'Filipino mail order bride' in media and other discourse with its subtext of exotic, poor, submissive women and/or opportunistic gold-diggers who meet Australian men through commercial intermediaries and then use the men as a ticket to Australia.

In Australia and many other countries, dominant representations of gender constitute women as dependents and property of men, as bought through men's breadwinning (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 35; Pettman 1992, 69). Family ideology constructs women as 'naturally' caring and responsible for the family's well being (Dobash and 1998, 146-147; Dobash and Dobash 1979, 33-34; 77; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 35). This ideology is particularly powerful when combined with victim blaming, the idea that a woman deserved and provoked violence (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994, 52), that she was a 'mail order bride' or exotic sex object, for example. Family ideology combined with racism and class inequality is powerful in keeping women in violent relationships. Fear of male retribution has a power of its own, as we shall see in Nenita Westhof's and Marylou Orton's cases.

Feminists in countries such as Australia, the Philippines, UK, and the USA highlight the sexist, racist and class-based ways women are represented in mainstream media and how these discursive depictions fail to accurately portray women's lives (Boyle 2005; Saroca 1997, 2002, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Howe 1997; Crenshaw 1991; Davies et al. 1987; hooks 1984, 1989). They

identify a sexualized and racialized "othering" of women of color in which class is central (Constable 2003; Crenshaw 1991; Hilsdon 2003; Consalvo 1998; Saroca 1997, 2002, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Tiongson 1999; Isis International-Manila 1998, 1999; Marshall 1997; Cunneen and Stubbs 1996, 1997, 2000; Gilbert et al. 1994-1995; Holt 1993, 1996; Wall 1994; de Dios 1992, 1993, 2002; Mowatt and Wall 1992; David 1991; Davies et al. 1987, 4). "Mail order bride" and related discourse in media commentary on Filipino women is an example of this process (Saroca 1997, 2002, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Cunneen and Stubbs 1996, 1997, 2000).

When men's violence is put into media discourse (Howe 1997), journalists often use representational strategies, such as omitting previous violence, privileging the story of the accused and blaming the victim's behaviour, her lifestyle and personal characteristics, to minimise or obscure men's responsibility for violence (Saroca 2002; Howe 1997, 201; Consalvo 1998; Cunneen and Stubbs 1996, 1997; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994). The perpetrator's crime becomes secondary to concerns about the woman, and responsibility for violence is shifted onto the victim while the killer is reconstructed as the victim (Saroca 2002; Cunneen and Stubbs 1996, 1997; Women's Against Family Violence 1994, 3; 36; 139. Consalvo 1998, 193).

In explaining how journalists produce discourses that support particular ideologies and misrepresent women's experiences, it is important to understand the economic, political and cultural contexts of media industries. It is these environments and the editor's pen that largely dictate the final copy (Saroca 2002, 198). Journalists help create and are shaped by the dominant discourses circulating within their societies. The Australian media is a product of colonization and racism and sexism, of which anti-Asian racism is a major facet (Jakubowicz et al. 1994; Broinowski 1992). Like broader social environments, media cultures are often racist, patriarchal and profit-orientated. This milieu provides fertile ground for the genre of reporting that has developed around Filipino women as "mail order brides". Such misrepresentations serve the interests of media practitioners who seek to create controversy and emphasize difference to maximize sales and to reinforce existing social and

moral orders (Scott 2001).

Economic imperatives to make profits and attract advertising revenue, and time constraints are major structural forces on journalistic practices that lead to particular news formats and stories (Turner and Cunningham 2002, 18; Ericson et al. 1991, 36; 40-41). Journalists frequently use sensationalist stereotypes to sell newspapers and employ standard news formulas to save time. "Mail order bride" is both a dominant stereotype and a set formula for representing Filipino women in Australia. Time constraints, deadlines, employment structures, space, staffing, funding priorities, limited resources and competition place heavy constraints on journalists and limit investigative reporting and the in-depth discussions of social issues (Burns 2002, 9; Jakubowicz et al. 1994, 160).

Similarly, the cultural values and beliefs of media practitioners and organizations shape news in that they influence the selection and interpretation of stories (Burns 2002, 8; Jakubowicz et al. 1994, 159). Events are (re)constructed and evaluated according to newsworthiness, perceived audiences, and the interests and goals of journalists and news organizations to receive economic rewards and to advance particular themes and political views (Burns 2003, 32; Ericson et al. 1987). News values ensure that dominant cultural values are constantly reproduced in the news while other perspectives are screened out as non-newsworthy or marginal (Jakubowicz et al. 1994, 159). Although journalists often claim news is objective, their own gender, race and class identities and values inform reporting, particularly around emotive issues such as Filipino women and violence.

Methodological and Ethical Issues

This section addresses key methodological and ethical considerations in conducting feminist research on Filipina victims of homicide. It is essential that authors are transparent and self-reflexive about the politics of their scholarship, including their subjectivity and the ethics that shape their work. As Robinson (1994, 197-204) and Maher (1997, 207-232) point out, a researcher's social

positionality or location shapes all aspects of the research process, including the written report. In situating myself as author of this article and providing context to my interest in the issues it raises, I highlight my subject position as an anti-racist feminist from a working class background who was involved in advocacy work in a refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence. Furthermore, I have a Filipino partner and children in this relationship as well as Filipino extended family and friends and, as a feminist, I am committed to challenging media 'truth' claims that sustain the unequal status of women, including Filipino women in Australia. Fundamentally, feminist scholarship directs attention to women's diverse positionings within oppressive, inequitable social systems and has an emancipatory agenda to generate knowledge which will contribute to women's liberation and the improvement of their daily lives (Guerrero 1999a, 8; 1999b, 15). In analysing newspaper reportage of Nenita and Marylou, I sought to provide alternative representations – accounts that do justice to the women's lives.

An important methodological and ethical issue in conducting this research is that the women are not here to tell their stories. This is a problem in two senses. First, we do not have any first person accounts from Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton. Although we have some sympathetic and supportive statements from family and friends who seek to do justice to the memory of the women, in each case, we can only know the women as mediated through the stories of others. We can only gain insight into how these women lived their lives through those who knew them well. These stories are important because they challenge the unproblematic 'truth' of the stories of the male perpetrators – their version of events and (re)constructions of their female partner (see Morgan 1997, 238), which were invariably given prominence in most of the newspaper coverage. Second, although feminists strive to do justice to their subjects and to empower the women through 'giving them voice', it is the author who determines what is written and, conversely, what is omitted, and how data is analysed (Maher 1997, 228-229). Thus, it was imperative that I reflect on my own role in (re)presenting Nenita's and Marylou's experiences and in the selection of narrative

(Maher 1997; Olesen 1994, 167; Robinson 1994, 203-204) while maintaining an ethical commitment to the women and their families and friends.

For this paper, I collected articles published between 1987-1995 from a range of Australian newspapers as the deaths of Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton, the court appearances of Nenita's partner, Antonio Curado, and a report on the homicides of Filipino women in Queensland occurred between these dates. Data collection involved commercial archival searches, online newspaper sites, microfilm searches and articles sent to me by people interested in the cases. Both stories received coverage in widely circulating Australian newspapers, including major dailies like the *Telegraph*, *Courier Mail* and *Herald-Sun* and local newspapers, such as the *Melbourne Leader*. The articles in this paper are representative of the way these Australian newspapers portrayed the women, and construct Filipino women more generally (Saroca 2002). I used two methods for recruiting participants. First, I approached organizations in Australia and the Philippines and these contacts then made the initial approach on my behalf to family members and friends of Nenita and Marylou. Second, I advertised through various media such as Filipino newsletters in Australia.

The relatives and friends of Nenita and Marylou were chosen based on their accessibility and willingness to discuss Nenita's or Marylou's life and subsequent newspaper portrayal. They were in a position to talk about the women as they had witnessed violence the women experienced at the hands of their male partners. Nenita and Marylou also discussed their marital relations with these relatives and friends. Most Australian newspaper articles tended to present the stories and perspectives of the women's partners. I, however, did not rely on one source or uncritically accept the accounts of family and friends, but cross-checked the latter representations for consistency and internal coherence in order to establish their reliability and accuracy. In exploring the newspaper representations and those of family and friends, New's point about competing knowledge claims and their evaluation is pertinent:

> Knowledge is situated and perspectival, but that does not mean all perspectives are equally good, or that there are no good ways of judging

> between them. While there are no self-evident criteria for making such judgments, the internal coherence of the account, its scope and power to "situate possibilities" … its implications for other accounts, and its practical effects are all relevant (New 1998, 2).

The feminist discourse analysis I employ here is designed to provide a critique that illuminates problems of newspaper representation and addresses the challenge of how absent women's stories can be heard.

A major ethical consideration of conducting research on women who have been killed is to acknowledge the legacy of their deaths on the lives of their children and other family members (Saroca 2002). What happened to Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton's children is a significant part of the women's stories but beyond the scope and parameters of this article to explore.

Nenita Westhof

> She's always laughing and joking … She is always full of life … that's why they called her full of life. Bundle of joy that's what she was (May, a friend of Nenita, August 1999).
>
> Well she was famous for parties … She was a very vibrant, happy girl … She was the most loveliest, loveliest person you'd ever meet, and that's the way I wanted to remember her (Peter, a friend of Nenita, August 1999).
>
> And she was a leader in the Filipino community … she was a person of energy … who would get things done within the Filipino community (Father Wally, activist and a friend of Nenita, July 1999).
>
> She was trying to establish a family of her own among her friends … [S]he gathered around her women who themselves are lonely … And she was always out there to help them somehow … they were all having fun together … And that's why maybe people had an image of her being fun loving. Well she is fun loving. She really enjoyed life but she wanted security (Lola, activist and a friend of Nenita, July 1999).

Nenita Westhof was born in the Philippines in 1954. She met Willem Westhof, also known as Jimmy, in the Philippines in the early 1980s. They married there and Nenita migrated to Australia. Jimmy Westhof originally migrated to Australia from Holland. After suffering emotional and financial abuse, Nenita separated from Jimmy when she was pregnant with their child. She boarded in a house with several people, including Peter and May, who is a Filipina. The three shared accommodation from 1984 until 1987 when Nenita moved to her own flat. In 1986, a friend introduced Nenita to Antonio Curado, a Spanish born Australian. They entered into an intimate relationship, although they did not live together. Antonio Curado murdered Nenita Westhof on 18 February 1987 in her flat in a suburb of Brisbane, Queensland. He cut her throat in a jealous rage. Nenita was thirty-three years old. Curado then shot and killed Jimmy Westhof at another location. Nenita's and Jimmy's daughter was two years old when her parents were killed and she was left an orphan. She was placed in her aunt's custody and raised in the Philippines. In March 1988, Antonio Curado was convicted of both murders and sentenced to life imprisonment (CPCA 2002, 2).

Newspaper Representations of Nenita

By the mid 1980s, media frenzy over so called 'Filipino mail order brides' was reaching its peak and the reporting tended to be sensationalist (David 1991, 26-41). Major features of the Australian coverage of Nenita Westhof's murder were the inclusion of irrelevant material, the pathologising of her behaviour, and the racist and sexist stereotyping of her marital relationship. Four of the articles (Watt 1987, 1-2; Rowett and Edmondson 1987, 1; Reynolds 1988, 10; Dibben 1195, 66; 95), examined here highlight Nenita's ethnicity but do not refer to the ethnicity of Jimmy Westhof or Antonio Curado.

On 27 February 1987, after the bodies of Nenita Westhof and Jimmy Westhof had been found, Watt's (1987, 1-2) article 'Bizarre Double Murder' appeared as front-page news in the *Telegraph*. He stated:

> Mrs Westhoff [sic] … was originally from the Philippines and lived with

> her daughter. Neighbors from the … unit block today described her as a 'happy-go-lucky' woman who 'loved life' and 'adored' her little daughter. They said she was a church-goer and 'someone you couldn't help but like'. A close friend and neighbor, Maria Elsa Kettunen, said Mrs Westhoff [sic] had only been living in the flat for five months on a supporting mother's pension. Mrs Kettunen, also a Filipino, said Mrs Westhoff [sic] had been separated from her husband, whom she met as a penfriend, for more than two years. 'She had a strange relationship with her husband … she had been thinking about getting a divorce, but I don't know any more than that', said Mrs Kettunen. 'Sometimes she didn't want Amanda to be with her husband, sometimes she didn't mind. She often stayed with friends for up to three days because she felt lonely, so I thought she was away', Mrs Kettunen said (Watt 1987, 2).

The overall tenor of Watt's article undermines the positive image of Nenita he presents in the opening sentences. His statement that Nenita met Jimmy as a penfriend has no relevancy to her death. It was already clear Jimmy did not kill Nenita so there was no need for a dissection of their marital relationship. There is a suggestion here that being a penfriend somehow explains her demise. In the cultural context of Filipino marriage migration to Australia, penfriend is not a neutral term but constructs Nenita as a 'mail order bride'. It implies her marriage was not based on romantic love, that she used Jimmy to get to Australia. "Mail order bride" discourse constitutes a racial and sexual 'othering' of Nenita wherein class is central. Nenita's 'difference' from other 'Australian' women is thus highlighted. This notion is further stressed by other comments attributed to Elsa Kettunen: Nenita was on a supporting mother's pension and left her husband when she was pregnant; Nenita had a strange relationship with her husband and was contemplating a divorce. The subtext is that Nenita was a 'bad' woman. Although the article states Nenita adored her daughter, other comments, such as her wavering about leaving Amanda in the care of Jimmy and her habit of staying away from home, suggest she was also not a good mother.

A similar scrutiny of Nenita and Jimmy and their marital relationship was played out the next day in Rowett and Edmondson's (1987, 1) *Courier Mail* article, 'Slain Couple's Baby Found Safe as Police Quiz Man: Tip-off Leads to Family Caring for Tragic Orphan'. After establishing that Amanda's 'mother was a Filipino …', the two female journalists state:

> A friend of the dead couple, Mrs Elsa Kettunen, yesterday described them as complete opposites. She said Mrs Westhoff [sic], 33, was an extrovert who liked having friends around her. Mrs Westhoff [sic] had been depressed for the past month after starting divorce proceedings. 'She wasn't sure if she was doing the right thing and still cared a lot for Jimmy', Mrs Kettunen said. 'She left him when she was pregnant with Amanda—they were just not compatible. But Jimmy was a good father, a quiet man, who worried a lot about Nenita. He had been upset a lot lately because whenever he came looking for her she was not around. Nenita was like a butterfly, popping from one place to another. But she was a good mother and her daughter was her life.' Mr Westhoff [sic] … survived on a pension and tinkered, fixing lawn mowers for pocket money. He hardly ever had visitors except for Nenita's monthly visits. Neighbours said the last few visits had ended in heated arguments (Rowett and Edmondson 1987, 1).

The article's most troubling aspect is the quote attributed to Elsa Kettunen, 'Nenita was like a butterfly, popping from one place to another.' Rowett and Edmondson articulate an orientalist discourse and exhibit cultural insensitivity in their use of the word butterfly to describe a Filipino woman. In Filipino colloquial language, the expression refers to a slut or prostitute – a bad woman. In Anglo-Celt culture more broadly, butterfly connotes a frivolous person. The reporters have not considered the meanings the term has for many Filipinos and how the article might have been read within the Filipino community or the social consequences of its use. Nenita Westhof's construction as a 'butterfly' who is never home when her caring husband comes to visit positions her as 'out of place'.

Nenita Westhof's behaviour is again the focus in Reynolds' (1988, 10) report on Antonio Curado's double murder conviction, 'Letters Led to a Killer's Conviction'. Media reporting of homicide is structured in part by who and what can be reported so stories, like Reynolds' piece, often derive from lawyer's cross examinations, judicial summaries and witness statements in court that are immune from legal redress (Walton 1993, 8-10). The article featured in the *Sun* on 11 March 1988. Nenita's relationship with two men is the central concern rather than the actions of her killer. Although Reynolds (1988, 10) states Nenita was separated from her husband for two years before she became involved with Curado, he portrays

the murders as the outcome of a 'vicious love triangle':

> For decades Queenslanders have been shocked to hear growing stories of tragic murder-suicides through vicious love triangles … From the evidence, Mr and Mrs Westhof separated and several years later she formed a relationship with Curado. All went well for seven months until she fell pregnant and went to several doctors for treatment. He was convinced Mrs Westhof had had an abortion and that he was the father of the unborn child. It was the distraught belief that she had terminated his child which led to an horrific end for two people … Curado automatically blamed Mr Westhof for her getting the abortion and, subsequently, her death [emphasis added].

Antonio Curado's story that their relationship was good until Nenita fell pregnant is presented. It is assumed she shared the same experience. Reynolds sympathetically addresses Curado's distress over Nenita's abortion while highlighting her 'loose morals'. Nenita Westhof's behaviour makes Antonio Curado's actions understandable. It was her abortion that '… led to an horrific end for two people.' Reynolds' portrayal deflects attention away from Curado's violence. It legitimates the patriarchal premise that women are the property of men and men have the right to control women's bodies. Nenita Westhof is transformed from a victim of Antonio Curado's violence into a woman who abused men and provoked her own murder. He is reconstructed as her victim.

Dibben's (1995, 66, 95) article 'Murder By Mail-Order' presents the stories of four Filipino women killed in Queensland, including Nenita Westhof. It appeared in the *Sunday Mail* on 26 February 1995. The sensationalist headline suggests these women were killed because they came to Australia as 'mail order brides'. Describing Nenita's demise as 'murder by mail order' is factually incorrect. As Dibben makes clear, Nenita's husband did not kill her. It is also racist and sexist. According to KASAMA (1995, 5), Dibben did not like the offensive headline; her editor imposed it. However, it reinforces the very orientalist stereotypes about Filipino women and violence it was trying to refute. The article reflects the earlier reportage about Nenita's marital relationship and complicity in her own murder:

> From one of the letters the jury in Curado's trial learned that Nenita had been his girlfriend for seven months, and at one stage had been pregnant with his child. It was Curado's belief that Mrs Westhof had had an abortion that led to the murders. Mrs Westhof and her husband, whom she met as a penfriend, had been separated for several years (Dibben 1995, 95).

Again, it is Nenita's abortion as the cause of the deaths rather than Curado's violence.

Nenita's Story

Nenita's story is drawn from interviews with her close friends – May, Peter, Father Wally Dethlefs and Lola. May and Peter lived with Nenita during her pregnancy and after the birth of her daughter. They became Nenita's family. Father Wally was Nenita Westhof's priest as well as her friend. Lola, a Filipina activist, was a grant-in-aid worker for migrant women at the Migrant Resource Centre. She supported Nenita through her domestic violence situation.

Australian newspaper portrayals of Nenita Westhof as a loose woman, 'a butterfly', worked to discredit her, particularly in local Filipino communities, and render invisible many aspects of her life. Father Wally reveals a different reality. Nenita was an active member of his parish and played a vital role as a leader in the Filipino community and in the wider migrant community:

She could be an incredibly generous sort of person and a person who was community-minded … [S]he played an important role in the West End community … and the West End church was then only a very small church community … But she played a significant enough role in that place as well. And then in the Filipino community, she seemed to play a significant role there (Father Wally July 1999).

Nenita Westhof's community spirit included holding regular gatherings in her apartment. Her parties were multicultural solidarity affairs which helped ease newly arrived Filipinos and other migrants into life in Australia. Father Wally and another parish priest were usually in attendance. Nenita truly was a unifying force in the West End community. As Father Wally made clear, she

brought together people from many different ethnic backgrounds and actively promoted multiculturalism:

> [Nenita] and May … use to put on these incredible parties … The last one I remember going to there were probably a hundred people there of all nationalities and people would donate the food for Nenita and May to cook and Nenita was a really good cook … I remember one of those parties, probably the last one before she died … And I was just amazed about the people who turned up. And Noel and I went down and we were actually trying to identify all the different nationalities that were there … (July 1999).

Discussing their parties, May spoke of Nenita's vibrancy and great passion for life. Nenita's life revolved around her daughter and her extensive network of friends:

> [W]e lived together for so long, and every occasion we always have a party which Father Wally is always there … In West End … [a] lot of ethnic groups there. So she got a lot of Vietnamese friends, Filipino friends and … Thailand friends … She goes to any functions. Like barrio fiestas … Greek Festival. Any festival she goes … And I think that's it … She just want to be talking to a lot of good people … She's happy with her little girl, she's happy with her life. Cause she got so much friends and people around her (May August 1999).

Furthermore, Nenita Westhof did voluntary work at the local Migrant Resource Centre. Like many women in similar situations, she used her own experience of domestic violence to support and empower other migrant women in crisis. Lola indicates the pivotal role Nenita played:

> Everytime I had a function, and I had a migrant women's support group within the MRC, she always came … She just relished the role of somebody who gives support to women perhaps in similar situation as she was. Not necessarily domestic violence—being isolated, newly arrived … Nenita just lapped it all up, whether as participant, whether as one of my main pillars. I'd say 'Nenita I need some women to come to this function' and she would get them all. It became sort of a reverse role for us … She somehow gathered together isolated, lonely women of different ages, different backgrounds … And, gee, when she passed away everyone just missed her (July 1999).

Nenita established a family amongst the women she helped while looking out for their wellbeing.

Another major issue to arise from the interviews was the way the *Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* journalists had sensationalised and misrepresented Elsa Kettunen's comments about Nenita Westhof. Her statements were (re)presented to construct Nenita in accordance with dominant stereotypes of Filipino women. Elsa was Nenita's good friend and neighbour. She was understandably in deep shock at the time of the interviews and it was felt the press had taken advantage of her vulnerable emotional state. The comments of Sheridan-Burns are pertinent here. Sheridan-Burns (2002, 83) contends that journalists should consider the interviewee's state of mind, especially if the latter is upset or grieving, as she or he may express views that do not reflect their thoughts when they are lucid. After her interview, Elsa was marginalised within the local Filipino community, as Peter and May explain:

> Peter: … [S]omebody rang May and just screamed that she was going to … kill Elsa … May said '… in the paper, it says [Nenita] was like a butterfly'. And what Elsa was referring to was she'd be at the Migrant Resource Centre, then she'd be back at the church doing something, back home, then shooting somewhere else. But in Filipino translation that meant she was a prostitute. So it was taken out of context … And then [Elsa] copped a lot of abuse for that … [She was interviewed by the media] I think it was … the next day … She was so distressed because it happened right underneath her … She heard no screams, she heard nothing (August 1999).

> May: Oh, a lot of people [were] ringing [Elsa] … abusing her, 'why did you say she's a butterfly? She's not a butterfly'. But Elsa was saying, 'I didn't tell she's like that. What I was trying to tell them she is a happy go lucky girl' (August 1999).

Here, I explore how Nenita's friends addressed her absent and silenced voice in newspaper accounts. The print media portrayal of Nenita Westhof divided the Brisbane Filipino community. Father Wally invested an enormous amount of energy in repairing damaged social relations within the community and beyond. He discussed his efforts to heal and reconcile community members and, in particular,

to mend Elsa's isolation:

> I did a little bit of fence mending there and a bit of mediation work … to allow people to grieve and at the same time not to blow the … community apart in their suffering. And that was a strong possibility because of the media stuff. That was very, very much an issue for some in the community. And then Elsa … was really upset about the fact that people had taken the connotation of the butterfly … that had been put in the [paper]. And she was really upset about the repercussions that were taking place on herself. So I just saw my job then as letting her talk about this stuff, and hearing her side of the story (Father Wally July 1999).

As part of his mediation work, Father Wally and others undertook a creative project to remember Nenita Westhof as the significant person she was. While the project was a poignant way to challenge the media image of Nenita within their group, as Father Wally points out, its effectiveness was limited:

> Father Wally: So one of the first meetings that we'd had of a smaller group that Margaret did and suggested and was taken up was that people actually write down their memories of Nenita and get photos together and they be kept and or given to [her daughter]. And there's a whole kind of healing thing with all of that project that Margaret took up. And it was very, very vital …
> NS: And that project to bring Nenita's voice into the picture would undermine the negative stereotype.
> Father Wally: [Yes] within the community but it doesn't get front page in the papers. So that stereotype on a societal level is not redressed (July 1999).

Despite Father Wally's hard work to mitigate the consequences of the newspaper portrayals, he was very aware that their long-term effects remained:

> But I suppose you are left with the residual thing that, well, here's a young woman who has been publicly vilified and basically she has no recourse to natural justice at all … And then like the wider Australia community, the male community, also has the stereotype reinforced once again which doesn't help [Filipino women], and it doesn't help the many, many Filipino women who are still coming out here (July 1999).

Commenting on how Australian newspapers responded to Nenita's

murder, Father Wally observed:

> And that sort of portrayal does nothing to promote community or community relations. Stereotyping in terms of these young women, that they're very available and all Filipinas are the same. And so it makes me feel very angry that kind of stuff is put around in places and many copies are produced, going to people's homes and front page, all sensationalised. I don't think that's justice … Doesn't respect the person (Father Wally, a friend of Nenita Westhof, July 1999).

There was a strong perception amongst Nenita Westhof's friends that Nenita's story could not be told because, aside from Elsa Kettunen who was misquoted, journalists did not interview those who knew her really well. Peter and Father Wally made it clear that this was a major flaw in the newspaper reports of Nenita's murder:

> Probably the detectives told them what they needed to know but nobody came and talked to us … They never even talked to Father Wally. But the people who knew her, nobody bothered talking to us. So where they got their story from, I don't know. So they couldn't have portrayed Nenita as Nenita was … Well, commonsense is that you talk to the people who were with her … Then they'd be able to understand Nenita a bit better and then write accordingly. Going half-cocked you only get half a story (Peter August 1999).

> They could have gone to the Filipino Welfare Association. Or they could have gone to Filipino community leaders, like Lola and whoever else was around at that time. But they didn't … so that whole side doesn't get mentioned at all. Nenita's life doesn't get mentioned at all … Nobody's being asked, or if Elsa was asked, they don't print up everything she said … Elsa probably said lots and lots and lots of things and giving her a better coverage of that rather than the butterfly stuff (Father Wally July 1999).

Rather than tell Nenita's story, journalists instead presented sensationalist accounts that did not accord with Nenita's experiences or do justice to her life. The comments of the Women's Coalition against Family Violence's on domestic homicide are relevant to the reporting on Nenita:

> [T]he uniform absence of any attempt to provide an account of the victim's life and the context and history of violence which preceded the

> murder was striking. [From] initial police investigations through to court trials and media reporting, we witnessed the systematic silencing … of the experiences of the dead women and children, and the relentless focus on attempting to justify or explain away the killer's actions. It was the victim, and not the offender whom we saw being described as inadequate, demanding, aggressive and provocative. It was she, in her absence, who was being assessed, judged … and punished. Judicial pronouncements echoed sexist, racist and class-based assumptions, as they attempted to frame the killer's actions as understandable, if not forgivable. These official versions, with their claims to neutrality and objectivity, obscure the power relationships underpinning domestic violence and murder, resulting in further victimisation and negation of the murdered woman or child (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence, 1994, viii)

A significant part of Nenita Westhof's story was the violence she experienced at the hands of both Jimmy Westhof and Antonio Curado. Lola described the emotional and financial abuse Nenita suffered in her marital relationship:

> I remember her story … that he was very stingy even when they were shopping. Cause I always gave this as an example of financial abuse and emotional abuse. They were shopping and she would put something she liked in the trolley and he would put it back. He was always scolding her, 'you don't need that'. If I remember right, he didn't want her to buy food of her choice. It was always his choice (July 1999).

The articles stressed Nenita's separation from Jimmy. Yet, no mention was made of the abuse she experienced in her marriage, which was certainly a factor in her decision to leave. Regarding Nenita's relationship with Antonio Curado, Father Wally said Curado was possessive, tried to control Nenita, and was jealous of her male friends:

> See he turned up at the presbytery one day telling me … what I had to do with regards to Nenita and what to do with Jimmy which didn't go over very well at all … And it seemed to me that he was … fixated or something on Nenita. And that he wanted to possess her. I mean she was a very beautiful looking young woman … And that he was very jealous of us probably. But I met him a couple of times and each occasion, he was 'you will do this and you will do that' … And he pushed and he pushed. Yes, so I met him a couple of times. I wasn't impressed with him.
> NS: Do you know if there was any violence in their relationship?

> Only that kind of violence. I am sure that if he was doing that with me, he was doing that with her, yes (July 1999).

In the commentary of Father Wally, Antonio Curado emerges as a man who believed and acted in ways that suggested Nenita was his 'property', that she did not have any rights. He claimed 'ownership' of her and could thus, so he thought, do what he liked with her. Reynolds' (1988, 10) coverage of Antonio Curado's sentencing for murder omitted the history of domestic violence that preceded Nenita Westhof's death. Curado's killing could thus be portrayed as an isolated act of jealous rage, rather than a continuum of abuse. As Mahoney (1991, 71) states in relation to (female) victims of domestic homicide, "[s]ince those women are not alive to tell their stories, their voices disappear into the narrative voices of the courts, where the women are not usually identified as battered". It was not Nenita's abortion, however, that led to murder but Antonio Curado's jealous possessiveness and violence. His struggle to maintain power and control over Nenita was lethal. By drawing on the police and court version of events, Reynolds portrayed Nenita's experience in a selective and biased way and ensured her story was not told.

Marylou Orton

> [S]he was just wanting … genuine happiness. You should see … how beautiful her face is. That smile it's always there … [S]he was involved in our organisation [Collective of Filipinas for Empowerment and Development], and she wanted to do something really good for other women … [S]he was always … wanting to give the best to [her sons] (Melba, activist and a friend of Marylou, August 1999).

> [S]he was … very full of life and very dynamic and always wanted to be with people. When we were doing acting … for the Fiesta, she related with everyone no matter what their age. Even it's someone who was very much younger than her … She was really open to everybody. And I felt like that was the kind of life she wanted to lead that she always wanted to be happy and be active … (Inday, activist and a friend of

Marylou, August 1999).

Marylou Orton was born in Cebu City, the Philippines, in 1959. She studied engineering at Cebu University but was forced to abandon her studies when her father died (Marginson 1992b, 13). Marylou had her first child when she was nineteen. In 1979, she met John Orton, an Australian engineer, when he stopped over in the Philippines. They married there on 7 March 1980, settled in Papua New Guinea, and eventually moved to Melbourne in 1981. They divorced in 1989. In the late 1980s, Marylou formed a defacto relationship and gave birth to her second child in 1990. After the birth of this child, Marylou quit her job as a computer operator. When her relationship with the father of her youngest child ended, she struggled to support her children on a sole parent benefit (Marginson 1992a). Financial pressures led Marylou to seek work at a Fitzroy massage parlour on 10 March 1992. Marylou Orton was stabbed to death at the parlour a few days later on 13 March 1992. Kim Wa Li, the owner's brother, was also killed. No one has been charged with their homicides. Police stated it was most likely a standover killing and that Marylou was 'in the wrong place at the wrong time' (Marginson 1992b). At the time of her death, Marylou Orton was thirty-three years old. Her sons were fourteen years and twenty months. They were separated and raised by their respective fathers.

Newspaper Representations of Marylou

In this section, I explore images of Marylou Orton's life and death in four Australian articles. My analysis will largely focus on Kennedy's (1992, 31) article as it caused the most pain and outrage amongst her family and friends.

On 17 March 1992, a few days after the bodies of Marylou Orton and Kim Wa Li were discovered in a massage parlour, Melbourne newspapers began making sense of their killings. The central focus of the *Melbourne Leader* was whether the massage parlor was used for prostitution. In 'Police Probe 'Death' Site', Martinkus (1992, 1, 3) wrote:

> The Vice Squad and Fitzroy Council yesterday confirmed that a Chinese

> massage centre … was under investigation last year … Mary-Lou [sic] Orton, 33, and Kim Li Wa, 24, were found murdered at the premises … Fitzroy Council town planner … said when a town planning officer inspected the premises late last year, there was no proof it was being used for any purposes other than Chinese massage … According to Homicide Squad Sen-Constable Sol Soloman, the Vice Squad investigation turned up nothing and failed to prove the premises were used as a brothel.

Unlike some of the later reports, her article suggests Marylou was not a prostitute.

A major feature of the earlier newspaper reports of Marylou Orton's death (Morrell 1992, 7; Reddy 1992, 9) was her construction as both a victim of circumstance and a mother. In the *Herald-Sun* on 17 March 1992, Morrell (1992, 7) presents this view of Marylou in her title, 'Victim in Wrong Place', and opening lines:

> The mother-of-two killed in a double murder at a Fitzroy massage centre at the weekend had been working there for only four days … Police sources said it appeared Mrs Orton was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Friends are caring for her sons, aged 13 and 18 months.

On 22 March 1992, Reddy's (1992, 9) *Sunday Age* article, 'Poverty Paves Way to Underworld', sympathetically develops these themes of victim of circumstance and mother. Here, Marylou struggles to give her children a better life at great cost to herself. Despite her personal circumstances, she is a good mother:

> It is difficult to say when Mary Lou [sic] Orton's life began to unravel … Friends say she was a victim of the recession, a woman propelled by poverty into a sordid underworld to support her two young children … She returned to work … after maternity leave but quit two months later because she was concerned about leaving her infant son … in childcare. It was then that her real problems began. According to the Centre for Philippine Concerns, Mary Lou supported herself and two children on a sole parent benefit of $470 a fortnight … The bills began to mount and her rent payments started to fall behind (Reddy 1992, 9).

Reddy also notes Marylou's political activism as a founding member of the Collective of Filipinas for Empowerment and Development (CFED). She draws out the complexity of Marylou's life in the years leading up to her death.

Unlike many of the newspaper articles I examined, Reddy identifies the domestic violence Marylou suffered before her death. Marylou's abusive male partners, however, were not suspects in her killing. While Reddy (1992, 9) does indicate problems in Marylou and John Orton's relationship, regrettably Marylou's behaviour appears more of a problem than the behaviour of her ex-husband:

> The marriage was under increasing pressure from his frequent absences with work, his sometimes excessive drinking, and her passion for night life. She liked to say she would settle down and become a more dutiful wife as she matured.

Reddy (1992, 9) draws on Melba Marginson's comments to clearly establish Marylou's abuse at the hands of her youngest child's father while emphasising Marylou's identity as a good mother:

> 'There was a new man in her life and she was very happy … She got pregnant and … she was delighted … Then after two or three months, I got a call at 5am from her' said Ms Marginson. 'She was crying. She said she had become a victim of domestic violence. I went over to see her. She had a big black eye and a lot of bruises …' Despite the violence, Mary Lou persisted with the relationship. 'She always thought it was in the best interest of her child to stay with the father', said Ms Marginson.

In this account, Marylou is clearly a woman in danger of an abusive man.

In contrast, Kennedy's (1992, 31) article in the *Sunday Herald-Sun* on 12 April 1992 constructs a sexist and racist image of Marylou Orton. Both fear and desire are present in Kennedy's portrayal of Marylou as an exotic sex object as well as a predatory 'gold-digger' exploitative of men's emotions (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997, 106-107). Reminiscent of Nenita's portrayal as a butterfly, Marylou is likened to a moth, another member of the insect family. Kennedy's sensationalist title, 'Bright Lights Death Lure: Mary Lou Loved Bars and Gambling But Her Luck Ran Out', presages the article's lurid details:

> Mary Lou Orton liked to live life dangerously. She was vivacious, glamorous and was never short of boyfriends … Like a moth attracted to a flame, Mary Lou could not resist the bright lights. Nightclubs and

> bars were her scene. But Mary Lou's life in the fast lane came to an abrupt and bloody end. The 31-year-old Filipina died, stabbed and handcuffed in a Fitzroy massage parlor … 'Mary Lou wasn't a prostitute. She was a beautiful girl who loved the night life', said a close friend … Mary Lou was petite and stunning. Men were dazzled by her and she accepted their admiration and gifts. 'She always had at least four men in her life', a friend said. 'They could not resist her.' There seemed to have been two sides to Mary Lou. Friends described her as 'sweet' and 'lovely' while others accused her of bleeding men dry, taking men's love and gifts and then dumping them … [Her eldest son's] 'Uncle Joe' said: 'Mary Lou was a lady of leisure who bled men dry. People keep saying she was a victim. She was not a victim' (Kennedy 1992, 31).

Kennedy suggests that Marylou is a dangerous woman who used her beauty and sexuality to bewitch and manipulate men. She has the potential to destroy men. It is a fear of the illegitimate techniques beautiful Filipino women use to threaten (white) male power.

Like the construction of Cynthia, the 'mail order bride' in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), Kennedy's representation of Marylou calls on an already existing catalogue of patriarchal Anglo-Australian male desires and fears about the 'exotic' other. As Holt (1996, 73) argues, Cynthia reiterates the role of Filipino women as desirable sex objects of white Australian men. Yet, she is also an object of fear. Game (1991, 169) captures this play between desire and fear when she argues our '… relation to nature as other is one of ambivalence: desire structured around fear. The landscape is beautiful but threatening'. Fear of and desire for Filipino women is closely related to their position as boundary markers. As Hamilton (1990, 18) contends, although there is a fear of an 'Asian' entity outside the boundaries, there is also desire for her exotic otherness. Similarly, Kabbani (1994, 26) asserts that colonizers exhibited ambivalence toward "Oriental" women, fluctuating between desire, pity, contempt and outrage, thus their construction as scheming witches and/or erotic victims.

Kennedy's construction of Marylou as a 'bad woman' rendered her political activism almost invisible:

> Mary Lou [sic] worked briefly as a computer operator with a Melbourne export company and, equally briefly, involved herself with the Collective of Filipinas for Empowerment and Development … But Mary Lou [sic]

> did not stay in politics. The bright lights beckoned and she started staying out all night, and getting into big mahjong games (Kennedy 1992, 31) [emphasis added].

As Cunneen and Stubbs (1997, 75) observe, these stereotypes positioned Marylou Orton as complicit in her death. Marylou is again cast as the cause of her own demise when Kennedy (1992, 31) states '… it was gambling—with her life, the people with whom she associated and with money—that killed Mary Lou'. Cunneen and Stubbs (1997, 106) point out there was no suspect in Marylou's case and, thus, no necessary connection between her death and 'lifestyle'. Kennedy did not develop her statement that there were '… two sides to Mary Lou'. Instead, she produced a sensationalised one–dimensional account, which effectively silenced Marylou's voice.

Marylou is represented as a bad mother as well as a bad woman. After stating that her children will live apart as they have different fathers, Kennedy highlights Marylou's 'irresponsibility' as a mother. There is a suggestion that Marylou's 'loose lifestyle' continues to affect her children even after death:

> When Mary Lou [sic] and her friends played mahjong, [her] young [son] did his homework and studied … Detective Senior Sergeant Paul Sheridan … described [Marylou's eldest son] as ' … a remarkable product of this environment with a couple of fathers he hasn't seen much of and living with the women … At Mary Lou's [sic] wake, there he was, with his mother dead, his little brother beside him, with very little emotional support—and the women playing mahjong in the room' … But the women said they were playing to raise money to help Mary Lou's [sic] mother … And also, Mary Lou would have wanted them to play (Kennedy 1992:31) [emphasis added].

To lend authority to her portrayal of Marylou as a bad mother and bad woman, Kennedy (1992, 31) uses the alleged words of Marylou's eldest son to pass judgement on his mother:

> [He] told one of Mary Lou's [sic] old boyfriends who telephoned from America just before she died: 'I am getting very worried about my mother. She needs to grow up'.

With this statement, Marylou is condemned as a parent. There is no

greater measure of a mother than the value her child places on her.

Although knowledge about John Orton's heavy drinking was already in the public domain, Kennedy does not refer to it. It is absent from her account. Instead, she scrutinises Marylou's behaviour as the cause of the marriage break–up:

> Mary Lou was entranced by the bright lights, the clubs and the bars. The marriage was rocky. She was moving with a fast crowd. Orton's friends claimed she was using drugs (Kennedy 1992, 31).

Turning her attention to Marylou's relationship with the father of her youngest child, Kennedy again fails to mention the domestic violence Marylou experienced, although Reddy had previously written about it. In her sympathetic portrayal of Raymond Henry, Kennedy (1992, 31) demonises Marylou:

> Mr Henry worked two jobs, as a retail manager by day and stacking supermarket shelves at night, to support Mary Lou, his son … and [Marylou's oldest son]. Mary Lou disliked housework so Mr Henry also did the washing, ironing, cooking and taking care of the children. He almost had a physical breakdown—and as fast as he made money at his two jobs, Mary Lou lost it on the mahjong table. 'Raymond really attended to Mary Lou,' said Ms Marginson. 'But Mary Lou's life was very complicated. Raymond became an incidental accessory to the way she ran her life.'

As in the case of Anthony Curado and Nenita Westhof, Mr Henry emerges as a victim, while Marylou is reconstructed as his abuser.

Marylou's Story

Marylou Orton story is based on interviews with her close friends and fellow activists, Melba Marginson and Inday. Together with Marylou, Melba and Inday were founders of the Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia (CPCA) and the Collective of Filipinas for Empowerment and Development (CFED).

Like many women, Marylou Orton had dreams of a better life in Australia for herself, her sons, and other Filipino women. Inday spoke about Marylou's struggle to improve her

personal circumstances. Concern for the well-being of her sons and commitment to her family back in the Philippines figured largely in this struggle:

> To her it was important that she was successful, and she was very proud of the fact that she was working in a big office … not only did she talk about her job, but she wanted to take up more studies … things that would equip her so that she can get promoted … [T]he kind of life she wanted was to be able to live comfortably while she can well provide for her family in the Philippines and be able to live happily here. Have a nice house … really afford to look after her children and have a good status as in career–wise … She was very conscientious. She was very ambitious. It's like she didn't stop at where she was at. She was always trying to improve herself … (Inday August 1999).

Melba discussed Marylou Orton's political consciousness and activism, particularly her concern to support Filipino women in crisis. As Melba points out, Marylou developed a strong interest in Filipino women's issues and joined community protests over the homicide of a Filipino women, Gene Bongcodin, and her portrayal in the media:

> I came to know Marylou Orton in … SAMPA … a mixed Filipino men and women's organisation … and the first activity that we had was … protesting against the killing of Gene Bongcodin … I directed a short play for the Philippine fiesta [about the experiences of Filipina migrants in Australia] and she was one of the performers … I actually organised a women's support group [CFED] from within that organisation as a result of the previous experience with Gene Bongcodin and the increasing number of domestic violence cases. And she joined in. I remembered that we even met in her place once … and she was telling us that 'oh, I have many friends who need support, and perhaps what we should do is actually to invite them in our houses … show them some Filipino films and then get them started talking. That way, we provide them with social support and at the same time a good avenue to start talking and discussing problems' (Melba August 1999).

Melba's comments directly challenge Kennedy's representation of Marylou Orton. Like Nenita Westhof, Marylou used her own experiences of domestic violence to support and empower other women. Further, through theatre performance, she used media in a

positive way to inform Filipino women of their rights, educate the general public about the abuse of Filipino women, and challenge media stereotyping of Filipino women.

Violence was a significant aspect of Marylou Orton's life with both John Orton and the father of her youngest son, a fact glaringly absent in Kennedy's article. Melba highlights the history of domestic violence Marylou experienced in these two relationships. Speaking about Marylou's marital relationship with John Orton, Melba said:

> She told me about her life in PNG, Papua New Guinea, that she was also a victim of domestic violence … He used to verbally and physically abuse her and in her anger she would just pick up her keys and [her son] and she would ride around and around the town, trying to cool herself down … So that was her first experience of domestic violence (August 1999).

John Orton's drinking was a significant factor in their marriage break–up and caused so much stress for Marylou that she had a breakdown (Marginson 1992a, 1992b, 13). Melba then discussed the abuse Marylou suffered at the hands of the father of her youngest son:

> The next thing that happened was I got this call at 5 o'clock in the morning … and she was crying on the phone, and telling me that she had been bashed, by [her son's father] … And she was raped … and if I could go and help her. So, Simon, my husband, and myself and Inday … we rushed to her place and saw her with black eyes and … crying all over … So we managed to settle her down … I had to leave Inday to be with her all throughout the day, with [her oldest son] and … the baby because she had just given birth, three months before (August 1999).

Like her marriage, Marylou Orton's relationship with this partner ended because of domestic violence. As Melba (1992c, 13-14) poignantly states:

> Marylou is … a Filipina survivor in a foreign country whose time ran out before she could enjoy the fruits of her increasing feminist consciousness. Her life story reflects a strong determination to raise up from a seemingly hopeless situation … Marylou, despite her assertiveness, always trusted the men in her life. Yet … it was these men who brought tragedies to her. After several harrowing experiences with them, she began to understand

> some of the worst aspects of men. However, before she could protect herself from the risks associated in dealing with their sort, she had become a victim.

In contrast to Kennedy's article, Melba identifies male violence as the problem rather than Marylou Orton's lifestyle or personal characteristics. Marylou's partners believed and acted in ways that suggested she was their 'property' and they could do what they liked with her. The men saw themselves as 'masters' whose authority could not be challenged. They did not consider their intimate relationship as a partnership but, rather, as an arrangement in which they were superior. These were relationships characterised by abuses of male power and control.

Kennedy made much of the different men in Marylou Orton's life and, in the process, constructed Marylou as a 'promiscuous' woman, bed-hopping from one man to the next. What she does not say is that Marylou left John Orton and the father of her youngest son because of their violence. Melba and I discussed this issue further:

> NS: Do you feel that the DV might be one reason why she was no longer with the man?
> Melba: Oh yes, definitely … Because all she wanted … was genuine happiness. So if [the father of her youngest son] had been a good partner, I don't think she would have left him. I remember her even telling me she wanted a real long-term relationship … free from violence (August 1999).

Marylou, like many women, never gave up her hopes and dreams for a relationship with a caring and loving partner:

> Every time, she was a romantic and a dreamer. She would always tell 'I wish I could find the right man … ' And at a certain stage I thought, because she met my husband and she could see us very happy … she was probably wanting to meet someone like Simon, who was decent, supportive (Melba August 1999).

Melba and Inday stated that newspaper portrayals of Marylou Orton as just a prostitute were neither accurate nor adequate. Marylou was not simply a massage parlour employee. She was also a loving

mother, career woman, hard worker, political activist, and friend. They felt Marylou's story could not be told when articles such as Kennedy's (1992, 31) sensationalised and overstated one aspect of her life while rendering silent its complexity and many different facets. As Inday explained:

> I think what was inaccurate or inadequate was how Marylou had found herself there. What had led her to this place. Because from my point of view, I didn't know her to be that kind of person. And it was inaccurate in the sense that I was led to believe that this woman was a prostitute or a lady of the night … The general impression you were given from the report is that she was just a prostitute because she found herself in this place where a lot of illicit sex was happening (August 1999).

Melba elaborated on the notion of Marylou Orton's absent and silenced voice and spoke about how Kennedy's misrepresentation of Marylou had caused personal anguish:

> I got this call from *Herald Sun*, this woman, Heather, saying 'oh all the media coverage is mostly about Marylou Orton and the murder itself, and her being a mother. I'm really interested in the angle of the children'. And she really had a sweet talk with me about the importance of the children's side being also discussed … And then came that very disastrous Herald Sun article … I rang the woman again and said 'why did you do that. All the time I tried to make sure that the media portrayal of this woman was to the best interest of herself and her family, especially her children …' [S]he said, 'oh, it wasn't my fault, it was the editor' … It was that last portrayal that I couldn't sleep for several days. I felt like I really betrayed her … I was for sometime depressed with that. And whenever I think of that or even look at that article, there is something in me that gets hurt … [T]he issue of accuracy for me is … an issue of whether she was given enough fair voice or reporting … [S]he could have written about the good things about [Marylou's eldest son], for example, how good he was in school. And how the mother despite her poverty did not give up taking care of him, and the baby. She could have written so much about the real situation with the difficulty in her financial situation … The fact is that she was a really opportunistic journalist … I did learn from that (August 1999).

Melba said that Kennedy had taken her own comments about Marylou out of context. She asserted that Kennedy's story was to:

> … portray [Marylou] badly, to all the more kill that woman by showing [her] as an unworthy human being. And that is quite a racism (August 1999).

This section examines the ways Marylou's friends addressed her absent and silenced voice in newspaper accounts and reinstated her story. Kennedy's portrayal of Marylou Orton provoked outrage and pain amongst her family, friends and fellow activists. CPCA and CFED actively tried to refute the portrayal and ameliorate its most harmful effects. Press conferences were held:

> When Marylou Orton died and CFED … was not happy with how her death was portrayed, I along with Melba and some other members of CFED, wrote … to media people … [A] TV channel responded to Melba's media release for a press conference about Marylou Orton …[I] was interviewed about Marylou. And I did try to say my bit, but … I ended up crying … [A]s a group … we did feel strongly about how it was reported and that had motivated us to do something about it … [CFED] was very much concerned about Filipina issues … so as a group we really tried to correct things so that we in turn can be helped and be seen in a better light (Inday August 1999).

On 15 April 1992, the CPCA, CFED, Women's Action Supporting Filipinas, and Friends of Marylou sent a protest letter to the editor of the *Sunday Herald-Sun*. It made clear that Kennedy's article had publicly vilified Marylou Orton, silenced her voice, exploited her children, and had more far reaching effects on Filipino women in general:

> We are writing to register our strong protest against your coverage of our friend and compatriot, Marylou Orton on *Sunday Herald–Sun*, 12 April 1992. An interview was given in good faith to your reporter Heather Kennedy. She gave us to understand that her main interest was in the welfare of Marylou's children, and we were extremely distressed to read that instead she exploited the plight of the children to discredit their mother's memory. At his mother's funeral, Jomar asked us to please remember her because she was a loving mother, a good friend, and a special lady. Your report went against his wishes and betrayed our trust when you presented a portrait of Marylou that conformed to the racist and sexist stereotypes of Filipinas that we are struggling to refute. By perpetuating these stereotypes, you are colluding in the oppression that Filipinas face in this country … There was no mention of the stresses and pressures that she lived under, the impact that racist and sexist oppression

> had on her life—an oppression that you have perpetuated after her death. By your sensationalized and irresponsible reporting, harm has been done to Marylou's memory, to the image of Filipinas in Australia, and to the right of all women to fair and equal treatment in the media.

Kennedy's opportunistic treatment of Marylou Orton, her children and friends propelled Melba to adopt a different protocol regarding media interviews. She now requests a written agreement '… that the reporting would be handled professionally and balanced'.

In analysing Kennedy's article, it is important to acknowledge that female journalists are not necessarily more sympathetic or less sexist and racist than their male colleagues. They are not a guarantee that the media texts they create will take a feminist view (Saroca 2002). There is no fixed essence to women that determines they will think and act in a particular way. Female journalists may not be women-centered, but may, like Kennedy, hold patriarchal and racist views on women.

Conclusion

This article has explored the absent and silenced voice in Australian newspapers through case studies of Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton. While raising particular conceptual, methodological and ethical concerns, the method I use here is one way we can hear the stories of those who do not have a voice in the present. The family and friends of Nenita and Marylou were very keen to share their stories, especially as journalists had represented the two women in sexist, racist and class-based ways. The newspaper representations of Nenita and Marylou bore little resemblance to their 'lived reality'. This caused further pain for their families and friends. As Thiesmeyer (1996, 4) argues, "it is precisely in the disappearances… performed by media, in a silencing of particular discourses, that real bodies are sacrificed". In providing different representations of Nenita and Marylou, the interviews of their families and friends have simultaneously highlighted the absence and silencing of the women's voices in the newspaper articles – particularly in terms of the violence the women experienced and in the way they were represented – and challenged those accounts.

The relationships Nenita and Marylou had with their partners were characterised by abuses of male power and control. However, in most instances, journalists did not acknowledge that the women were victims of domestic violence. In different ways, Nenita and Marylou were trying to escape intolerable situations, struggling to do something about the oppression they experienced at the hands of their abusers. As the women attempted to become more assertive, the men became more abusive. The Women's Coalition Against Family Violence (1994, 23) notes that:

> Men's violence towards women and children is a considered exercise of power aimed at maintaining control over them. When a man who is violent towards his partner and children has his control over them challenged, he will often inflict more violence to 'teach them a lesson', to remind them 'who is boss' and to intimidate and force them to comply with his wishes. The ultimate expression of this desire to control is the act of murder.

Similarly, Polk (1994, 28, 56) points out that often men use murder as a form of control to ensure possession of 'their' woman. Silence on domestic violence and men's role in women's suffering meant Nenita's and Marylou's actions in dealing with violence, for example leaving their abusive partners, were reconstructed as abusive. As DuBois (in Mahoney 1991, 69) argues:

> That which has no name, that for which we have no words or concepts, is rendered mute and invisible; powerless to inform or transform our consciousness of our experience, our understanding, our vision, powerless to claim its own existence
>
> As in the cases of Nenita Westhof and Marylou Orton, it is imperative that journalists name domestic violence and its impact on women, children and their families.

In most of the reports, sexist, racist and class-based discourses constructed Nenita and Marylou in accordance with dominant representations of Filipino women in Australia. Both women were portrayed as sexually immoral – Nenita as a 'mail order bride' and Marylou as an exotic sex object and predatory 'gold-digger'. Images of the women as insects – Nenita as a 'butterfly' and Marylou as

a 'moth', further highlighted their 'immorality'. While butterflies flitter about during the day popping from one place (or man) to another, moths fly at night, eat things up and damage things (clothing, men). The women's behaviour was held accountable – Nenita's 'abortion led to her death'; Marylou's 'lifestyle and gambling killed her'. Further, Jimmy Westhof and Antonio Curado, and John Orton and Raymond Henry were frequently portrayed as victims of women who abused them. Such representations sensationalise the issues, misrepresent violence as the women's own fault and shift the burden of responsibility from the perpetrator onto the victim. In the process, they silence women's voices. 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). These images inflict violence on the women long after their deaths.

This article raises important issues regarding media sources and interviews. First, journalists cannot tell the victim's story unless they interview families and friends, those in caring relationships with her, who knew her well. Second, journalists must provide a fair account of what these sources say, rather than shaping interview quotes to fit stereotypes of Filipino women. Third, the reliance of journalists on court and the story of the accused allows little space for the woman's story. As Nenita Westhof's case study has shown, problems of representation arise when journalists rely on flawed court accounts rather than investigate the case. Journalists compound these problems by privileging the story of the suspect without considering the element of self-interest in the presentation of the relationship with the victim in as good a light as possible. According to Scott (2001, 144):

> Fair representation … requires journalists to discover the full breadth of facts, to check them against a range of sources, and to present them in an even-handed way that discloses whose interests are served by various statements ... [I]t requires journalists to actively combat their own ignorance or insensitivity … [It also] requires interviewing all interested parties and carefully observing their words and actions while being aware of prejudices and preconceptions that get in the way of understanding the story from the interviewee's point of view. Balance … is about equal representation of points of view that require a high degree of empathy

> from the journalist. It is this empathy … that prevents events, issues, and people from being sensationalised, trivialised, or stereotyped in ways that perpetuate mythologies and racist attitudes.

Structural forces, however, such as economic imperatives to make profits and attract advertising revenue, deadlines, space, staffing, funding priorities, limited resources and competition place heavy constraints on journalists and limit investigative reporting and in-depth discussions of social issues (Turner and Cunningham 2002, 18, 40-41; Burns 2002, 9; Jakubowicz et al. 1994, 160; Ericson et al. 1991, 36).

Fourth, aside from exercising greater reflexivity, journalists need to be more transparent in how they select information in constructing news and what they omit. Dominant cultural values such as those that inform the representations of Nenita and Marylou are constantly reproduced in the news while other perspectives, such as those of the women's families and friends, are screened out as non-newsworthy or marginal (see Jakubowicz et al. 1994, 159; Ericson et al. 1987). Media practitioners are "authorized knowers" (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989, 3-4), and they wield enormous power in this selection process (Sheridan Burns 2002, 60). According to Scheppele (quoted in Morgan 1997, 255):

> … particular 'true' stories and particular descriptive statements are often selected from among a set of arguably accurate versions of reality – it is just that other descriptions in the set give very different impressions about what is going on. The vexing question is … how it is that some particular description instead of some other description comes to be forwarded as the authoritative version of events

Journalists must take more responsibility for the representations they create. As Sheridan Burns (2002, 65) argues, "[t]he people and places are real and so are the consequences of published journalism … the potential for harm is undiminished".

Fifth, despite media claims that news is objective, this article suggests the benefits of exploring how the gender, race and class identities and values of journalists inform their reportage of Filipino women and violence. As Marylou Orton's case has shown, female journalists are not necessarily more sympathetic or less sexist and

racist than their male colleagues. Both male and female journalists work within media cultures and are members of broader Australian contexts that are often sexist, racist, and profit-orientated. While journalists help create the dominant discourses circulating within their societies, they also are shaped by them.

When reporting violence, there is a need for journalists to develop cultural competence ' … in the cultural contexts in which they are working' (Scott 2001, 142). This includes respecting cultural differences, rather than sensationalizing and sexualizing those differences, and identifying stereotypical representations that perpetuate myths of the "other" (Scott 2001, 141). Racism and sexism awareness training and cross-cultural communications courses for journalists, as well as all those who come in contact with Filipino women – immigration officers, police, judiciary, lawyers, advocates, social workers, educators, researchers, the general public and so on – is vital. Clearly these practitioners require more education regarding domestic violence and all its manifestations, including racist abuse, and how to treat Filipina victims with respect and dignity. Although journalists negotiate competing professional, commercial and ethical considerations in constructing and presenting news, they each have some power to practice responsibly, to treat the subjects of their reportage with fairness and dignity, to decide what constitutes news, what questions to ask or to omit (Sheridan Burns 2002, 7, 10-11). The challenge for journalists is how to present social injustice such as homicide while ensuring that Filipino women are not stigmatised (Mowatt and Wall 1992, 12).

Endnotes

1. Although Foucault has provided a useful framework for analysing women's oppression, he failed to address the gender, race and class configurations of power on the body. He neglects that power is often patriarchal, it inscribes male and female bodies in quite specific ways with different consequences, and the subjugation of women's bodies has been a primary target (Spivak 1988; Diamond and Quinby 1988, xiv; Grosz 1990, 107; Ramazanoğlu 1993, 10). Foucault's discourse is anti-hierarchical. As Hennessy (1993, 43) points out, the ubiquity of power makes it impossible to explain the political force of particular discourses over others and so precludes an understanding of the hierarchical relations among discourses. Weedon (1987, 35, 110) argues that not all discourses possess the social

power that comes from a secure institutional site, and discourses within fields such as the law or the family do not manifest equal power. This will be seen in the way Nenita's and Marylou's stories were often absent and silenced in newspaper reports and in their own homes. Foucault's focus on institutions in local formations cannot explain systemic power, such as patriarchy, racism and capitalism, or elucidate the relations between such global arrangements and the local practices that sustain them (Hennessy 1993, 19-21).

2. In 1983, Rose Lacson was hired as a housekeeper for mining magnate Lang Hancock, and later married him. The media obsession with Rose Hancock has lasted for over two decades. She remains the paradigmatic Filipino woman in the Australian media, the definitive 'mail order bride' and 'gold-digger prostitute'.

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