

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Anthropology Faculty Publications

Anthropology

1999

Globalization, Migration and Class Struggles: NGO Mobilization for Filipino Domestic Workers

Lisa Law

Kathy Nadeau

California State University, San Bernardino., knadeau@csusb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/anthro-publications>



Part of the [Labor Economics Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Law, Lisa and Nadeau, Kathy, "Globalization, Migration and Class Struggles: NGO Mobilization for Filipino Domestic Workers" (1999). *Anthropology Faculty Publications*. 3.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/anthro-publications/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

Globalization, Migration and Class Struggles: NGO Mobilization for Filipino Domestic Workers

LISA LAW AND KATHY NADEAU

This paper contributes to post-marxist discussions on the relevance of class as a social category in a postmodern world. Rather than marginalize this issue of social positioning, the authors explore the relevance of an Althusserian perspective which acknowledges the importance of class as it articulates with other social/identity issues such as gender and ethnicity. The substantive context for this discussion is gendered labor migration from the Philippines, and the advocacy work conducted by Filipino non-government organizations (NGOs) working with migrants in Pacific Rim countries. It focuses on NGOs in Hong Kong and Vancouver, and their efforts to contest the gendered national identities which are being constructed as poor women migrate to wealthier countries to seek employment as domestic workers. These contexts highlight the articulation of issues of class, gender and ethnicity in conceptualizing the migration of Filipino women, and the authors argue that NGO activities provide insights on how to envision decentered class struggles in relation to transnational migration.

This paper reasserts the value of a post-marxist perspective which views the contemporary world as an increasingly decentered and internationalized economy but not as a globalized economy where the territorial boundaries of nation and culture are necessarily becoming blurred. Through examining the perspectives of non-government organizations (NGOs) which do advocacy work on behalf of Filipino domestic workers in Pacific Rim countries, we examine how gendered national identities are being contested in cosmopolitan centers and how these struggles provide local openings for the kinds of social transformations that the Filipino Left traditionally has been struggling for. With this perspective, however, we do not view NGOs as a uniform response to expanding world capitalism. Rather we focus on how NGOs negotiate the meaning(s) of transnational migration, and how Filipino women's social and economic position might be theorized within a recontextualized politics of class which is sensitive to issues of ethnicity and culture.

The paper is arranged accordingly. First, we describe a post-marxist perspective, one which acknowledges the relationship between the growth of capitalism, nation-states and constructions of class, gender and ethnicity. We then give a background to labor export from the Philippines, highlighting the importance of overseas contract work to the

Filipino economy. This is followed by a discussion of how the foreign labor and immigration policies of Hong Kong and Canada influence Filipino migration, and how Filipino NGOs mediate these push-pull patterns of migration in their advocacy work. Finally, we examine NGO perspectives in ways which decenter the notion of a “global economy” in order to understand different meanings and processes of class formation which are generated by transnational migration.

To begin with, we would like to discuss the relevance of post-marxist analysis which acknowledges the unevenly developing relationship between the growth of the global economy and constructions of race, gender, ethnicity and nation. We reassert the value of an approach which views the current historical conjuncture of transnational migration as being set into motion not by technological advances alone (e.g., the Internet, media satellites, rapid transit), but also, and (we think) more preponderantly, by new articulations between class and culture in the global political and cultural economy. Following the important work of Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994), we accept the notion of a capitalist class which is becoming increasingly internationalized and regionalized and views the world as a single production mode, while political processes work to produce and stabilize unequal relationships between groups that are structured within territorial boundaries of separate states. In our own analysis of transnational migration and domestic work, however, it is difficult to develop an analysis of a global capitalist class since this labor market is utilized by disconnected households in a number of different countries. Furthermore, an emphasis on a global market for domestic work determined by labor and immigration policy tends to marginalize the everyday politics of migration and the constitution of more localized relationships of inequality between different cultures. In this paper we are most concerned with processes of social transformation which engage with new economic and political conditions of the Pacific Rim, but we aim to do this in ways which do not abandon the realities of what might be recontextualized as a sense of economic identity. Indeed, our point of departure is Gibson-Graham’s (1996) feminist critique of political economy which stresses the need to decenter our conception of capitalism as an economic and social descriptor in order to reimagine economic identities and multiple and different class processes. This is particularly true for understanding the experiences of transnational migration.

Let us take a few moments to clarify what we mean by a “post-marxist” analysis. In contrast to declassified debates on the disoriented, fragmented and indeterminant space of postmodernism, we see the value of a post-Marxist (Althusserian) perspective that is different from orthodox, economistic and positivistic readings of Marx’s texts, and that understands knowledge as produced and the economy as decentered. This admittedly unpopular but still useful Althusserian interpretation of Marxism does not privilege any one social process over another. It transforms the terrain of debate to produce an understanding of class from many angles of vision such as from the viewpoint of gender and ethnicity. Althusser, as those familiar with the post-70s, post-everything debates may remember, argued that Marx viewed the relationship between classes as actuating change in the capitalist mode of production but he never claimed his model replicated actual social life; rather he put forth the mode of production concept as an “objective ideal” (Althusser and Balibar, 1970, 194). Although Marx dealt with the dynamics of production modes in terms of two predominant and opposing classes (the rich and poor), he also considered a wide variety of classes that included classes like the petite bourgeoisie, straddled between the rich and the poor, who could be domestically well-situated but internationally at odds with the multinational or transnational bourgeoisie (Marx and Engels, 1967, 24-26). According to Althusser, who read Marx against the grain, one must define class positions not only from a particular production mode, but also from the social formations of which they are a part. This is because within any given social formation typically more than one mode of production performs together with another, and, one of these modes exerts its preponderating influence over the other causing its own dominant reproduction. But social formations are shaped by the historic epoch of which they are part and, as Mandel pointed out, the world economy is only one mode of production in diverse social formations united by capitalist exchange: “the historical specificity of (postcolonial) imperialism lies in the fact that, although it unites the world economy into a single market, it does not unify world society into a homogeneous capitalist milieu” (cited in Nash 1981:397).

At the center of Althusser’s reading of Marx’s theory of social transformation is a relocation of the position of the economy in social change. His argument is that the mature Marx did not invert Hegel’s dialectic simplistically in a way that reduces everything in the superstructure to an economic basis. Rather, for Althusser, class struggle is an important

force for change but it is not the sole determinant of social change. Social change comes about from a wide array of exceedingly complex and diverse “circumstances and currents” that form uneven contradictions in all sites of struggle (Althusser, 1969, 99). While this is not exhaustive of the complexity of Althusserian discussions on the overdetermination of class relations and capitalism, it does provide an alternative, decentered and class-sensitive way of examining the role of NGOs as spearheading social movements for change in a postmodern epoch. In our present study of transnational labor, to which we now turn, this perspective is instrumental in helping us see local spaces and to listen to the lacunae in the social and economic climates of Vancouver and Hong Kong in which the Filipino NGOs working with domestic workers are struggling — against diverse local conditions of exploitation — to create new spaces for social transformation. But first we give a background to labor migration from the Philippines, and to the specific contexts of Hong Kong and Vancouver.

Labor Migration from the Philippines

The deployment of overseas contract workers (OCWs) is an important but contested strategy in contemporary economic development policies in the Philippines. In 1995 there were approximately 3.5 million Filipinos working overseas, and annual remittances from OCWs have been estimated anywhere up to US\$5 billion. This is a major source of foreign currency for the national economy and helps to raise the standard of living for thousands of Filipino families. While the financial gains of a labor exporting economy are clear, the negative consequences of labor migration are palpable. Many female migrant workers suffer ethnic and gender discrimination in the countries where they work, and in the Philippines there is evidence of domestic stress.

The maltreatment of Filipino women working overseas gained popular press in 1996 when two domestic workers, Flor Contemplacion in Singapore and Sarah Balabagan in the United Arab Emirates, were convicted of murder and sentenced to death. It is widely believed that Contemplacion had been wrongly accused, and Balabagan had been sexually assaulted by her employer. NGO activists helped to organize mass vigils and protest movements that united Filipinos around the world to petition for new court hearings. Despite proof of her innocence, however, Contemplacion was denied an appeal by the Singaporean

government and was subsequently executed (Sarah's death sentence, on the other hand, was later appealed). Activists used these cases to highlight the adverse effects of a "liberalized" and outward-looking economy on women. Both stories highlighted the plight of Filipino domestic workers in the international media, although the issue has been discussed in the Philippines since the implementation of a formal overseas contract program by President Marcos in the 1970s.

There is a burgeoning literature which documents the phenomenon of overseas Filipino women, particularly in the Asia-Pacific. This research usually focuses on the lived experiences of, and stereotypes associated with, domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vancouver (Constable, 1997; Huang and Yeoh, 1996; Pratt, 1997), entertainers in Japan (Mackie, 1994; Tyner, 1996; Buckley, 1997), and mail-order brides in Australia (Robinson, 1996; Holt, 1996). There is also evidence that these women are frequently stereotyped as prostitutes regardless of their occupations, indicating the highly sexualized perception of Filipino migrant workers (Chang and Groves, forthcoming; for a critique see Lowe, 1997). These perspectives highlight the importance of the receiving country's attitudes toward gender, ethnicity and culture in both the economic and social lives of Filipino women.

Thus far, although research has been published on the NGOs working with overseas domestic workers, it primarily deals with illegal recruitment and maltreatment abroad, advocating policy changes on the part of governments and practical issues such as how to disseminate this information to current and prospective migrants (Santos Maranan, 1989; Battistella, 1993; Diaz, 1993). We see a need for further investigation on the issue of how NGOs contest the gendered and ethnic national identities which are being constructed in a postmodern era where women from poorer countries in Asia are migrating to "developed" Pacific Rim cities. Through examining the perspectives of Filipino NGOs and their understandings of female labor migration to Hong Kong and Vancouver, we provide a post-marxist interpretation of social relations which incorporates issues of culture, ethnicity and nation. We draw on NGO analyses of the political economy of migration, highlighting the multiple class processes which mediate the knowledge about and experiences of female labor migration from the Philippines.

Women working as domestic workers in Hong Kong, for example, have been the subject of much debate for the past decade — a place where the very identity “Filipino” is synonymous with “maid.” Of the 150,000 Filipino overseas contract workers currently employed in Hong Kong approximately 90% are female domestic workers, which accounts for the local stereotype without excusing the stigma which attaches to it. While the importance of overseas contract work to the Philippine economy, and the adverse conditions these women face in terms of working conditions, living quarters, abusive employers and so on have been well-documented (Paz Cruz and Paganoni, 1989; David, 1991; Lane, 1992; de Guzman, 1994; Tyner, 1994), there has been less attention to how Filipino activists mediate the images of Filipino women. In examining the local contexts of Hong Kong and Vancouver through a frame which acknowledges the articulation of class with gender and ethnicity, we situate NGO perspectives within a complex and decentered global sphere where economic identities and class processes play important roles in mediating political activism.

Domestic Workers in Hong Kong

Prior to the turn of the century Hong Kong was dominated by an overwhelmingly male population, and the so-called servants of this time were men. In the early 1900s, however, and with the increasing numbers of Chinese and British women and children migrating to the colony, the demand for female household workers increased. Men moved into coolie labor and women took their place as domestics. The women employed as servants were initially the *mujjai*, young girls of around 10 years old, but this practice ended in the 1920s. In the 1940s there was an influx of women migrating from mainland China, and in post World War II there was an influx of refugees. Until the 1970s, these latter two groups supplied the labor market for domestic help (for a review of this history see Constable, 1997). Since the 1970s Filipinos have dominated the foreign domestic labor market, but there are also an increasing number of Indonesian, Thai and Sri Lankan women.

Partly due to its geographic proximity, but also due to relatively high wages, Hong Kong is a favored destination for Filipinos seeking overseas employment. Women began migrating to Hong Kong in the 1970s when Chinese women began taking up more lucrative service and factory employment, and between 1975 and 1991, the number of Filipino

domestic workers rose from 1,000 to 66,000. They currently number over 120,000 and are the largest non-Chinese community in Hong Kong. Indeed, this feeling of community is particularly striking on Sundays in Central Hong Kong's Statue Square, where thousands of Filipinos gather on their only day off to exchange news, food, letters and gossip.

This combination of Philippine labor policies and changing economic conditions in Hong Kong would seem to suggest that migration is encouraged by a fairly traditional series of push-pull or supply and demand factors in the labor market. On the one hand, a cultural history of domestic work and restructuring in Hong Kong's labor market have created a demand for foreign domestic help. On the other hand, Filipino women respond to a lack of employment opportunities at home and overseas employment is facilitated by government policies on overseas work. Yet this perception of a global economy where poor women migrate to wealthier countries suggests a totality which masks other important issues of economy and culture which we seek to examine here. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, it is disrupted by the fact that women migrating to Hong Kong are not necessarily from the poorest sections of Filipino society. Indeed, the expensive government fees incurred to travel abroad usually restrict the possibility of labor migration to women from the Philippine middle class, many of whom have completed a college/university education and worked in professions such as teaching or office work prior to their arrival in Hong Kong. In this case the goal of overseas migration is to improve their class position through a combination of financial and cultural capital. These conditions make it particularly confounding when Filipino women realize their "inferior" position within Hong Kong society — where their ethnicity and gender combine and make them intelligible not as labor migrants making calculated decisions about their financial and social resources, but as poor ethnic women naturally suited to domestic work.

Vancouver's Live-in Caregivers

Canada has a long history of importing foreign domestic workers, beginning with the importation of working class British and European "nannies" from the 1800s until World War II, to the importation of Caribbean women under the Caribbean Domestic Scheme until the 1960s. The latest wave of domestic workers is from Asia, however, and is facilitated by Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) (for a review of

this history see Bakan and Stasiulis, 1994). European nannies were initially given landed status upon arrival and were conceived as part of Canada's project of nation building — where these women were seen as being future wives and mothers. While Caribbean nannies were also granted landed status upon arrival, they were less likely to be considered future Canadians. They were subject to stringent health examinations and, should they be found unsuitable for domestic work or the Canadian climate more generally, could be deported back to their country of birth. A system of "temporary visas" was instituted in 1973, however, and an increasing number of women of color were permitted to enter Canada on a limited basis. This situation continued in much the same way until the Foreign Domestic Movement program was instituted in 1981, which allowed domestic workers who had worked for two years on a live-in basis and could prove they had upgraded their skills to apply for landed immigrant status. This policy is much like the current LCP, which was instituted in 1992. The LCP specifies these women as "caregivers," however, and their duties might include not only the care of children, but care of the elderly and disabled as well.

It is difficult to obtain statistics concerning how many Filipinos work as domestic workers under Canada's LCP in Vancouver, but as an indication of the kinds of numbers, between 1982 and 1992, the number of Filipinos employed in Canada as domestic workers increased from 2,775 to 5,440 (Macklin, 1992; Pratt, 1997). Workers under the LCP are not officially listed by nationality for the Vancouver area, although one organization has estimated this number at almost 6,000 in the lower mainland region for 1997. While these statistics may not be compiled systematically, they do indicate the growing number of Filipinos engaged in domestic work in Vancouver.

While relatively high wages might be a reason to migrate to Hong Kong, they do not necessarily reflect the desire to migrate to Vancouver since wages are somewhat comparable to Hong Kong. One of the major reasons to migrate to Canada would be to obtain landed immigrant status and eventual citizenship. In order to enter Canada under the LCP, applicants must have completed a grade 12 or equivalent education, be able to converse and write in English or French, and have either six months formal training as a caregiver or one year's care-related experience. In many cases this experience is gained in Hong Kong or Singapore. Once a domestic worker completes two years of live-in care in Canada, he or

she is eligible to apply for landed status. We emphasize the dual gender possibility here since Canada's revised policy on the importation of domestic workers cites caregivers as being responsible not only for the care of children, but for the disabled and elderly as well. This may alter the feminized profile of Filipinos in Canada, although few men are currently employed in this capacity.

As is the case in Hong Kong, Filipino domestic workers are bound up in the history, economics and culture of domestic work in Canada, and a series of push-pull factors are associated with the market for domestic labor. While the stereotype of domestic worker is not as closely associated with Filipino women in Vancouver, it is also true that these women suffer ethnic discrimination in terms of their eligibility to be considered for landed status and/or their post-domestic work employment possibilities. As in Hong Kong, Filipino women migrating to Vancouver aim to increase their financial and social resources? and therefore their symbolic class position? Rather than saving earnings for their eventual return to the Philippines many women opt to maintain in Canada for the long-term. In Canada their new employment/class position is negotiated through a series of ethnic stereotypes which limit their ability to seek different job opportunities, and many domestic workers are therefore encouraged to remain in this line of employment.

NGOs and Sites of Struggle

In both of these cities there has been a related and somewhat consequent increase in the number of Filipino NGOs assisting these women. There are three NGOs in Vancouver, and approximately ten in Hong Kong. In both places these organizations offer a variety of services including counseling for those in distress; legal advice on working conditions, immigration requirements and the termination of contracts; and temporary shelter for women who are between jobs and therefore without accommodation. They are also involved in data collection and research, which usually takes the form of advocacy campaigns directed at either the Philippine or host country's government.

Advocacy aimed at the Philippine government usually encompasses demonstrations and rallies directed at Philippine diplomats or visiting government officials. These events politicize the cycles of indebtedness to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank which encourage the

Philippine government to export labor to pay foreign debts, and the importance of remittances to the Philippine economy. Advocacy in this case is aimed at persuading the Philippine government to change what are perceived of as neocolonial labor export policies — policies which primarily benefit government agencies and the businesses which facilitate employer-employee contracts. Rallies can also be directed at the host country's government, however, such as the “good enough to work, good enough to stay” campaign launched by domestic worker organizations in Canada. This campaign highlighted the discriminatory policies which limited the ability of domestic workers to gain residency status, despite their importance to Canadian families. Such advocacy has also included reports on the housing needs of domestic workers in Canada, whether this be lobbying against the “live-in requirement” of the LCP or advocating affordable housing for domestic workers who seek alternative accommodation on weekends (Philippine Women Centre, 1996). In both cases NGOs focus on the economics of Filipino identity and the unequal relationships which are constituted through transnational migration.

In the late 1990s, NGO activism is also linked to broader objectives such as interrogating the role of APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) in facilitating particular kinds of labor migration in the region. In both Manila and Vancouver APEC meetings, for example, NGOs held separate but parallel sessions to discuss issues such as the migration of poor women to engage in domestic work throughout the Asia-Pacific. This final sort of advocacy localizes the new transnational forces at work within the political economy of the Pacific Rim, as well as transnationalising the grassroots advocacy work conducted by NGOs. Indeed, NGOs have developed unique bodies of knowledge about Filipinos in transnational migration which synthesize experiences across several cultures. Whether in Vancouver or Hong Kong, these sites of struggle and social action connect the realities of Filipino politics to the social and political realities where NGOs conduct their research and advocacy work.

NGO members are also in the position of being Filipinos trying to frame their own experiences of migration, employment and racism, whether they be naturalized citizens of Canada or temporary labor migrants in Asia themselves. They too must live with the stereotypes about Filipino women on a daily basis, most obviously in Hong Kong where the identity of Filipino is synonymous with domestic work. The symbolic boundaries of class which would separate NGO members from their

domestic worker counterparts in the Philippines become transformed as they interact with the societies of Hong Kong and Vancouver and abandon class differences in favor of identifying with each other along shared axes of ethnic discrimination. Indeed, negotiating the social and political boundaries of national inclusion and exclusion, for themselves and for domestic helpers more generally, places NGOs in difficult positions which are about negotiating (and theorizing) conflict where different societies and cultures intersect.

NGOs in a Decentered Global Sphere

The conjoining of the Philippines' Labor Export Policy (LEP) and Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) is not a mere coincidence of two separate policies making a perfect fit. It is in fact, a typical North-South relationship where a poor country of the South supplies cheap labor ... for jobs that people of the North are reluctant to take.

(Philippine Women Centre, 1997, 29)

We have chosen this quote to emphasize one characteristic view of Filipino NGOs working with domestic workers in the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Europe. Typically these organizations have framed the issue of labor migration within the political economy of neocolonialism and imperialism, and for Filipino NGOs in the Asia-Pacific, APEC has raised questions about what is commonly being termed "imperialist globalization." As a result, their advocacy work focuses on publishing newsletters and disseminating information packages which highlight racist labor policies, the continuing dominance of Western agendas in global restructuring, and how these perpetuate cycles of poverty in the Philippines. In Vancouver, for example, there is increased attention to connecting the demand for Filipino domestic workers with restructuring Canadian child and health care systems, and with a set of neocolonial and racist sensibilities which justify the importation of this labor as helping Philippine families (i.e., as opposed to Canadian families). These perspectives on labor migration emphasize how inequalities in the global economy produce a relationship between Hong Kong and Vancouver employers and Filipino employees which conform to a globalizing notion of class position.

On the other hand, however, and for reasons which are at least partly enmeshed in political expediency, there also are NGOs that are more focused on working for reforms that can ensure gains for the short-term but not social transformation for the long-term. For example, some NGOs in Hong Kong are more concerned with minimum wages than with the neocolonial, export-oriented policies of the Philippine government. Another example would be NGOs in Canada which are predominantly concerned with ensuring that domestic workers gain landed status upon arrival thereby reducing their dependency on employers. These perspectives decenter the structuralist view of the political economy by focusing on immediate issues of importance to domestic workers, while not losing sight of the economic and social contexts of labor migration such as wages and citizenship. Indeed, they too maintain advocacy programs which view Filipino domestic workers as *workers*, while at the same time interrogating the policies which place Filipino workers as an ethnically distinct group.

A debate in Hong Kong is exemplary of these different positions. In May 1993 there was a rally to protest two issues: the minimum wage and the “Two Week Rule.” One group of NGOs wanted to highlight the issue of the minimum wage, which had not been increased in two years.¹ Another group wanted to raise the issue of the “Two Week Rule,” an immigration policy instituted in 1987 which forces foreign domestic workers who break their contracts before the end of a two year period to return to their country of origin within a period of two weeks. This policy was instituted to prevent foreign workers from job-hopping, or from remaining in Hong Kong to work illegally (i.e. to prevent them from working part-time where they could earn higher wages). Given the expenses incurred to travel abroad, however — including passport, visa, travel and agency fees — many workers find these conditions stressful, particularly if their contract has been broken due to abusive employers, or employers who simply thought the domestic helper did not suit their family’s needs. As a result, many Filipinos stay with their employers despite poor/degrading conditions and sometimes danger, until their contracts are complete. In response to this situation, NGOs argued that Filipinos should have the right to change employers during their stay in Hong Kong.

The first group works in cooperation with local trade unions and frames the issue of domestic work within the context of Hong Kong

society, arguing that domestic workers have the right to increased wages due to inflation. The second group wanted the Two Week Rule to be the major aim of the rally, and to frame domestic work within the context of the Philippine government's inability to provide jobs at home, and the discrimination suffered by Filipinos as an ethnically stereotyped underclass of Hong Kong society. While it is possible for the issues of these groups to be complementary, the rally had the effect of drawing a line between two factions of the Filipino Left — a line which continues to divide activists in Hong Kong today.

This event highlights very different conceptions of both domestic work and labor migration. On the one hand, Filipino domestic workers are temporary participants in Hong Kong society, providing a valuable contribution to the economy while at the same time trying to save money for their eventual return to the Philippines. On the other hand domestic workers are viewed as women forced into an unequal world of global divisions and migration, where they suffer undue abuse and hardship. Examining both perspectives together, however, highlights the difficulties in theorizing economic identities without a stable notion of class. While Filipino NGOs have developed a sophisticated and Marxist-inspired analysis of the connection between nationalist and class struggles, this analysis is currently in crisis. Radical organizations draw their analyses from the discourse of the traditional Left which, due to colonial history and US imperialism, has historically emphasized the unequal relationship between the Philippines and the United States in a binary relation of domination. Indeed, this perspective theorizes the political economy in ways which give centrality to the structural elements of poverty. As Filipino workers now migrate to more countries than just the US, and as Filipino NGOs are increasingly confronted by the other nationals such as Indonesians and Sri Lankans who work alongside Filipinos as domestic workers, however, some organizations are revising the project of the radical Philippine Left within a more complicated framework that takes into consideration the transvaluation² of world outlooks of overseas workers. These processes of revisioning and decentering different elements of the political economy, and of rethinking the place of the Philippines in the global economy, are the most resonant with our discussion here.

It is important to remember that although Filipino NGOs have bi-national objectives as part of their advocacy work, as a network these

organizations are producing new analyses of labor migration in the Asia-Pacific region. Whether they conduct rallies at Philippine embassies, in public gathering places for migrant workers such as Statue Square, or alongside conference centers hosting APEC meetings, Filipino NGOs are grappling with new kinds of politics which reflect the complex circumstances of class, gender and ethnicity in transnational migration. While there may be division within the NGO community itself, this alone does not detract from envisioning NGOs as a political community since most cultures sustain conflict and disagreement. Rather, NGO division serves to highlight the tensions in envisioning the importance of class and nation in a world where national boundaries are deemed less important but where inequalities nonetheless persist. It also supports a conception of NGOs as a new social and class-focused movement which produces new organizational frameworks and political initiatives in a decentered global sphere. By interrogating the political and social institutions of the Philippines, Canada, and Hong Kong, as well as the regional relations which constitute the Pacific Rim, Filipino NGOs grapple with difficult questions of the changing nature of global/local and north/south relationships which characterize transnational migration.

Conclusion

The term globalization is not seen to be new by some leading Filipino scholars (David, Diokno, Rivera, and others) who recently convened to rethink the Third World concept (Third World Studies Forum, 1997). Indeed, Gimenez-Maceda (1997, 36) views globalization as just another name for the Americanization or neocolonization of the Philippine view, wherein the political powers of advanced capitalist states and city-states are seen to dictate the terms of political, economic and cultural spheres. But popular peoples' organizations and NGOs, in the Philippines and abroad, have responded in the interstices of competing states and contending powers to resist the homogenizing power of imperial processes. As Gimenez-Maceda goes on to discuss, Filipinos continue to resist cultural imperialism and to create their own view of the world, and we think the experiences of NGOs in Hong Kong and Vancouver are exemplary of such resistance.

There are many Filipinos who migrate to other parts of Asia or to Canada for reasons which are complex, varied, and facilitated by a range of government policies and new socio-economic conditions in the Asia-

Pacific. How to theorize this phenomenon has been a central concern of this paper, and we have used the experiences of NGOs to highlight the changing nature of social relations in this important economic and political region. The ambivalence of transforming political agendas is particularly evident for NGOs assisting domestic workers, and can be evidenced through the different images and meanings they produce through their advocacy work. While their efforts reflect the continued importance of the global political economy in the lives of Filipino women, we think their experiences also provide insights to how we might envision decentered class struggles in relation to transnational migration.

The transnational migration of Filipino women is linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism and must be analyzed within the contexts of home and host countries in ways which take the important issues of capital and labor into account. This much is not at issue. Here we have reasserted the relevance of a post-Marxist and, more specifically, Althusserian approach which acknowledges these processes, while simultaneously stressing the importance of ethnicity and gender in mediating particular forms of labor migration. Images of Philippine women in the region, whether constructed by Hong Kong residents or by Filipino NGOs, play a role in mediating employment in particular occupations. While gendered and ethnic stereotypes may facilitate domestic labor possibilities, here we have focused on how NGOs reclaim these stereotypes in ways which make them politically viable.

As the global political and cultural economy transforms relations between nation-states, it is important to emphasize attempts by Filipino NGOs to bring new forms of discrimination into public view. Such discrimination can range from how women become ethnically coded as naturally suited to domestic work in Hong Kong, to how Canadian racism combines with socio-economic restructuring to justify importing Filipino women to work in Canadian homes. While class-based analyses no longer explain these complexities of migration, here we have explored how political economic processes can work to produce unequal relationships, and the role of NGOs in contesting these processes. We have also tried to complicate traditional analyses of class by maintaining issues of labor and social positioning, but in ways which do not necessarily substantiate a hegemonic view of a "global economy." The experiences of NGOs highlight the need to formulate new ways of thinking through class as it articulates with ethnicity and culture in a decentered

global sphere, and in terms of the new social formations which are a part of the global cultural economy. We hope this paper contributes to post-Marxist debates about transnational migration which are anxious about abandoning issues of class and economic identity by offering new directions for thought. ❁

Endnotes

- 1 In August 1997 this rate was HK\$3860 or \$A690/month. The exchange rate at this time was A\$1=HK\$5.44.
- 2 E. San Juan, Jr. first coined this term (1983, 2).

References

- Althusser, L. and E. Balibar. *Reading Capital*. London: Verso, 1970.
- Althusser, L. *For Marx*. New York: Vintage, 1969.
- Bakan, A.B. and Stasiulis, D. "Foreign domestic worker policy in Canada and the social boundaries of modern citizenship," In *Science and Society* 58(1):7-33, 1994.
- Basch, L., N. G. Schiller, C. Szanton Blanc. *Nations Unbound, Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1994.
- Battistella, G. "Networking of NGOs for migrants and information in Asia," In *Asian Migrant* VI(1):25-31, 1993.
- Buckley, S. "The foreign devil returns: Packaging sexual practice and risk in contemporary Japan," In *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*. Edited by L. Manderson and M. Jolly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 262-291, 1997.
- Chang, K. and Groves, J. McAllister. Forthcoming. "'Saints' and 'prostitutes': Sexual discourse in the Filipina domestic worker community in Hong Kong." *Women's Studies International Forum*.
- Constable, N. *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- David, R.D. "Filipino Workers in Japan: Vulnerability and Survival," In *Kasarinlan* 6(3):9-23, 1991.
- De Guzman, A. "Export of Filipino labor: Problems and prospects for change," In *Solidarity* 141:59-65, 1994.

- Diaz, C.J. "The role of NGOs in the protection and promotion of human rights in Asia," in *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 2(2):199-222, 1993.
- Gibson-Graham, J.K. *The End of Capitalism* (as we knew it). Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996.
- Gimenez-Maceda, T. "Modes of Resistance in a Globalizing Popular Culture Industry," *Kasarinlan*, A Philippine Quarterly of Third World Studies. 12(2): 35-56, 1996.
- Holt, E. "Writing Filipina-Australian Bodies: The Discourse on Filipina Brides," *Philippine Sociological Review* 44(1-4):58-78, 1996.
- Huang, S. and Yeoh, B. "Ties that bind: State policy and migrant female domestic helpers in Singapore," *Geoforum* 27(4):479-493, 1996.
- Jackson, R. Sundays at Lucky Plaza: Gender, Occupation and Migration in the Philippines in the Twentieth Century. Paper presented to the Fourth International Philippines Studies Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 1-3 July 1992.
- Lane, B. "Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong," *Asian Migrant* V(1):24-32, 1992.
- Lowe, C. The outsiders voice: Discourse and identity among the Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong. Paper presented at the International Conference on Gender and Development in Asia, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, SAR, China, 27-29 November 1997.
- Mackie, V. Female labor migration to Japan: The politics of representing women workers. Paper presented to the 'Linking our histories: Asian and Pacific women as migrants' conference, Melbourne, 30 September - 2 October 1994.
- Macklin, A. "Foreign domestic workers," *McGill Law Journal* 37(3):683-760, 1992.
- Marx, K. and F. Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1967.
- Nash, J. "Ethnographic Aspects of the World Capitalist System," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 10: 393-423, 1981.
- Paz Cruz, V. and Paganoni, A. *Filipinas in Migration: Big bills and Small Change*. Manila: Scalabrini Migration Centre, 1989.
- Pratt, G. "Stereotypes and ambivalence: The construction of domestic workers in Vancouver, British Columbia," *Gender, Place and Culture* 4(2):159-177, 1997.
- Philippine Women Centre. Trapped: "Holding on to the knife's edge," *Economic violence against Filipino Migrant/Immigrant Women*. Vancouver: Philippine Women Centre, 1997.

- Philippine Women Centre. *Housing Needs Assessment of Filipina Domestic Workers*. Vancouver: Philippine Women Centre, 1996.
- Robinson, K. "Of mail order brides and "boys' own" tales: Representations of Asian-Australian marriages," *Feminist Review* 52:53-68, 1996.
- San Juan, Jr., E. "The Filipino Worker in America: An Introduction to Carlos Bulosan," *Bulosan: An Introduction with Selections*. Metro Manila: National Book Store, 1983.
- Santos Maranan, A. "An alternative way of looking at women and migration: Why an NGO perspective." In *The trade in domestic helpers: Causes, mechanisms and consequences*. Selected Papers from the Planning Meeting on International Migration and Development, Asian and Pacific Development Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, pp.129-138, 1989.
- Third World Studies Forum, "Discussion, Rethinking the Third," *Kasarinlan, A Philippine Quarterly of Third World Studies* 12(3): 39-77, 1997.
- Tyner, J.A. "Constructions of Filipina Migrant Entertainers," *Gender, Place and Culture* 3(1):77-93, 1996.
- Tyner, J.A. "The social construction of gendered migration from the Philippines." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 3(3):589-617, 1994.