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Limpangog, Cirila

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## Migration as a Strategy for Maintaining a Middle-Class Identity: The Case of Professional Filipino Women in Melbourne

CIRILA LIMPANGOG<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper surveys the diverse motives of professional Filipino immigrant women in Melbourne, Australia. In-depth interviews of 20 women reveal that their mosaic of motives challenges the traditional notion of economic advancement framed within the household theory, or ideas of purely individualistic pursuits. Their movements were facilitated through the intersection of established families and social networks in Australia, and the possession of skills required by the immigration department, defying the mail order bride stereotype that was projected on almost all Filipino women in the 1980s. It is argued that migration provided a bridge to more liberating quality of life, enabling them either to recover their declining middle-class status in the Philippines or to explore an alternative lifestyle in the new context.*

**Keywords:** Australia; Gender; Lifestyle; Philippines; Skilled Migration

*Dieser Beitrag untersucht die unterschiedlichen Motive gut ausgebildeter philippinischer Migrantinnen in Melbourne, Australien. Die Ergebnisse, basierend auf 20 Tiefeninterviews, zeigen eine Vielfalt an Migrationsmotiven, die klassisch wirtschaftlichen Konzepten wie jenen der mikroökonomischen Haushaltsstrategie widersprechen. Die Migrationsbewegungen philippinischer Migrantinnen wurden durch das Zusammenspiel sozialer und familiärer Netzwerke in Australien sowie durch die Fachkompetenzen, die von der Einwanderungsbehörde vorausgesetzt werden, gelenkt. Dieses Migrantinnenprofil widerspricht dem Vorurteil der „Katalogbraut“, das während der 1980er Jahre auf viele philippinische Migrantinnen projiziert wurde. Es wird argumentiert, dass Migration einen im Herkunftsland zu erwartenden sinkenden Status verhindert und persönliche Freiheiten, das Ausprobieren alternativer Lebensstile sowie individuelle Lebensqualität im Migrationszielland ermöglicht bzw. erhöht.*

**Schlagworte:** Australien; Gender; Lebensstil; Philippinen; qualifizierte Migrantinnen

<sup>1</sup> Cirila P. Limpangog holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne, Australia and is currently a lecturer at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. She is also Program Manager at the International Women's Development Agency. Contact: cirila.limpangog@rmit.edu.au

## **Introduction**

Immigration takes place within the complex interaction of macro (structural, legislative), meso (familial, social network), and micro (individual) contexts. In this context, human agency is significant in determining people's migration trajectories. This is the force through which social and human capital are summed up, accessed, and utilized for the individual to succeed. This paper explores the informants' (micro) reasons and motives for migrating to Australia. I analyze how human agency is facilitated, fortified, or curtailed through its interaction with macro and meso forces.

Migration involves various and complex motives. The range of women's aims can include advancing themselves and their family economically, fleeing gender-based persecution, reuniting with their families, seeking asylum, seeking greater personal autonomy, and (re)marriage, to name a few (DeLaet, 1999; Kofman, 2004). I thus reject the one-dimensionality of household or family-centered economic theory (without negating the importance of family and kinship in people's movements), which asserts that the individual's decision to migrate is induced by household needs. Migration primarily appears as a strategy for household maintenance, with the migrant worker returning to the same household in between contracts or during work holidays (Semyonov & Gorodzeisky, 2005). So far, studies on Filipino migration have emphasized economic motives that are directed towards the 'left-behind' family remaining in the Philippines. Hereafter, migrant workers are studied as remitters of income (Basa et al., 2012; McDonald & Valenzuela, 2012; McKay, 2011; Quisumbing & McNiven, 2010; Semyonov & Gorodzeisky, 2008). I extend such analysis by exploring the ways that migrating women remain family-oriented in their economic interests, but in a situation where the family has also migrated. As Kofman (2004) remarks "women may seek to combine work, career and marriage but these rationalities are difficult to grasp using a classification of migratory moves based on a single reason, such as labour, family or asylum" (p. 647). My informants' migratory aspirations were variously framed. Alternative lifestyles and, to some extent, marriage and escape from political persecution and from oppressive gender and cultural norms were their motives. They left the Philippines as middle-class<sup>2</sup> professionals, and migration was principally a strategy for maintaining or extending their class position.

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2 In the Philippines, education is an important marker of class. Thus, *middle-class* is used here to refer to people possessing educational qualifications from reputable universities, and occupying well-paid jobs. They usually come from well-educated families.

Despite the extraordinary global reach of Filipino migration, there has been a lack of scholarship on Filipino skilled or professional migrant women, and this could be attributed to two reasons: First, the majority of Filipino women working overseas are low-waged laborers, mainly domestic workers (Constable, 1997; Liebelt, 2011; Paredas, 2001); and second, they often leave the country as 'marriage migrants', or, as they are commonly known and thought of in Australia, 'mail order brides' (MOBs) (Angeles & Sunanta, 2007; Jackson, 1989; Robinson, 1996; Saroca, 2007; Woelz-Stirling, Kelaher, & Manderson, 1998). Studies reveal that despite their high education, low-waged workers experience meagre occupational mobility after migration. Even nurses – the only prominent, female-dominated Filipino migration stream of skilled workers – have experienced deskilling, downward occupational mobility, and structural as well as everyday discrimination in their transnational movement (Ball, 2004; Choi & Lyons, 2012; Hawthorne, 2001; Pratt, 1999; Salami & Nelson, 2013).

Roces (2003) notes that women who move as either a spouse or fiancé quickly become mothers, workers, and citizens in a new context, and yet, these new identity dimensions are rarely surveyed. Instead, migrant women are pigeonholed as brides, even after years of settlement in Australia and despite their high level of education and skills prior to migration. These narratives also obscure the movements of the other skilled Filipino migrant women. The category 'skilled migrant' is used here to refer to holders of university degrees who occupied white-collar jobs during the interviews, although some of them had experienced under-employment at one point or another. Their entry was facilitated by either a skilled visa, through family reunification, studies, marriage, or a combination of any of these.

The under-representation of skilled Filipino women in the migration discourse seems anomalous for two reasons: First, since 2004, Philippine entrants to Australia largely come through skilled migration visas; in the period between 2011 and 2012, 70 percent of these visas were issued through the skilled migration stream (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). Second, Filipinos represent the seventh largest immigrant group in Australia, with a men-to-women ratio of 1 to 1.5 for the year 2010 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This paper therefore challenges the invisibility of skilled Filipino migrant women in the migration discourse in Australia and beyond.

This paper is based on my research for my PhD thesis on skilled migrant Filipino women in Melbourne. From 2006 to 2007, I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 Filipino women who came to Australia over the past 25 years.<sup>3</sup> As I used a ‘snowball’ approach in the selection of informants, some of them were each other’s friends, colleagues, neighbors, or relatives. Yet, they were diverse in their professional fields, and in the circumstances of entering Australia. As a minority scholar researching the lives of co-nationals, I occupied a unique position. My own embodied experience as a skilled Filipino woman researching the lives of skilled Filipino immigrants in Australia has enabled the deployment of indigenous knowledge valuable to this research project. I did not conduct the interviews as an ‘outsider’ but more as an ‘outsider within’ (Collins, 1986). While minority scholars have the privilege of accessing trust and comprehension of the cultural ways of the subjects, they are constantly faced with self-criticism to ensure authenticity of their own voice and those of the subjects (Andersen, 1993). I was aware that my own historical and cultural situatedness would always influence me as researcher (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007). The researcher’s subjectivity is integral to the knowledge production process. Interpretation involves a ‘fusion of horizons’ – that of the historical specificity of the researcher and that of the object of inquiry: “The fusion at the center of understanding means that we must see knowledge production as a flexible, creative, historically influenced process” (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 23).

I used the intersectionality framework in analyzing the informants’ accounts. Intersectionality, according to Davis (2008), is “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (p. 68). I argue that middle-class maintenance, expressed in terms of alternative lifestyle, retrieval of a declining class position, and a host of other interlocking motives, many of which have familial undertones, frame the migrants’ move to Australia. The following sections contextualize the migration of Filipino women and explore the diversity, nuances, and conflicts associated with their migrations.

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms were used to protect the informants’ privacy.

## ***An Overview of the Australian Immigration Restriction and the Passage of Filipino Women***

Australian migration history is significantly different from that of other major destination countries of Filipino immigrants mainly because of its racial policy that prohibited the settlement of non-white people. In the 1850s, labor disputes both in the gold mining industry and in factories, due to Chinese diggers' productivity and cheap wages for the hardworking indentured laborers from the South Pacific, would all precipitate the White Australian Policy (1901-1973). Also known as the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, the policy deployed language tests to prevent 'undesirables' (prostitutes, criminals, paupers, contract laborers, non-Whites) from entering the newly federated Australia mainly for economic reasons.

It was also during this last half of the nineteenth century when the history of Filipino immigration to Australia was first recorded. The first wave of Philippines-born migrants consisted of sailors, artisans, laborers, and divers. They were recorded in the official registry as Manila men and Sulu men.<sup>4</sup> Many of them fled the pre-republican Philippines in search of peace, away from the tyrannies of the Spanish colonizers. They petitioned for their families to emigrate; some married local residents. Thus, the first wave of Filipino settlers clearly made use of their familial and social networks as an immigration strategy, consistent with the clannish orientation of Filipino culture. This trend would continue irrespective of the constraints in subsequent immigration regimes (Hennessy, 2004).

The White Australian Policy was officially terminated in the 1970s, as the Whitlam government affirmed anti-discrimination treaties. Yet, a strong anti-immigration sentiment would reverberate on a structural level (for instance, refugees without valid visas were subjected to mandatory detention<sup>5</sup>; or through ideological critiques on multiculturalism as 'Asianization of Australia'<sup>6</sup>).

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4 The Philippines was declared a republic in 1898, although its independence was immediately disrupted by the invading Americans. It was only in 1946 that it became an independent nation state. Before 1898, inhabitants of the archipelago were recognized in terms of their regional orientation. Those who came from Manila and the larger Luzon region were simply called 'Manila men', while those who came from the Mindanao Region were called 'Sulu men' (see Iletto, 1993).

5 Colloquially known as 'boat people', asylum seekers who arrived by boat – such as those aboard the historic Tampa in 2001 – were subjected to mandatory detention. Such political posture is a blunt contravention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Australia is a signatory.

6 In 1996, politician Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party endorsed a populist and protectionist stand calling for the abolition of multiculturalism and the prevention of further Asian immigration to Australia.

Another reason that historically prevented Filipino women from entering Australia was gendered labor restrictions. Looking at the larger contours of Asian migration, Hugo (2003) emphasizes that male-led movements from Asian countries to Australia in the nineteenth century were facilitated by labor migration strategies that restricted the entry of women. This was however neutralized in the third part of the twentieth century with the onset of family and humanitarian visa schemes, which also propelled female-led migrations, and then later with the government's preference for skilled migrants. Despite these policy developments, feminist thinkers demonstrate that Australia's skilled migration strategy is gender-biased. Fincher (1995) sees these skill categories as oriented towards the male migrant, as men are more often trained in the professions required for overseas employment. Thereafter, male managers, administrators, professionals, paraprofessionals, and tradespersons embody the skills favored by Australian immigration policy (Fincher 1995, p. 212).

Through the nineteenth and twentieth century, policy guidelines have placed women as 'immigrant wives', 'breeders for Australia', and 'unskilled dependents' (see Hugo, 2003). Iredale (2005) observes that it was not until quite recently (namely 1989) that Australia's immigration policies have taken into consideration the professional qualifications of the spouse of the main applicant.

Despite the restrictive measures that led to the decline in their number in earlier eras, Filipinos have not stopped entering Australia. They came again in trickles, mainly as female nursing students through the Colombo Plan<sup>7</sup> in the 1950s. Most of them were enrolled in universities in Sydney and Melbourne, and opted to permanently settle after graduation. Simultaneously, changes in Australian immigration policies were introduced to fill shortages of skilled tradesmen in response to post-war needs. The repeal of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s coincided with the proclamation of the Martial Law in the Philippines. In the following decades, many Filipinos were demoralized because of the widespread corruption, growing insurgency, and suppression of democracy during the Marcos dictatorship.<sup>8</sup> The political instability and persistent economic predicaments on the one hand, and the state's aggressive move

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7 The Colombo Plan was a bilateral aid set up in the 1950s to enable economic, technical, and educational assistance by Western countries to developing countries in South and South-East Asia. Australia played a critical role in the Colombo Plan by sponsoring Asian students to its tertiary academic institutions.

8 President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law on September 21, 1972. He ruled the Philippines until 1986, when his dictatorship was toppled by the famous People's Power movement. Subsequent leaderships attempted to restore democracy, install transparency in governance, and improve the country's economic life – but with little success.

to globalize its labor force on the other, resulted in an unprecedented out-migration and overseas work deployments, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. The migration of many middle-class Filipinos was also a means to maintain their standard of living that was endangered in their homeland (Tacoli, 1999, p. 668).

### ***Mosaic of Motivations for Coming to Australia***

In this section, I outline the informants' diverse motivations and strategies as well as the facilitating factors that enabled their migration to Australia.

Family reunification has been a favored strategy of Filipino immigration not only in the U.S. (Keely, 1973; Liu, Ong, & Rosenstein, 1991; Tyner, 1999) but also in Australia (Cariño, 1994). Although geographical studies focus more on receiving countries' changing immigration policies, it can be assumed that Filipinos take advantage of these opportunities to advance their family-centered agenda.

The family is described in many writings as the site of Filipinos' most cherished values (Asis, 1994; Medina, 1991; Miralao, 1997). Filipinos abroad are characterized to have maintained a strong 'shared identity' with family and friends in the homeland, inducing them to recreate such affiliation through family reunification (Pe-Pua, 2003). The family is the chief inspiration and benefactor of its members' goals, aspirations, and trajectories in life, including their migration to urbanized cities in the Philippines as well as abroad (Asis, 2002; Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004; Lauby & Stark, 1988; Parrenas, 2006; Ronquillo, Boschma, Wong, & Quiney, 2011). Such attitudes extend beyond economic factors, for the ideological force of the family is stronger than the restrictive immigration policies and discriminatory cultures in the host country. However, as will be shown later, this compelling desire to move, although couched as family-induced, is actually tied to other individualistic agendas.

The family was a motivator and facilitator in the informants' migration. Yet, regardless of kin support, the informants' diverse motives to migrate were not necessarily consistent with the visas they obtained. To elucidate the complexity of both migrant women's motivations and experiences, in the following I will sum up informants' responses into three themes, according to dominant, recurrent motives: (1) alternative lifestyles, (2) escape from political persecution, and (3) consequential



migration. Yet, in reality, these are no neat categorizations, and motives and experiences tend to overlap in one or the other way.

### *Alternative Lifestyles*

Due to the prevailing focus on family culture rather than on the individual, migration studies in the Philippines tend to focus on the role of the family as the primary lens in analyzing migrant movements. Similarly, Filipino migrants tend to couch their stories in line with familial responsibility. I do not dispute the importance of this aspect; yet, I suggest that the family is just one factor in their cross-border movements. Other desires, individualistic as these may sound, equally frame their migration and thus deserve attention.

One dominant and overlying reason for the informants' migration was to search for an alternative lifestyle. Lifestyle migration puts one's own self-centered desires as the focus, and uses one's agency and social capital to fulfill them. Giddens (1991) calls this 'reflexive biography' as the self takes on the responsibility traditionally expected from society or the state. Lifestyle migration also resonates to some extent with individualization, an approach that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) appropriate for those who relocate to explore their self-centered motives. Focused on the power of the individual rather than of organized institutions, migration is an escape option in which people construct their 'do-it-yourself-biography'.

The informants' alternative lifestyle movements may be further understood as acquiring an improved quality of life, resisting financial insecurity, and accomplishing greater autonomy.

### *Improved Quality of Life*

Coming to Australia held a promise of improved quality of life especially in terms of better political governance, employment opportunities, and protection from social unrest and economic vulnerabilities. Informants commonly appraised the Philippine economy as 'unstable', 'worsening', and 'plunging' due to the exponential foreign debt being serviced, and a corrupt bureaucracy. The series of coups d'état that deposed or destabilized national leaders, the long-standing communist rebellion, the Muslim separatist movements, and the atrocities committed by the militant Muslim fundamentalist Abu Sayyaf had all weakened the informants' trust in the govern-

ment. In contrast, Australia was seen as having an established, transparent, and efficient government. The informants perceived Australian society as egalitarian and affluent “*where there is dignity in labor*”, as they often told me. They heard anecdotes of migrant Filipino tradesmen in the 1970s and 1980s who became financially successful in Australia, but who would have stayed poor had they remained in the Philippines.

Susan, a medical doctor, and her husband were motivated by this fantasy of an ‘alternative lifestyle’. She explained that their migration was prompted by their shared dream for “*quality of life. In the Philippines, although you’re earning well, it’s always stressful.*” By this she meant that the cost of living was higher than a worker’s average wages. Susan’s husband supported her desire for a more comfortable life, as he was experiencing stagnation in his IT executive job. Although they were thriving in their respective professions and had no children to support, they could not afford to buy their dream house.

Coming to Australia was a step to a secure comfortable lifestyle for Carol, even if, at first, she vaguely knew this country. Her father suggested Australia, having read about its potentials for a good life: “*My dad said, it would be good if you could go to this country. It’s a young country. You can be part of the growth of this country.*” Her father-in-law, who as a cargo ship captain had visited all corners of the world, agreed. Carol argued, “*if he would live his life all over again, or if he were in his 30s, he would live in Australia. So my husband and I thought there must be something wise about our fathers’ words.*” Carol was born to a middle-class family, married to a man with a lucrative IT job, a graduate from a reputable university, and enjoyed a thriving career as a statistician. Yet, these were not enough for her to attain her desired quality of life.

*I guess we were young. . . . We thought life in the Philippines is hard, although from our parents’ side we didn’t face hardships. We knew we wanted more for our own children. . . . We had our eldest [child] in Manila. We trained him here . . . we wanted more, more . . . greener pasture. More chances of getting a good job, be able to afford a house, be able to afford a holiday.*

Leah, then a PR executive, came with her family in 2002. Working abroad had been a desire she nurtured over the years. “*Like most migrants, [we were] looking for a better life . . . despite the fact that we’re both professionals, we were not very happy economically. We felt that there were more opportunities for the kids and the family here in Australia,*” Leah said. Choosing Australia over Canada where her husband’s side of the family had migrated proved to be strategic.

*First, comparing Canada and Australia in terms of financial requirements such as 'show money' as bond, the latter required less. . . . And second, my mom who had already settled in Australia helped us in having our skills assessed. She lent us money, and hired an agent to start the processing of our papers.*

Familial networks can thus have diverse purposes. Supplying information and financial resources influenced my informants' decision about the destination. In Bashi's (2007) 'hub-and-spoke' network model, the old immigrants' accrued resources in terms of housing, social connections within and outside the ethnic network, entrenchment in the labor market, and monetary power all collude to provide the new recruits an opportunity to risk, survive, and eventually succeed. These resources largely catalyze my informants' decision to move to Australia.

Lorna, a civil engineer, also came with her husband for career furtherance. Like Carol, Leah, and Susan, she was looking for a more secure life especially in the light of economic and political crises in the Philippines.

*In 1985, my husband Randy won a scholarship from an organization [anonymized by author] in America. He proceeded in taking his masters and PhD there. I went along with him. There, our two boys were born. We were on an exchange visitor visa, under which as a spouse I was permitted to work. After the scholarship, Randy was expected to serve in our home country at least for two years. But the political condition in the Philippines was worsening, so we thought of migrating abroad instead. Randy tried applying for jobs in New Zealand and Australia. We eventually chose Australia because of the better employment benefits offered. We didn't know much about Australia back then. All we knew then was it is a huge mass of land in the South Pacific!*

Amy, who came with her family in 2004, echoed similar sentiments. Her two young children were enrolled in an exclusive school where Amy taught, enabling them a 50 percent discount in tuition fees. Yet, her salary combined with her husband's, who was in the IT marketing field, was just enough to cover their needs, leaving them little to improve their lifestyle. She yearned to own a house and live a slower-paced life. After an eight-hour job back in Manila, Amy would sell insurance before negotiating the polluted and often choked-up thoroughfares to get home. As soon as she arrived home, her household duties would always conflict with her teaching work, as she had to mark papers and make lesson plans. This routine always left her exhausted. Migrating to Australia offered a chance to reconstitute paid work into one that was more harmonious with family life. Before they left Manila Amy had begged her husband to take on the breadwinner role alone at least for a year or two upon arriving in Melbourne. She longed for a break after 15 years of continuous teaching. She had also envisaged that migrating to Australia would reduce the strains in her paid work

and family life. She wanted to re-channel her energies into looking after her children.

Coming to Australia was somewhat of an escape strategy, as the informants' reasoning would dwell on the romanticized image of the new country. Although it had some legitimate basis, its depiction was partly flawed. Egalitarianism and multiculturalism in Australia is increasingly advocated. However, in practice, its exclusionary white culture, although indirect and less blatant than before, remains well entrenched (Dunn & Nelson, 2011; Mapedzahama, Rudge, West, & Perron, 2012; Poynting & Noble, 2004). The informants did not have false pretenses about the many forms of discrimination and challenges they would encounter. But as far as they were concerned, Australia symbolized 'hope' where they could stake a new life through the use of hard work, qualifications, and ambitions.

### ***Resisting Financial Insecurity***

The need for financial security was more pronounced for those who had older children. Bing and her family were perennially vulnerable to the economic crisis despite their combined earning capacity. She and her husband, at some point in their lives, served as full-time ministers in a Christian church. Understandably, they depended on members' tithing. Echoing her husband's apprehension, Bing recalled, "*the children are getting older. There is no future here.*" They believed that migrating to Australia was their only hope. It was a strategy to reverse their declining class status.

All of their five children went to private schools and reputable universities in the Philippines. Before coming to Australia, the couple had worked in the U.S. on a tourist visa, at least to alleviate their immediate financial woes. They did not stay long in the U.S. because their children in the Philippines were having problems. The youngest of their five children was only four years old, and their eldest daughter, who was barely 18, looked after them with the maids' assistance. Upon returning to the Philippines, her husband fell from favor in his Church because he had sought other employment while in the U.S., and his ministry was terminated. Moving to Australia was considered an escape from their chronic economic hardship. In consultation with her four Melbourne-based siblings, Bing and her husband worked strategically to obtain enough points for the skilled visa assessment. Bing returned to teaching and enrolled for an education graduate certificate. Drawing on his engineering qualifications, her

husband opened a home appliance repair shop. Being a teacher in a well-established private college did not guarantee an adequate living, as Bing struggled to make ends meet with jewelry retailing and after-hours tutorials. In 1999, the couple's combined monthly income was 25,000 pesos.<sup>9</sup> However, they needed at least 1,000 pesos a day for food, petrol, and the children's matriculation and allowances. Family migration sponsorship and a reasonably settled clan to lean upon presented a way out of their financial distress for Bing's family. Coming to Australia enabled a reassertion of their middle-class status, which was greatly imperiled in the Philippines.

The husbands of Susan, Carol, Leah, Amy, and Bing shared their desires to migrate. Gender equality was not an issue for these women in terms of strategizing their family migration. Both wife and husband equitably helped each other to garner enough points for the immigration assessment, and both also took advantage of their kinship networks in Australia. Typically, the husband was the principal applicant, but both parties were actively involved in the tedious visa application process.

The case of Amy is different because her movement to Australia marked a conscious desire for downward job mobility and a radical career shift for the sake of 'reduced stress'. We might also infer that her desire to be 'available' for her children was an implicit strategy that authenticated her ideas of maternal responsibility, placing obligations derived from ideologies of the gendered nature of social reproduction. She proudly told me of her involvement in her daughters' school assignments and attendance in their co-curricular activities.

### ***Seeking Greater Autonomy and 'a Taste of Good Life'***

Those who came as single migrants were motivated more by the chance to experience the adventures and leisure brought about by traveling and living in a foreign country. Such were the cases of Kris, Gemma, and Ligaya.

Kris reunited with seven of her eight siblings, their respective families, and her widowed mother in Melbourne. In Manila, Kris lectured at a prestigious university when she was offered a scholarship to Australia, but she declined. She preferred to come instead via family visa in 1991. Migration, to her, promised an "*opportunity to travel for pleasure and a taste of good life*". She recalled:

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<sup>9</sup> PhP 25,000 was equivalent to USD 584 or AUD 609 on June 13, 2013.

*When I came, I thought . . . this would be nice. I can have a gallivanting life. In Manila, I had to work really hard. When I arrived here, life was really gratifying. The means of transportation, food and environment . . . it's clean everywhere. Then you have all the time. So there was time for gallivanting even amidst my studies and part-time work . . . Practically my first two years was largely gallivanting.*

Apart from having siblings already settled in Australia, Gemma (the sister of Kris) decided to come for better economic prospects. She said that her father who went to the U.S. for a postgraduate degree had always advised his children to study hard and obtain a college diploma.

*It seemed that he was always discouraging us from taking a blue-collar job. But here in Australia, it is very useful. . . . Back home, when you're a driver or mechanic how much do you get? But here, they get a much better pay, right?*

Gemma readily gave up her teaching job in Manila. Like her sister Kris, Gemma benefited from an elder brother's family visa petition and offer of free accommodation while she was job hunting.

*"All my friends are here. [I want] challenges, adventures,"* was the reason for Ligaya's lifestyle change-induced migration in 1990. She was single without any boyfriend or relatives in Australia. But after a one-year residence in Bangkok as a government-sponsored scholar her perspective about life abroad broadened. She learned about Australia's skilled migration opportunity, but reluctantly resumed work at the government's agrarian reform bureau in Manila to compensate for her one year of full-time study abroad. The desire to be with her friends who had all obtained their visas to Australia prompted her to follow suit. Besides, the wide-scale corruption in Ligaya's bureau demoralized her. Quitting her job and migrating to Australia was a much better option.

Ligaya did not convince any of her siblings to come to Australia. *"That's why I left [the Philippines]. If they were here, I'd rather go home [laugh]. That's because I'm independent. It seems to me that your family has a lot of expectations sometimes."* It was clear to her that migration would allow for a do-it-yourself biography; after all, she was young, unattached, and without any dependent. Her stance was in striking contrast to the family-oriented patterns and practices of Filipino migrations. Nonetheless, she supported the visa application of a skilled nephew and his wife, who were based in Adelaide during the interview. Apart from them, Ligaya had no other relatives in Australia, although she had friends whom she considered a 'second family'. They and

their respective families constitute her local support system. They would teasingly match her with prospective husbands, but she was not interested. Later she established a de facto partnership, which she feared would not be acceptable to her family back in the Philippines.

It appears that Ligaya's 'escape strategy' was stimulated by dissatisfaction in her previous job, but it was also her way to explore a less culturally restrictive lifestyle, especially in terms of intimate relationships. This was a lifestyle choice that she did not feel comfortable taking while in the Philippines. Benson and O'reilly (2009) explain that this form of "[m]igration is presented as a way of overcoming the trauma of these events, of taking control of their lives, or as releasing them from ties and enabling them to live lives more 'true' to themselves" (p. 610). Ligaya's friends provided the security of a social network, with which she shared home and gallivanting activities especially during her first year of settlement.

These women's envisaged 'alternative lifestyle' intersects with a desire to improve the standard of living they had while in their homeland. In the Philippines, young and single adults normally live with their parents and abide by their household rules. The only exception is when the children would study or work elsewhere. Thus, migration allows the informants to experience freedom, autonomy, and adventure. Even the siblings Kris and Gemma, who came through the behest of their elder brother and therefore were tacitly obliged to turn to him for household authority, saw their move as an opportunity 'to gallivant'. Gemma's desire to improve her economic status would even intensify when she saw that trade skills in Australia were valued more than in the Philippines. Migration is perceived as "a rite of passage from dissipated youth to responsible adulthood" (Tacoli, 1999, p. 670). Without any dependents to send money to and with family or friends to rely upon, the 'alternative lifestyle' lets them indulge in what their new life has to offer at their own pace. In the case of Ligaya, leaving the bounds of her nuclear family and the cultural constraints it imposed was an additional attraction. She was the only informant who lived with a partner without marriage or children, and therefore circumvented the mother-wife identity that most informants assumed. The alternative lifestyle she chose was one that transgressed the traditional gender roles in the household.

My observations resonate with the findings of Tacoli (1996) on Filipino women in Italy. For those coming from relatively affluent backgrounds, economic advancement



is subsidiary to their “desire for change, seeing the world and living a different experience” (p. 17). The informants’ desire for change and election of an alternative lifestyle was based on career dissatisfaction and financial insecurity, although they were not typically out of jobs nor endangered in the labor market. I interpret this as wanting to retain their notions of middle-class privileges, which had been threatened by the worsening socio-political climate in the Philippines. Their seemingly advantaged position, such as having relatives in Australia, possession of above-average educational credentials, and, in one case, prior residence in Australia had enabled them to initiate that change.

### ***Escape from Political Persecution***

Political grievances against the Marcos dictatorship, and the failed reforms promised by the People Power administration that toppled Marcos, influenced informants’ migration decisions. Two were blacklisted during the Martial Law era. Vilma recounted:

*The declaration of Martial Law in 1972 prompted me to migrate. Scholars then were in hotspot. From 1973 to 1975, there were scores of disappearances amongst scholars. I finished pre-nursing in Baguio [northern part of the Philippines]. I was the very first in my family to migrate to Australia as a student, and then later stayed on as a skilled worker. I’d never set foot in Manila until it was time for me to collect my visa and go to the airport.*

Vilma did not look back. After graduation, she met and married another medical practitioner of Anglo-Australian background. They have two children.

Maggie, a broadcasting journalist, also left the Philippines to escape political persecution. She was a co-founder of an underground radical feminist movement of student activists organized during the First Quarter Storm (FQS). Filipino feminist academic and former student activist Judy Taguiwalo (2005) described the First Quarter Storm that occurred in January to March, 1970, as

*mark[ing] the series of widespread protests in Metro Manila against the then administration of Ferdinand Marcos and signifying] the resurgence of nationalist struggle in the country which has been dormant since the 50s. The ferment of the FQS would lead to a frenzy of organizing among the students, community youth, workers, and farmers.*

To quell the FQS outrage and the unrest that followed, Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972. A fellow youth activist, Maggie’s husband, disappeared without any trace. He was assumed murdered along with other comrades during the militarized regime. In the course of community organizing work, Maggie met Rudy, an Anglo-Australian



who was stopping-over in Manila en route to India. They fell in love and married shortly after. Maggie was at first hesitant to move to Melbourne: *“No, it wasn’t our plan, but that era was turbulent. That’s because I am an activist, and I was advocating for human rights.”*

Maggie came on a tourist visa, believing that she would still return to the Philippines. But she eventually stayed, found a job, and re-established her family. She became pregnant and gave birth to another child, and later, petitioned for the migration of her first child from the previous marriage.

Marriage to an Australian national was an unplanned life-changing event that facilitated these women’s flights to safety. The cases of both Vilma and Maggie demonstrated that Australia offered the peace, stability, and security they longed for. Yet, they continue to spearhead social reforms and political activism in Australia on issues that affect Filipinos there and in their homeland. Vilma was a mentor to an association of Filipinas in rural Victoria, and was actively involved in assisting those who sustained psychological trauma due to domestic violence. Maggie, on the other hand, was engaged in human rights advocacy. Immigration therefore allowed them to freely retain their political identities that would have otherwise risked their lives, had they returned to the Philippines.

### ***Consequential Migration***

Studies show that the nexus of family and work-related migration often leads to one spouse sacrificing career and social networks, to follow the other’s (usually the male’s) work-induced movement (Ho, 2006; Jervis, 2011; Meares, 2010; Van der Klis & Mulder, 2008; Yeoh & Willis, 2005). Such were the cases of Rosanna, Luningning, and Sharon, who all came as fiancées to their Philippines-born partners.

Rosanna and her husband Eric got engaged in Manila in 1990. Two years later, Eric obtained a skilled visa with family sponsorship and joined his parents and sister in Melbourne. On spousal grounds, Rosanna followed in 1994. They married in Melbourne and raised two children. Rosanna said that she would not have relocated to Australia without the stimulus of marriage. She was satisfied with her life in Manila as a dentist and part-time lecturer, jobs that were not easily recaptured in Australia. There were numerous challenges for her qualifications to be accredited. She had to

undergo professional review seminars and pass qualifying tests, as well as work as a dental nurse during the process of obtaining her professional license. Pregnancy and maternal responsibilities slowed her career reconstitution even more.

Luningning moved to Australia in 1989 on a fiancée visa. Unlike Rosanna, she was discontented with her life in the Philippines, and was looking for a way out.

*I had no intention of coming to Australia. When I returned from the States after completing my masters I tried to work in Manila. I wasn't contented or happy working in that kind of environment. I couldn't apply what I have learned in the States. PR work in the Philippines was still publicity-oriented.*

Luningning had an active yet stressful career in the Philippines. Although her partner's prior movement paved her migration, Luningning implied that a job prospect overseas would improve her career. Like most informants, she was not acquainted with Australia, and would have probably gone elsewhere if it were not for her fiancé. Yet, she chose not to enter the PR industry in Australia. Therefore, even as Luningning initially believed her relocation to Australia would advance her career, marriage and new status as a wife-mother circumscribed her options. Her changed circumstances meant she had to take a different career path and when she had children, her choices were further limited.

For many, their migration motives were straightforward. To be with one's family and loved ones might seem a clear-cut reason to migrate, and this is intertwined with their economic motives, but not to some who had other equally attractive options. Sharon is a case in point. She came in 2003 to marry Richard despite her ambivalent feelings about moving to Australia. The couple met online the previous year. She was then employed as an administrative officer in a Japanese construction company in Manila. Richard, a Filipino-Australian, was holidaying and exploring a computer-related business in Manila. Their whirlwind romance produced a son, who was born after Richard had returned to Melbourne. Richard then petitioned for their migration. But Sharon, who enjoyed a prestigious job, the trust and recognition from her expatriate bosses, and a comfortable life in Manila with full-time maids, was initially reluctant to come.

In a different scenario, Sharon might have opted for a green card in the U.S. She would have gone there for two months with her grandfather and aunt, both naturalized U.S. citizens who came to Manila for Christmas in 2002. Sharon would have tried living in the U.S. on a tourist visa before finalizing her migration plans. *"But I was two-months pregnant, so that plan was shelved aside."* Giving up her life in Manila, and waiving her chance to reunite with her relatives in the U.S. was not without fur-

ther complications. It also meant declining her former fiancé who courted her back despite carrying a baby by another man. According to Sharon, he was an affluent and mature 42 years old American. Being financially unstable, Richard paled in comparison to him. Thus, Sharon's family favored her American boyfriend over Richard. But she turned her back on the American life option, and chose to marry the latter. Her move to Melbourne was mired by financial insecurity. Richard was then just establishing himself as a freelance programmer. Sharon and their son migrated amidst the fears of her mother that Sharon was marrying someone who was financially unstable. Migrating to Australia in this instance signified a loss of prestige for the family as well as a subversion of gender expectations.

During the interview, Sharon was working as a training coordinator in a professional association, which she found stimulating, although less prominent than her posts in Manila. A job in line with her original career path was not her priority at that time.

The cases of Rosanna, Luningning, and Sharon suggest that consequential migration is accompanied by varying degrees of reluctance. Severe reluctance in the case of Sharon was linked to her vulnerability to class demotion. In Rosanna's case, the 'slight' reluctance may be viewed as fear of temporary career instability, which is presumably common to well qualified migrants. All three women faced difficulties in recapturing their careers, prompting Luningning and Sharon to shift course.

### ***Discussion and Conclusion***

This paper showed the informants' complex, contradictory, and overlapping reasons for migrating. It concurs with feminist writings that women's and men's migrations cannot be explained alone by monolithic household- or individual-based theories. The migration of these professional Filipinos had varied and complicated starting points, which were not solely economically motivated. In sum, their movements were facilitated through the intersection of established kinship networks in Australia, and the possession of education and skills required by the immigration department. Yet, what appeared to have overlaid their decision to move were the maintenance of middle-class status as well as the exploration of an alternative lifestyle. In this paper, I have shown the connectivity of these two main migration motives.

For those whose aim was mainly economic, migrating to Australia was a way of retrieving their declining class position, or at best protecting it against the economic and political turbulence that beset the Philippines at that time. Most of the informants' move is argued to be used as a strategy to middle-class maintenance. My argument coincides with Tacoli (1999), whose study of Filipino women in Rome shows migration as a means to protecting their middle-class standard of living against the perennial domestic economic crisis. Subsequently, I would add to this argument by emphasizing that their motives are essentially fluid and do change during the course of migration. Unfolding opportunities and desires, such as meeting a partner or establishing a family, affect their trajectories. Migration as a solution to economic problems seems over-determined in the Philippines. Given their qualifications, these women could have succeeded in their career aspirations in the homeland, yet they did not rely on it. Hope and ambition were projected into migration – and were reinforced by the encouragement of relatives who had already migrated.

Most informants had either a spouse or direct family members as companions during the process of migration. Those who came as students met their partners and subsequently settled down. More than half of the informants had established clans in Australia, either sponsoring their nuclear family, or petitioned by a kin who arrived before them. I see the ways and capacities through which they negotiate their new identities as migrants as markedly privileged given their social capital in both the homeland and Australia.

Another dominant stimulus of the informants' migration is the opportunity to explore other facets of their lives. Focused on the power of the individual rather than that of organized institutions, many exercised their self-centered motives to *enjoy, gallivant, be with friends rather than family, and meet new challenges*. The quest for lifestyle change appears to be a subplot for most, which, though not exclusively, relates to middle-class status maintenance. The informants' ability to elect and eventually pursue their desire for a lifestyle change by coming to Australia was also facilitated by their middle-class status in their homeland. It enabled them to reconfigure gendered expectations inscribed in Filipino culture, especially when living with one's own family while single, and obeying its implicit decorum.

The informants' entries were mediated by stringent immigration measures and steep visa costs which are not accessible or affordable to the average Filipino. Despite

their middle-class status in the Philippines, some had to sell off their properties, get loans, and solicit financial help from relatives in Australia to subsidize their immigration. Once in Australia, it became necessary for them to aim for well-paid work corresponding to their qualifications in order to recover the costs of their migration.

Yet, in some cases, prior class privileges, high skills, and education would not translate into economic success. Sharon's story suggests that marriage with someone in a Western country did not guarantee an improved quality of life. Coming to Australia meant downward social and occupational mobility, and a letdown to an implicit gendered expectation to marry up.

The mosaic of motives outlined in this paper challenges the traditional notion of economic advancement framed within the household theory, or of purely individualistic pursuits to self-development and gratification, although some informants, like Kris and Ligaya, had prominently cited these at the outset of their migration. Surprisingly, advancing one's career as a main motive to migrate was not mentioned except by three informants, Luningning, Lorna and Ligaya, whose move were triggered by the lack of satisfaction in their previous jobs. Quite the opposite, Amy envisaged her migration as a step to downscale her once stressful professional life in Manila.

Overall, the informants' accounts show that migration provided a way towards a better quality of life, regardless of their original intentions. Yet, the migration process also compromised some informants' social status and caused frustration.

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