

R h a c e l   S a l a z a r   P a r r e ñ a s

## **Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and "Imagined (Global) Community" of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers**

**L**ocated in more than 130 countries, migrant Filipina domestic workers have settled in the cities of Athens, Bahrain, Rome, Madrid, Paris, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Dispersed among a multitude of industrialized nations, they have come to constitute a diaspora—more precisely, a contemporary female labor diaspora.<sup>1</sup> A particular result of global restructuring, this labor diaspora is a product of the export-led development strategy of the Philippines, the feminization of the international labor force, and the demand for migrant women to fill low-wage service work in many cities throughout the world. As numerous nation-states rely on the Philippines to supply domestic workers and provide care for their populations, the globalization of the market economy constructs the Philippines as a nation gendered female.

Globalization also prompts the denial of these women's full citizenship in countries of settlement.<sup>2</sup> With its corresponding macrostructural processes, such as the "opposite turns of nationalism"—that is, the "denationalization of economies" and "renationalization of societies" (Sassen 1996),

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<sup>1</sup> *Diaspora* refers to the dispersal of groups of people from their homeland. The term has come to mean more in recent years. For instance, it also refers to the dual loyalty of migrants to the host society and homeland. Migrant Filipina domestic workers fit both concepts of diaspora.

<sup>2</sup> By citizenship, I defer to T. H. Marshall's meaning of "full membership in a community," which encompasses civil, political and social rights and responsibilities" (Yuval-Davis 1991, 59).

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globalization results in the partial citizenship of migrant Filipina domestic workers and other low-wage migrant workers.<sup>3</sup> Partial citizenship broadly refers to the stunted integration of migrants in receiving nation-states, which in the case of women is demonstrated by discriminatory measures that deny them their reproductive rights. Pregnancy, for instance, is prohibited for migrant Filipina domestic workers under contract in the Middle East and Asia (Alcid 1994; Chin 1998; Lan 1999). In the global economy, the relegation of care work to an increasing number of migrant women not just from the Philippines but also from other traditional sending nations, for instance, Mexico, makes partial citizenship quite a paradoxical reality for low-wage migrant women workers. These workers provide care for the citizenry of various receiving nations at the cost of the denial of their own reproduction (most receiving nations deny citizenship to the children of migrant Filipina domestics) and membership in the nation-state that they are reproducing (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1995).

This article examines the contradictory positioning of migrant Filipina domestic workers vis-à-vis the nation-state in globalization. It illustrates the constitution of their partial citizenship and analyzes their negotiation of this subject positioning. “Contradictory regulatory practices” of nation-states constrain the integration of migrants (Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem 1999, 11). In the case of migrant Filipina domestic workers, these practices include measures against family reunification, restriction to live-in domestic work, and the imposition of temporary settlement on overseas labor contracts.<sup>4</sup> For these women, partial citizenship is embodied in the shared experience of extended separations from families left behind in the Philippines, the lack of protection in domestic work, and the insecurity of a “guest worker” status in most destinations of the diaspora.

With the integration of national economies into a single global labor market, citizenship has become compulsory in globalization and therefore a critical lens from which to understand the position of women in society (Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem 1999). As Suad Joseph states, “Citizenship defines identity — who you are, where you belong, where you come from, and how you understand yourself in the world” (1999, 162). If citizenship in a nation-state defines one’s sense of belonging in globalization, how do those who are denied full citizenship imagine a community to which they

<sup>3</sup> The first turn — the “denationalization of economies” — refers to the multinational production and circulation of goods, labor, and finance. The second turn — the “renationalization of politics” — refers to increasing sentiments of nationalism.

<sup>4</sup> For examples, see discussions of Bakan and Stasiulis 1997 on Canada; Constable 1997 on Hong Kong; and Yeoh, Huang, and Gonzalez 1999 on Singapore.

belong? How do migrants whose experiences speak of exclusion develop a sense of place in globalization? Migrant Filipina domestic workers turn to the Philippines as “home,” thereby maintaining their nationalist identity. At the same time, they create an international community. As such, their sense of place and sense of community extends into a transnational terrain. They perceive themselves as part of a global community, an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). It is one that in a rudimentary fashion is based on a consciousness of their presence in various countries and their shared experiences across the globe.

I begin with a discussion of the publication *Tinig Filipino*, which is my primary source of data.<sup>5</sup> I continue with background information on the constitution of the Filipino labor diaspora. Then, I examine how globalization imposes the subject positioning of partial citizenship. Finally, I analyze the double turn that migrant Filipina domestics take against their experience of partial citizenship—the construction of the Philippines as “home” and the construction of an “imagined (global) community.” In taking this double turn, these migrants emphasize both their nationalist and diasporic identities, thus simultaneously reinforcing and transgressing the nation-state.

### ***Tinig Filipino***

*Tinig Filipino* is a glossy monthly magazine that is published in Hong Kong and Italy and distributed in more than a dozen countries. While the widespread circulation of *Tinig Filipino*, which is approximately fifty pages in length, points to the existence of the Filipina diaspora, the competition posed by *Diwaliwan*, another glossy monthly multinational magazine, reinforces the established presence of this diaspora. In contrast to *Diwaliwan*, which frequently covers entertainment news in the Philippines, *Tinig Filipino* offers its readers a forum for dialogue as migrant workers themselves write most of the articles and commentaries in this magazine.

*Tinig Filipino* is a private enterprise that is owned by American investors in Hong Kong but run exclusively by its Filipina editor, Linda Layosa. Prior to working as an editor, Layosa had been a domestic worker in Hong Kong. She started writing for *Tinig Filipino* in 1990, when she was invited to write a column based on an article she had submitted for publication. In 1991, with sales down, the owners of *Tinig Filipino* turned to her for help with their fledgling year-old publication. On being given free reign to

<sup>5</sup> In Tagalog, the word *tinig* means voice; thus, *Tinig Filipino* translates to *Filipino Voice*.

run *Tinig Filipino*, Layosa completely restructured the magazine's format and distribution. *Tinig Filipino* does not employ staff writers. Instead, it has an open invitation for Filipino migrants and their families to submit articles, opinion pieces, poetry, and short stories. Domestic workers write most of the content of *Tinig Filipino*, which indicates that they make up a large portion of Filipino migrants. Most articles are written in English. Only a very few articles are in Tagalog or Tag-lish (a hybrid of English and Tagalog). The dominant use of English is not surprising considering that migrants have a high level of educational attainment (Parreñas 2001). Not financially compensated to write for *Tinig Filipino*, writers, I assume, are motivated by their need to address their experiences and social issues. In fact, *Tinig Filipino* usually has a backlog of submissions. The distribution of *Tinig Filipino* is also community centered and based; individuals work on commission and use their social networks to sell the magazine in migrant communities.

Considering the unique format of *Tinig Filipino*, topics that it regularly covers can arguably be seen to represent the social realities of migrant Filipina domestic workers. Indeed, a close reading of the magazine is a gateway to their world. In *Tinig Filipino*, the most regularly addressed issues concern transnational family life, that is, the difficulty of raising children from a distance; work difficulties pertaining to employers and government regulatory agencies; migration laws; and the general trials of women, particularly with their love life. In doing a close reading of the issues published between October 1994 and May 1996, I often felt as though I was listening to a conversation among migrant Filipina domestic workers, as the magazine regularly features reader responses to previously published articles and commentaries.<sup>6</sup> For instance, there is a continuous debate among readers on whether children who are left behind by migrant mothers are "abused." Most readers seem to feel that they are. There is also an ongoing consensus among readers that underemployment—that is, their experience of downward mobility from their professional jobs in the Philippines to domestic work—is a painfully excruciating experience.

For this article, I closely read seventeen issues of *Tinig Filipino*. To understand the relationship of migrant Filipina domestic workers to the nation-state, I examine articles and commentaries that express the views of the workers on the political economy of their labor and the politics of their settlement. To establish that migrant Filipina domestic workers address their social issues in *Tinig Filipino*, I also focus my close reading on discus-

<sup>6</sup> My close reading includes almost all of the issues published from October 1994 to July 1996. A few back issues prior to May 1995 were unavailable from the publisher.

sions of the workplace and see whether they extend to the level of the nation-state.

### **The Filipina diaspora**

The outflow of women from the Philippines represents one of the largest and widest flows of contemporary female migration. As the quintessential service workers of globalization, Filipino women provide entertainment, child care, elderly care, and companionship to men and families around the world. According to nongovernmental organizations in the Philippines, there are approximately 6.5 million Filipino labor migrants, 60 percent of whom are women (Rimban 1999, 128).

The Filipino diaspora is made up of two distinct gendered flows. Women migrate to destinations with a greater demand for entertainment and service workers, and men are usually channeled into areas with a greater need for heavy-production and construction workers (Tyner 1994). Consequently, the gender makeup of Filipino migrant populations in various nations is highly incongruent: men compose the majority of Filipino migrants in the Middle East, and women far outnumber men in most other destinations. One survey indicates that in 1996 women composed 83.3 percent of Filipino migrants in Hong Kong, 77.1 percent in Singapore, and 78.3 percent in Italy (Republic of the Philippines 1999).

In the diaspora, the labor market distribution of Filipina migrant workers varies according to host government policies and level of immigrant integration. Professional women are concentrated in the United States (Pido 1986). Filipino migrant women in most other destinations, such as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, are segregated in low-wage service work. There is also a concentration of Filipino women in sex industries, for instance, in Japan and the Middle East (Sarmiento 1991). A staggering number of Filipino women have also entered Australia and other countries, including Germany, Finland, and Norway, as brides of former "pen pals" (Tolentino 1996).

### **The partial citizenship of migrant Filipina domestic workers**

With the relocation of manufacturing production to less developed nations, the demand for low-wage service workers has increased in both advanced capitalist and newly industrialized countries. In postindustrial nations such as Italy, the growing professional populations in global cities rely on low-wage workers to provide an array of reproductive services such as hotel housekeeping and domestic work (Sassen 1988). In newly industrialized



countries such as Singapore, production activities in these economies subsume the traditional proletariat female workforce who would otherwise perform low-wage service jobs such as domestic work (Chin 1998). A larger number of migrant women have responded to this demand for low-wage service workers.

However, globalization stunts the political, civil, and social incorporation of low-wage labor migrants — both male and female — inasmuch as it increases the demand for their labor. Receiving nations curb the integration of migrants so as to guarantee their economies a secure source of low-wage labor. By containing the costs of reproduction in sending countries, wages of migrant workers can be kept to a minimum; that is, migrants do not have the burden of having to afford the greater costs of reproducing their families in host societies. Moreover, by restricting the incorporation of migrants, receiving nations can secure their economies a supply of low-wage workers who can easily be repatriated if the economy slows down.

Although globalization imposes partial citizenship on both male and female migrants, this experience is made doubly ironic by the denial of reproductive rights for women, who not only contribute to the economic growth but also perform the reproductive labor of receiving nations. For instance, the contradiction of having the responsibility of caring for class-privileged families and being unable to nurture their own families magnifies the restricted incorporation of migrant domestic workers.

Migrant Filipina domestic workers do indeed share the experience of partial citizenship. In various destinations of the diaspora, they are not protected by labor laws, and they are left vulnerable to the exploitation of employers, including sexual harassment and abuse, excessive work hours with no overtime pay, and substandard living conditions. For example, the imprisonment and confinement of domestic workers in the home of employers is a common case among shelters for migrant Filipina domestic workers in the Middle East and Asia (Alcid 1994). As unwanted citizens, they are also relegated to the status of temporary settlers whose stay is limited to the duration of their labor contracts. Usually, contracts bind them to stay with their sponsoring employer. In Hong Kong, for instance, domestic workers who flee abusive employers automatically face deportation proceedings because of the stringent legislation imposed for foreign domestic workers in 1987 (Constable 1997). Further sending the message that only the production of their labor and not their own reproduction is desired, nations such as Singapore prohibit the marriage or cohabitation of migrant Filipina domestic workers with native citizens (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997). Finally, state policies in various destinations, for example, Taiwan,

deny entry to the spouses and children of the migrant domestic workers (Lan 1999). These stringent restrictions in Asia and the Middle East result in the racial differentiation of Filipina migrants who, as a lesser race, cannot reproduce along with native citizens.

Accounting for the nuances engendered by differences in government policies, partial citizenship comes in different degrees and levels of exclusion. More inclusive than receiving nations in Asia, Italy allows guest workers to stay for as long as seven years instead of just the two years allowed in countries such as Singapore. Moreover, permits to stay in Italy do not restrict the employment of migrant domestics to the sponsoring employer (Campani 1993). Finally, temporary residents have been eligible for family reunification since 1990. Nonetheless, migrant Filipina domestics are still restricted to the status of "guest workers" as they are in most other countries of Europe. With heightened anti-immigrant sentiments in Italy, the basis of citizenship is unlikely to become more inclusive and allow permanent settlement for this racially distinct group. As a result, most migrant Filipina domestic workers prefer not to petition for the children whom they have left behind in the Philippines (Parreñas 2001).

Eligibility for full citizenship is available in a few receiving nations including Spain, Canada, and the United States. In Spain and Canada, migrant Filipina domestic workers are eligible for full citizenship after two years of legal settlement. Despite the seemingly more liberal and inclusive policies in these nations, political and social inequalities, as Abigail Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis (1997) have pointed out using the case of Canada, still mar the incorporation of migrant Filipina domestic workers. In Canada, the Live-in Caregivers Program requires an initial two years of live-in service before foreign domestics can become eligible for landed immigrant status. During this time, it restricts these workers to the status of temporary visitors, denies the migration of family, and leaves them prone to face abusive working conditions. Without the protection of labor laws granted to native workers, migrant domestic workers in Canada — the majority of whom are Filipinos — have fewer rights than full citizens.

Partial citizenship is also imposed on migrants in the liberal United States, where Filipina migrants, though to a much lesser degree than in other nations, have also been known to enter domestic work (Hogeland and Rosen 1990). While the United States accords full membership to its legal migrants (e.g., they can eventually gain citizenship and the right to participate in the host polity), the global trend of the renationalization of politics also threatens the integration of migrants in this country. The United States has attempted to enforce stricter regulations on migrants,

such as ineligibility for social security to the elderly and the denial of public services to undocumented migrants in California. The belief that migrants burden the economy and drain government services has raised public resentment against migrants (Martin 1995).

By highlighting the shared dislocation of partial citizenship among migrant Filipina domestic workers, I wish to point out that globalization initiates the constitution of parallel realities among them across different settings and that this includes nations with both liberal and illiberal policies. I intend not to suggest that globalization has an overarching effect but that it impels the confrontation of similar issues of migration among workers in similar economic locations.

### **The Philippines and its unprotected migrant citizenry**

The “opposite turns of nationalism” place poor nations with export-based development strategies in a quandary. On the one hand, the “denationalization of economies” compels these nations to provide low-wage labor and extend their range of exports to include workers. On the other hand, these poor nations are unable to protect their exported nationals because of the “renationalization of politics.” Even so, the labor diaspora is a particular effect of globalization that is promoted by the Philippines despite the growing threat of nonprotection on its migrant citizens. This is because of the economic gains brought by the deployment of labor.

Remittances of deployed workers sustain the Philippine economy with the smooth flow of foreign currency. Without labor migration, the rate of unemployment would increase by 40 percent (Castles and Miller 1998). Remittances amount to the biggest source of foreign currency, followed by electronics manufacturing. Just in the first eleven months of 1994, labor migrants sent \$2.6 billion to the Philippines through the banking systems. According to economists, if money sent through private finance companies, letters, and return migrants are to be considered, the total cash infusion could be as much as \$6 billion per year (Karp 1995).

As a result of these gains, the government, in a speech given by President Corazon Aquino, has created the iconic representation of its mostly female overseas workers as the “modern-day heroes” of the nation; this facilitates the nation-building project of the Philippines to enter the global market economy as an export-oriented economy. The construction of the positive imagery of migrant workers as “heroes” without doubt promotes the process of emigration. Moreover, the image of a male migrant that is projected by the iconic figure of “modern-day heroes,” while in sharp contrast to the female-gendered construction of the Philippines in the global



economy, further smoothens this process. The Philippine government prefers to project a representative male instead of female image so as to downplay the reality that more women than men are leaving the Philippines.<sup>7</sup> The government does so in order to downplay one of the greatest costs of exportation, which is the vulnerability of female migrant workers. Concentrated in domestic and entertainment work, Filipina migrants — 77.8 percent of whom could be found in service occupations in 1996 — enter more vulnerable occupations than do their male counterparts (Republic of the Philippines 1999).

The contradictory gender construction of the Philippines as a female-gendered nation with “modern-day (male) heroes” emerges from the lesser need of the government to protect its male than its female migrant workers, thus suggesting the different experience of partial citizenship for men and women in migration. The vulnerability of female overseas workers is a tremendous threat against the maintenance of a steady outflow of exported labor for the Philippines.<sup>8</sup> The emergence of a national consciousness about this vulnerability is a threat the Philippine government attempts to contain. Government officials, for instance, downplay the brutalities faced by their “modern-day heroes” as “rare incidents.” Moreover, they usually treat these “rare incidents” on a case-by-case basis instead of systematically (Gatmaytan 1997). In doing so, the state consciously downplays the human side of migration and renders the experiences of its mostly female migrants as having less importance than their role as generators of foreign currency.

The gains motivating the iconic representation of overseas migrant workers, however, come not without other costs for the state. The sovereignty of the Philippines diminishes with its inability to protect its overseas nationals. For example, the failure of President Ramos to personally convince Singapore’s prime minister Goh Chok Tong to reopen the investigation of the case of Flor Contemplacion, who was convicted of murdering another Filipina domestic worker, Delia Maga, and her young ward not only caused national embarrassment but also brought to the forefront inequalities underlying the relationship of sending and receiving nations in globalization: the lesser economic power of sending nations vis-à-vis

<sup>7</sup> This preference is not necessarily due to the lesser acceptance of women, particularly single women, to migrate independently. The Philippines traditionally has benefited from a more gender egalitarian system than other Asian countries due to its matrilineal family system.

<sup>8</sup> The vulnerability of Filipina migrants has been made known to the public by the highly publicized return to the Philippines of corpses of abused workers, including Maricris Siosin of Japan.

receiving nations means their lesser political power. Consequently, those nations that send out secondary-tier workers cannot protect their overseas nationals. The Philippine government is caught in a deleterious situation: it deploys workers around the world to generate foreign currency while it simultaneously lacks strength to protect citizens working in richer nations. Although international human rights codes may declare the rights of transnational citizens, the fate of migrant Filipina domestic workers is for the most part dependent on the receiving nation-state.

As outmigration is a state-sanctioned flow, the Philippine government attempts to protect overseas contract workers by monitoring their placement through official contracts with receiving states throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) maintains jurisdiction over overseas contract workers through the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), which monitors the exit of workers, and the Overseas Workers Welfare Agency (OWWA), which provides services to migrants in receiving nations. The OWWA offers free legal assistance and counseling, assistance with repatriation, insurance coverage, and loan programs for housing and small business enterprises (Stasiulis and Bakan 1997). Yet, its lack of power to override the laws and jurisdiction of receiving nations mars the assistance that OWWA can offer. For example, a Philippine government-sponsored welfare center in Saudi Arabia was closed down “because the Saudi government thought that providing shelter to runaway maids constituted foreign intervention in their internal affairs” (Alcid 1994, 176). The labor conditions established by POEA, such as salary rates and days off, similarly lose bearing with the loss of jurisdiction upon migration. In Malaysia, for instance, the state does not have to recognize contracts signed overseas (Chin 1998). As a result, migrant Filipina domestic workers receive lower salaries and fewer rest days than those stipulated by the POEA as fair standards of employment.

### **The construction of the Philippines as “home”**

“Saang dako ka man ng mundo, Hong Kong, Australia, Singapore o Saudi, babalik at babalik ka rin . . .” [In whatever corner of the world you are in, Hong Kong, Australia, Singapore, or Saudi Arabia, you are eventually going to return . . . ] so a song goes. And just like species of birds who migrate from their place of origin during the winter season to another place, so they won’t feel the pangs of coldness, we, too, migrant workers are bound to go home for good after

our stint abroad. No matter how long it has been, what achievements we have accomplished and what factors have been driven us to be home at last. At long, long last. (Pelegrin 1994, 7)

Filipina labor migrants consider the Philippines to be "home," the "place where they really belong" (Pelegrin 1994, 7). It is the place where they are liberated from the physical confines of domestic work. It is where they attain a higher social status in migration. It is where they can reunite with family members not seen for at least two years. Just as transmigration scholars have observed of other migrant groups, Filipina domestic workers turn to "home" to negotiate their racially segmented integration (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1995). But, more generally, they do so to negotiate their experience of partial citizenship. In doing so, they reclaim their Philippine nationalist identity. It is not surprising that writers in *Tinig Filipino* frequently refer to themselves as "heroes" to emphasize their important role in the nation-building project of economic development in the Philippines.<sup>9</sup>

In *Tinig Filipino*, the word *home* has become synonymous with the "Philippines." In fact, *Tinig Filipino* frequently promotes return migration by featuring stories of successful return migrants. The Philippine government and the various nations that receive its migrant workers most likely applaud the promotion of return migration. For the Philippine government, the construction of the Philippines as "home" guarantees the smooth flow of foreign currency on which it depends in the denationalization of economies. For receiving nations, it supports anti-immigrant sentiments brought on by the renationalization of politics.

Although the Philippines is referred to as "home," new ties to the receiving country undeniably form in migration. A mother who, after four years in Hong Kong, wants to go "home for good" to her husband and children in the Philippines, asks "But why . . . is it hard now to leave this land of milk and honey? Am I one of those who fear to go back to our country for good?" (Villaruz 1995, 62). Another domestic worker, Betty Atiwa, agrees when she says, "For me, going back home for good is both pleasant and depressing. Pleasant in the sense that I could see and live in my beloved

<sup>9</sup> This observation questions the assertion of Yasemin Soysal (1994) that full citizenship does not matter in the incorporation of migrants into Western Europe when she argues that migrants develop a sense of "postnational membership" in the host nation-state on the basis of their daily praxis in the host society as well as from the knowledge of universal notions of human rights. Migrant Filipina domestic workers do not achieve a sense of rightful membership in the host society, and as such settlement is often motivated by the goal of returning "home."

country and be with my family again. Depressing because I will see poverty again” (1995, 42). The fear of returning home to the Philippines is engendered by the womens’ fear of returning to the situation that they had hoped to escape in migration.

It is not surprising that migrant Filipina domestics do not go home even though they articulate the desire to do so. Many, for instance, some in Hong Kong, actually renew their overseas contracts multiple times (Constable 1999). Women hesitate to go back home not just because of poverty. Research on various groups of migrant women indicates that women achieve a certain degree of gender liberation upon migration because of their greater contribution to household income and greater participation in public life (Kibria 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Like other migrant women, Filipina domestics fear that returning home will diminish their advances. As the editor of *Tinig Filipino* observes, many view migration as a “temporary relief” from their marriages: “In my casual talks with lots of fellow women overseas contract workers especially the married ones, I found out that there seems to be a certain common factor that binds them—that leaving their families for overseas gave them temporary relief from the sacrifices that go with their marriage. Others are blunt enough to share that their main reason for coming abroad is not merely to earn money but to escape from their bitter relationships with their husbands” (Layosa 1995, 7). Having been “partially liberated from the anguish of their day-[to]-day existence with their families” (Layosa 1995, 7), women are less pressed to return home than are their male counterparts whose status declines upon migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Although many do not return home, migrant Filipina domestic workers do, in fact, still view the Philippines as their rightful home. As such, discussions in *Tinig Filipino* about the political economy of their labor solely concern their economic contributions to the Philippines. With very few exceptions, they do not in any way regard their labor market participation as having provided economic benefits to host societies. *Tinig Filipino* has yet to begin a critical discussion of the partial citizenship of migrant Filipina domestic workers. Its contents offer neither direct critiques of exclusionary policies of receiving countries nor suggestions that migrant Filipina domestic workers are entitled to permanent settlement. Ironically, receiving countries are usually seen as benevolent nations that have provided “blessings” and “opportunities” that are not available in the Philippines and for which they believe they should be grateful. In contrast, critiques of the Philippine government and its economy abound in *Tinig Filipino*, and the recurring discourse regarding home concerns the contradictory relationship that migrants have with the Philippine economy as laborers who are displaced from this same economy that flourishes from their displacement.

The cynicism of Filipino migrants especially shows in critiques of their representation as the “new economic heroes.” Articles in *Tinig Filipino* indicate that Filipina domestic workers both are aware that they are displaced from an economy that labels them as heroes and know that they are not rewarded for their heroism. Veronica Plandano, a domestic worker in Hong Kong, states that “we are called the living heroes or the new heroes. Yet why are we called ‘heroes’ when we are slaves in other countries. Oh, OCWs [overseas contract workers] — the heroes without monuments. . . . Why does the government, instead of supporting our college graduates and youth and pushing them to strive in our country, actually allow them to leave the country yet without any sufficient protection as citizens? Country . . . when can you finally provide us with a peaceful and simple life?” (Plandano 1995, 60; translated from Tagalog to English). Disheartened by the inability of the Philippine government to protect its heroic citizens, Plandano asserts that the heroism of migrant Filipina domestic workers comes at the cost of their underemployment and “slavery,” an image that conveys their lack of authority in the emotionally demeaning and physically demanding occupation of domestic work.<sup>10</sup>

The cynicism of migrant workers also manifests in their pessimism about the state of the Philippine economy. In *Tinig Filipino*, migrants generally do not foresee an end to their outflow. One reason, they argue, is that their deployment hurts the economy with the loss of skilled laborers.

In the latest survey, almost 6.5 million Filipinos are working in rich countries like Saudi Arabia, USA, Japan, Hong Kong, etc. And some of us are proud of it because we contribute a big amount of dollars in our national treasury every year. However, in my humble opinion, it is quite unfair because we spread our talent, knowledge, and expertise to other countries instead of using them in our homeland. Perhaps it is one of the reasons why our country's economy is still way down below. . . . We cannot blame those who decide to be migrant workers because our government cannot provide them with jobs to satisfy their financial necessities. (Gutierrez 1995, 31)

In *Tinig Filipino*, discussions regarding the weak state of the Philippine economy generally reflect Bobby Gutierrez's perspective and barely touch the level of the interstate system. Although Gutierrez acknowledges that the outflow of Filipino “talent, knowledge, and expertise” benefits receiving nations, he fails to consider the underlying structural factors that

<sup>10</sup> As I noted, the Philippine government attempts to provide migrant workers with support services such as free legal assistance through OWWA. Nonetheless, these workers are still subject to the greater authority of employers and the stringent policies of many host societies.



generate an unequal relationship between developing and advanced capitalist countries. Consequently, Gutierrez does not recognize the structural inequalities that prevent the Philippines from providing workers with jobs that can “satisfy their financial necessities.”

Because discussions of the economic problems of the Philippines are contained within the political economy of the nation-state, the solutions posed in *Tinig Filipino* stay within the level of the nation-state. Gutierrez continues by calling for a “clean-up” of the Philippine government: “I think the solution for cutting out the root of poverty is a strong-willed government who will work for a standardization of our educational system and who will impose punishment to all corrupt leaders and hoodlums in uniform” (1995, 31). A few writers and readers of *Tinig Filipino* do acknowledge the need to invest in the economy’s infrastructure. However, discussions by *Tinig Filipino*’s contributors have yet to acknowledge the fact that most of the remittances of the workers abroad cover the \$1.8 billion of annual interest on loans accumulated from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Rosca 1995).

The agency of migrant Filipina domestic workers does emerge in their criticisms of the Philippine government. Not only reflecting their nationalist identity, these critiques indicate that migrant Filipina domestic workers practice their political rights. The sense of entitlement that they have gained from their position as the “economic heroes” of the nation has reinforced their nationalist identity and empowered them to speak for and against their government.

### **An “imagined (global) community” of migrant Filipina domestic workers**

Many migrant Filipina domestic workers cannot go “home” to end their dislocation of partial citizenship. For one thing, the dependence of their families on their foreign earnings deters them from going home. Considering that structural factors of globalization keep them away from home, the use of a nationalist identity to counteract their experience of partial citizenship is at most limited. Even more so, the use of a nationalist identity, although empowering, redirects migrant Filipina domestic workers from claiming their rightful membership in receiving nations. In effect, the nationalist identity of migrant Filipina domestic workers maintains their partial citizenship and, concomitantly, their need to construct a stronger sense of place and sense of community in globalization.

Migrant Filipina domestic workers have opted to use another strategy for achieving a sense of belonging in globalization. They have particularly

turned to the transnationalization of their nationalist identity as migrant Filipina domestic workers by forging the creation of an "imagined (global) community." By constructing a community that transcends the nation-state and at the same time builds from their nationalist-based affiliation with those similarly displaced from their homeland, they foreground the formation of a contemporary female labor diaspora of migrant Filipinas in globalization.

Providing migrant Filipina domestic workers a source of support against their partial citizenship, the existence of an "imagined (global) community," using Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of the nation, reinforces the presence of similarities in their lives. Their imagined global community emerges, in part, from the simultaneity of their similar experiences as domestic workers across geographic territories. A Filipina domestic worker in Rome may imagine the similar conditions faced by her fellow workers in Singapore, London, and Dubai. Migrant Filipina domestic workers are only able to conceive of a global community because of the similar impacts of global processes on their lives. These similar experiences function as the premise of their community from which they carve a symbolic transnational ethnic identity as Filipino diasporic subjects. They are what Stuart Hall refers to as "narratives of displacement," meaning the historically and culturally grounded conjunctures that define the subject's positioning in larger structural processes (1988, 45).

The imagined global community of migrant Filipina domestic workers does not emerge solely from the sharing of experiences or conjunctures such as partial citizenship or the experience of family separation but comes from, borrowing the words of Michel de Certeau (1984), the creation of continuously traveled "bridges" across geographic territories ("frontiers") in migration. As Arjun Appadurai (1996) notes, imagination is not a fantasy that can be divorced from actions. This imagined global community is constituted by circuits like those identified by Roger Rouse as tying together sending and receiving communities of migration into a singular community through the "continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information" (1991, 14).

Migrant Filipina domestic workers maintain transnational projects that connect the Philippines to various geographical locations. As servants of globalization, they perceive their sense of community to envelop the diaspora. Thus, the circuits that tie their community together function multinationally. They are not restricted to a binary flow that is directed solely to and from the Philippines. First, the circulation of goods occurs in a multinational terrain. In Europe, ethnic goods circulate to connect multiple migrant communities with the shipment of Philippine products from

the Philippines to the United Kingdom and only then to other European nations. Moreover, multinational ethnic enclave businesses have sprouted up with franchises of remittance agencies in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North America. Philippine bank-sponsored remittance centers such as Far East Bank-SPEED and Philippine Commercial International Bank compete with carriers such as LBC across continents. Although money does not usually circulate between migrant communities, remittance agencies represent collective locations among geographically distanced migrant workers. Second, nonprofit organizations create multinational networks to provide support services for members of the diaspora. For instance, the Kanlungan Center Foundation, a nonprofit service and advocacy organization in Manila, maintains network associations with Abu Dhabi Round Table in the United Arab Emirates and the Asian Migrant Center in Hong Kong.

In addition, the transnational family ties of migrants are not limited to the Philippines. The families of the following women vividly show that migration creates multinational households in various forms. Ruth Mercado works in Rome, while her oldest sister is a barmaid in Switzerland, her brother a tricycle driver in Manila, and her other sister a provider of elderly care in Saudi Arabia. Her retired parents stay in the Philippines, where they depend on the remittances sent by their daughters from three different nations. A domestic worker in Los Angeles, Dorothy Espiritu had previously worked in Saudi Arabia, during which time her husband passed away in the Philippines, her oldest daughter began working in Japan, and another daughter was working in Saudi Arabia. Finally, there is the family of Libertad Sobredo, a domestic worker in Los Angeles. Her nine children are either working outside of the Philippines, in Saudi Arabia and Greece, or pursuing their college degrees in Manila. Accentuating the experience of a multinational family, Libertad often deals with family crises occurring across the Pacific in the Philippines by making transatlantic phone calls to her oldest son in Greece.

Finally, magazines that cater to Filipino labor migrants provide another solid evidence of a circuit that links multiple migrant communities. The distribution of *Diwaliwan* and *Tinig Filipino* in at least a dozen countries around the world signifies the presence of a diasporic community from which these magazines profit, and which in turn is perpetuated by their circulation of information (to say the least) across geographic borders. As print language created the "imagined community" of the nation in the 1800s, it now provides a tangible link connecting migrant Filipina domestic workers in the formation of an imagined global community. A vehicle for creating the notion of a global community and instilling "in the minds

of each . . . the image of their communion" (Anderson 1983, 6), the magazine *Tinig Filipino* aptly describes itself as the "Linking Force around the World." Available at the same moment in different national contexts, *Tinig Filipino* circulates throughout the Middle East, Asia, and Europe to tie multiple localized migrant communities of Filipina domestic workers into a singular global community.<sup>11</sup>

*Tinig Filipino* is arguably a gateway to the world of its primary audience of migrant Filipina domestic workers. Titles of articles reflect some aspects of their social realities. While the title "I Want to Go Home but Where Is Home?" suggests the jagged process of settlement in migration, the title "The American Dream" tells of the construction of the United States as the ideal destination of migrant Filipinos, a legacy of the colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines. Other titles address family and work-related issues. For example, the title "Isang Kontrata Na Lang Anak" (One more contract, my child) insinuates the recurrence of family separation in migration. The common use of the English language and frequent references to canonical literary figures, such as William Shakespeare and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, reveal the readers' high level of education. Imagine my surprise when I encountered a Shakespearean quote, "Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt." Although first surprised, I soon realized that these quotes simply reflected the high level of educational attainment in the diaspora. Thus I was left to imagine that there are Filipina domestic workers all over the world relaxing from the physical challenges of their daily routines and relieving themselves of their mentally stifling duties by reading literary texts of the Western canon.

The significance of *Tinig Filipino* is that it enables workers—isolated domestic workers—to reach each other cross-nationally and cross-continently. These workers use *Tinig Filipino* to highlight their collective struggles as transnational laborers. As in any imagined community, differences do exist in the global community of migrant Filipina domestic workers. They, for instance, represent different classes, age groups, and regions in the Philippines. However, in the making of their imagined (global) community, the need to find support in the diaspora transcends these material differences.

The existence of a narrative discourse in *Tinig Filipino* shows us that migrant Filipina domestic workers do have many unifying realities from

<sup>11</sup> Quarterly publications of nonprofit organizations such as the Kanlungan Foundation Center's *TNT: Trends, News, and Tidbits* also circulate multinationally to various local community advocacy groups in the diaspora.

which they can form their imagined (global) community. It is, thus, important to emphasize that *Tinig Filipino* is able to circulate not because of the wide dispersal of migrant Filipina domestic workers but because these workers have unifying social realities that are engendered by their migration and settlement processes. These social realities are the points of convergence from which migrant Filipina domestic workers are able to conceive of an imagined (global) community. The imagination of this global community is based on a “deep horizontal comradeship” that is grounded on the creation of a “set of shared symbols, common events, and a secular ‘cross-time’ temporality promoted by a print vernacular” (Bates 1999, 26).

Letters to the editor indicate that reading *Tinig Filipino* creates a sense of camaraderie among geographically separated workers. Julie Lopez, a reader in Hong Kong, writes: “We are all aware that many of us Filipinos work around the world. With our great efforts, we created and published *Tinig Filipino International* magazine which makes us aware of the facts of life we don’t even know they exist [*sic*]. Through correspondence, we could publish the life experiences of our fellow Filipinos in other countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, France, Italy, London [*sic*], and many more. Through this way [*sic*], we are able to unite and educate all Filipinos abroad” (July 1995). Readers of *Tinig Filipino* take credit for its creation and circulation because they themselves write the articles that the magazine publishes. Thus, Lopez, who has written an article for *Tinig Filipino*, can claim that she along with other migrant domestic workers are those who “publish the[ir] life experiences.” Lopez recognizes that without the efforts of migrant Filipina domestic workers such as herself to submit articles that speak of their “narratives of displacement” *Tinig Filipino* would not exist. More than a hundred migrant Filipina domestic workers actively participate in the open forum of *Tinig Filipino*. By featuring the life experiences of migrant Filipinos in a multitude of nations, *Tinig Filipino* consequently instills a diasporic consciousness among its readers, who thereby situate themselves in an imagined community inclusive of domestic workers in other parts of the world.

*Tinig Filipino* represents a transnational site of gathering that forms imaginary, yet at the same time real, allegiances from which migrant Filipina domestic workers may draw support in their everyday struggles in the workplace. For instance, the diasporic consciousness engendered by *Tinig Filipino* affectively acts on the level of the corporeal. In a letter to the editor, Gina Cortez writes:

I could say that *TF* [*Tinig Filipino*] is a magazine that heals because when I read all the contents of this magazine, every thoughts and



feedbacks of my compatriots are the same as mine [*sic*]. We are really lucky to have *TF*, which gives knowledge not only academically but also we gain knowledge about the way of life of other compatriots all over the world. . . . During my work routine, I try to glance at it and read it as much as possible so that my fatigue [*sic*] body seems to get relaxed [*sic*]. And when I do this, it seems there's no need for me to apply cream on my aching back. (November 1995)

Providing comfort at work, the magazine simulates the imaginary movements of immobile domestic workers across the multiple confinements imposed on their geographic location, from the walls of private homes to the borders of nations.

The intercontinental dialogue fostered by *Tinig Filipino* strengthens the sense of a multinational community in the Filipina diaspora inasmuch as it functions as a base for emotional support against the isolation of domestic work. For instance, many give credit to this magazine for helping them counter "homesickness" and "loneliness":

I have read your very interesting magazine. . . . I found out that it can help a lot to those who are fighting homesickness and loneliness like me. (Esther Balanga, Brunei, January 1995)

I want to congratulate and thank you for having this kind of magazine. It really helps our fellow countrymen who are working here abroad to less [*sic*] their homesickness. (Elenita Sikat, China, June 1995)

Being away from our beloved Motherland [Philippines] is so difficult. We can feel such loneliness and homesickness for our loved ones we left behind. But by having a hobby of reading *TF Magazine*, our loneliness vanished. We feel home. (Ailyn Manaday, Italy, November 1995)

It is striking to observe similar claims among domestic workers in locations as distant as Italy, Brunei, and China. "Loneliness" and "homesickness" are two central narratives of displacement that are frequently addressed in *Tinig Filipino*. By bringing to the foreground these narratives of displacement, *Tinig Filipino* helps migrant Filipina domestic workers learn of their shared experiences with counterparts in other parts of the world.

A teacher by training and profession in the Philippines, Linda Layosa, the editor of *Tinig Filipino*, sees her job mostly as guiding the transnational dialogue among migrant Filipina domestic workers. Describing the philosophy of the magazine, she states that "it's a reader's magazine. I want

everyone to participate. . . . Why not give light reading to the overseas contract workers? At the same time, inform them, entertain them, educate them. . . . I wanted the workers to write the stories themselves. Even the simplest people have stories to tell, stories from the heart. It's important that they are involved, personally involved. I want their lives to be told by them. That's all. I tell them they are the soul and the heart of the magazine. That gives them the pep and inspiration. They are the superstars of the magazine" (Layosa 1996). Without imagining it as such, perhaps, domestic workers write articles in the spirit of Paulo Freire's concept of "problem-posing education" (1970). In contrast to "banking education," which deposits knowledge to passive recipients, "problem-posing education" enables individuals to "develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire 1970, 71; emphasis in original). Filipina domestic workers, as the oppressed, are conscious beings who cannot be told what problems are important to them as they themselves "inform, entertain, and educate" each other of the issues that are relevant in their lives.

One of these issues concerns their workplace struggles. Every issue of the magazine features numerous stories describing experiences of overwork, maltreatment, and inhumane living conditions. One such story is that of Rosalie Vista, who writes:

My employer's family consists of 11 persons and I served them all. They dictated to me everything that I should do. I had to wash the clothes with my hands twice a day, do all the household chores and I had to look after the baby as well. With all sorts of work for me to do everyday, I had to wake up very early at about 4:30 in the morning. At nighttime, I had to sleep very late. . . . I could not stand the way they treated me. . . . They all easily got angry with the slightest mistakes I did. How they scolded me? Well, they just shouted and insulted me—a very typical way of treating a household helper of long ago. (1995, 30)

Many articles in *Tinig Filipino* establish that migrant Filipina domestic workers are often at the behest of their employers. As such, they are highly prone to an exploitative work environment.

Domestic workers often advise one another to cope with this abuse.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Constable 1997 also observes that the discourse of work in *Tinig Filipino* never transcends the level of the personal responsibility of the domestic worker. Advice to improve work conditions always falls on the shoulders of the domestic worker. As such, Constable sees *Tinig Filipino* as a mechanism of self-discipline.

Rosalie Vista continues her story: "With all the things that happened, I just cried out of self-pity but I never uttered any word against them. I gave my respect to them as they were my masters. With all the hardships I encountered working with that family, I still managed to stay with them for three long years. When I left, they told me that they would always remember my kindness and that I was always welcome to work with them. So you see, kindness softens a heartened [*sic*] heart" (1995, 30). Domestic workers such as Vista usually end stories of abusive working conditions with advice to tolerate them. *Tinig Filipino*, however, does not condone abuse. Yet such advice does suggest that awareness of abuse does not automatically translate to a consciousness of human rights and does not necessarily invoke agitation but, instead, may generate passivity.<sup>13</sup> As *Tinig Filipino* informs domestic workers of their low employment standards, it also reminds domestic workers of their limited economic and political power. Thus, the passive attitude of "we know we are abused, but we cannot do much about it" that is found among the writers of *Tinig Filipino* stems from the consciousness of their limited power as isolated migrant domestic workers, who as such have to eventually turn to the imaginary community of the diaspora to find support in the workplace.

This attitude emphasizes the construction of foreign servants as having no rights to complain. Why do they promote such a compliant attitude? First, they consider themselves guests of the state, fortunate enough to be given jobs more financially rewarding than those available in the Philippines. Second, as they see themselves as sojourners, they convince themselves that the conflict that resistance would generate may not be well worth its gains. Third, as readers are always reminded of the difficulties that they have left behind in the Philippines, they concede to the inequalities determining their situation because they would much prefer to be "transnational actors" rather than left "immobile" in the Philippines. Thus, tolerance emerges from the fact that their position as low-wage migrant workers reaps benefits that would otherwise be unavailable in the Philippines.

Consequently, the political potential generated by the creation of the global platform of *Tinig Filipino* remains a potential at most among these women, who still construct themselves primarily as individuals with minimal resources and support to transform the conditions in the workplace. As writers operate from the frame of mind of overwhelmed individuals,

<sup>13</sup> An ironic underside to these stories is that other domestic workers in similar working conditions may be better able to tolerate abusive working conditions because of the emotional support given by the knowledge that they are not the only ones who are exploited at work.

the articles of *Tinig Filipino* consequently never raise the issue of the accountability of the employer. When faced with a difficult employer, it is up to the domestic worker to adjust her behavior according to the employer's personality: "Employers are not the same. There are employers who are suspicious and don't trust maids at all. . . . Some employers are also generous. . . . There are even employers who are counting what is inside their refrigerator like eggs, fruits, etc. . . . So as to avoid trouble if you know that your employer is suspicious, one should be careful" (Dulat 1996, 38). Adjusting one's behavior to accommodate employers is considered an act of professionalism. Ironically, this kind of professionalism assigns additional unpaid labor to domestic workers.

Unlike nonprofit-organization-sponsored global community newsletters such as *TNT: Trends, News, and Tidbits*, *Tinig Filipino* has yet to transform into a platform advocating for political acts of resistance against inequalities in the workplace. While reaching a wider audience than do the more radical publications that circulate in the diaspora, *Tinig Filipino* generally does not address the conditions generating their writers' and readers' oppression at work or limited integration into receiving nations. However, the support that it provides may still empower migrant Filipina domestic workers to perform acts of resistance in their daily routines.

The community of *Tinig Filipino* should also be given credit for attempting to educate migrant workers. *Tinig Filipino* regularly publishes relevant laws and policies of various nation-states, such as standard contract regulations. In addition, it has published a short listing, aptly titled "Seeking Help?" of various local community organizations, including shelters, that service migrant Filipina domestic workers. While conducting fieldwork in Italy, I for one turned to *Tinig Filipino* to get the address of Life-Asper, a local organization in Rome. This indicates that *Tinig Filipino* offers its readers alternative avenues for protection to the state-sponsored OWWA. In doing so, it tries to create a global community that goes beyond the nation-state.

Finally, *Tinig Filipino* should be given credit for the sense of allegiance that it fosters among domestic workers. Explaining the importance of addressing work-related issues, Liza Bueno of Italy insists that the difficulties of domestic work must be acknowledged so as to deter prospective migrants from romanticizing overseas employment:

Let's just say that life in another country is good because we earn dollars and in all honesty we do well especially if we compare our salaries to office workers or teachers in the Philippines. And it is so great to hear that we are being placed on a pedestal as "new heroes"

of the country. . . . Life abroad is rewarding but painful. . . . It is hard to be away from our loved ones. Our employers order us around, but we cannot do anything about it. . . . Isn't it time that we let everyone know the truth, that working abroad is very painful and hard? (1994, 21; partly translated from Tagalog to English)

A litany of articles provide responses to Bueno's question in the regularly featured columns of "Life in Italy," "Life in Saudi," and "Life in Singapore." Through the articulation of their experiences as domestic workers in a particular location of the diaspora, readers do not just imagine the conditions of fellow domestic workers in other countries but also recognize them as those very much like their own. As a result, the globalization of their experiences—in other words, the globalization of their work—despite their different contexts—geographical, legal, political, and economic—highlights their sharing of narratives of displacement and, in turn, strengthens the formation of transcontinental bonds among women in different migrant communities. The sharing of these experiences projects a united community of Filipina domestic workers who are invested in the successful adjustment of other members of their global community.

### Conclusion

Migrant Filipina domestic workers are located in a multitude of industrialized countries around the globe. As such, they have come to represent a diaspora, a contemporary labor diaspora of female migrant workers. In this article, I have shown that members of this diaspora are, at most, partial citizens of receiving nations. The need for low-wage labor in more developed nations in the global economy generates this subject positioning. Receiving nations curb the integration of migrant Filipina domestic workers so as to secure a source of low-wage labor. In doing so, they do their part in promoting the continued development and maintenance of the unequal relations between sending and receiving nations in the global economy. So as to guarantee the smooth flow of foreign currency into its economy, the Philippines also promotes the curbed integration of their migrant workers. This is despite the fact that it cannot offer these workers the rights granted Philippine citizens.

As partial citizens, migrant Filipina domestic workers have forged the creation of a community that transgresses the nation-state. Their imagined (global) community forges the ground for the transnationalization of their identity as gendered and racialized low-wage migrant workers whose incorporation into any nation-state is stunted by the processes that place



them in these nation-states. This diasporic identity is one that builds from their nationalist identity, as it is based on the allegiance that develops from their displacement from “home.” Moreover, these two identities are mutually reinforcing, as both underscore this displacement.

The position of partial citizenship, as it is a conjuncture that the structural processes of globalization produced, is not particular to migrant Filipina domestic workers. We can assume that it is shared by other groups of low-wage workers whose migration is similarly demanded in globalization. They include male labor migrants, such as Mexican farmworkers in the United States and African day workers in southern Europe, as well as other female labor migrants, including other groups of domestic workers such as Latinas and Caribbeans in the United States, Sri Lankans in Greece, and Indonesians in other Asian countries. As partial citizenship is a central basis for forging the creation of an imagined (global) community, the sharing of this narrative of displacement leaves the promise of the expansion of this global community to include other groups of secondary tier migrant workers in the global economy.

*Women's Studies Program and Asian American Studies Program*  
*University of Wisconsin — Madison*

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members of the emerging middle class in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, have constructed notions of modernity and progress in their daily social, material, and spatial lives.

**Rhacel Salazar Parreñas** (rparrenas@facstaff.wisc.edu) is assistant professor of women's studies and Asian American studies at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, where she teaches courses on immigration and the family. She is the author of *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001). Her recent work has appeared in *Feminist Studies* and *Gender and Society*. Her current research is a study on changing family forms in globalization and looks at the experiences of children left behind by migrant worker parents in the Philippines.

**Jasbir Kaur Puar** (jpuar@rci.rutgers.edu) is assistant professor of women's studies and geography at Rutgers University. Her recent publications include "Transnational Configurations of Desire: The Nation and Its White Closets," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Matt Wray et al. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); and "Transnational Sexualities: South Asian Trans/Nationalisms and Queer Diasporas," in *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*, ed. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). As a 1999–2000 Rockefeller postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at City University of New York, she began researching the gay and lesbian tourism industry and is currently editing a special issue of *GLQ* on queer/ed tourism.

**Shirin M. Rai** is reader in the department of politics and international studies at the University of Warwick. Her research interests are in the areas of feminist politics, democratization, globalization, and development studies. Her publications include (as coeditor) *Women in the Face of Change: Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), (as coeditor) *Women and the State: International Perspectives* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), and (as coeditor) *Global Social Movements* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

**Barbara Risman** (barbara\_risman@ncsu.edu) is professor of sociology and director of graduate studies at North Carolina State University. She is the author of *Gender Vertigo: American Families in Transition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998). She also is the coauthor of *Feminist Foundations: Toward Transforming Sociology* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998). She recently ended a term as coeditor of *Contemporary Sociology*. She also edits the Gender Lens (Pine Forge and Sage) book series, designed to transform the field of sociology by mainstreaming research on gender throughout the curriculum.

**Ella Shohat** (shohat@postbox.csi.cuny.edu) is professor of women's studies and media studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center and Staten Island. She has lectured and published extensively on the intersection of postcolo-