

## • CHAPTER FIVE •

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# On Identity and Development: Filipino Women Entertainers in Transition in Japan <sup>1</sup>

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Classified by the United States government in 2002 as belonging to the Tier Two Watchlist,<sup>2</sup> Japan has engaged in a major crackdown on illegal migrants, raiding entertainment bars and tightening immigration rules as a means to prevent human trafficking and the exploitation of foreign workers, especially women. Recently, talks concerning the entry into Japan of Filipino nurses and caregivers as part of the ongoing negotiations for the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) have effectively covered the issue of remaining Filipino entertainers, married or divorced women in Japan, and their children. At this stage, when we have yet to see the implementation of laws and programs or the integration and reintegration of migrants, for the “development” of the lives of foreigners in Japan, peoples’ efforts at community organizing have shown potential in introducing and lobbying for change. Japan has become a site of struggle and negotiation for Filipino women who aim for self-development. After years of work in the sex and entertainment industry, Filipinos who are former and even current entertainers hope to reclaim lost skills for upward mobility. It has also been reported that migrants in general experience tensions or problems in labor-receiving countries due to “undercasting” or seclusion in their places of destination. True enough, migrants in Japan are still treated merely as a part of the “foreign labor problem” (Chan-Tiberghien, 2004).

Labor migrants may be considered part of the lowest strata of the absorbing community because they become occupiers of the so-called “3D” (dirty, dangerous, difficult) or “3K” (*kitanai, kiken, kitsui*) jobs. As foreigners, they may also experience difficulty in integrating into a culture “alien” to them (Nowotny, 1981). Thus, understanding a specific migrant-oriented organization’s conceptualization of development for Filipinos in Japan, as seen in a particular project for women, remains the main task of this chapter.

The life stories of Filipino women in Japan, as well as the characteristics of organizations which seek to assist them, of course vary in many ways. To avoid hasty generalizations about women and organizations, I take the case of a particular program for Filipino women in Japan – the training of current and former Filipino women entertainers to become English teachers for Japanese children – initiated by a Filipino-run community organization in Tokyo called the Center for Japanese Filipino Families (CJFF). By looking at this program, I aim to show how complex issues in migration – of governmentality and neocolonialism – surround, penetrate and comprise a specific development project for a group of Filipino women in Japan.

## FRAMEWORK

Conway (2006) suggests that all forms of collective action, or perhaps all social processes, need to be partly understood in terms of identity formation (p. 8). Feminist views on identity construction (Abu Lughod, 2006), meanwhile, suggest that the international dispersal of peoples may be understood as configured by history and

crafted according to nations' contemporary politics of governing. Thus, I first attempt to illustrate how issues of Filipino contemporary migration and its feminization intersect with and relate to the Philippines' colonial legacies. While previous studies have established that the migration of Filipinos for work purposes can be explained according to the fluidity and personal desires of migrants (as agents) to seek social mobility, this study looks at issues of neocolonialism as intricately connected to contemporary Filipino migration. I also concur with McGovern (2006) that colonialism continues to echo in the politics of neoliberal globalization in the Philippines.

To contextualize Philippine migration and to show that contemporary migration reflects the country's compliance with supposedly internationalist trends in policy-making, I further borrow Foucault's (1991) concept of "governmentality." As interpreted by Ferguson and Gupta (2005), governmentality refers to the processes by which the conduct of a population is governed by institutions and agencies, including the state; by discourses, norms, and identities; and by self-regulation, techniques for the disciplining and care of the self (p. 114).

As the program of CJFF for Filipino women in Japan contains the English language and education as its primary components, this chapter provides a discussion of both as (1) products of neocolonialism related to the Philippine state's persistence in nurturing colonial legacies, and (2) as possible cultural products used by organizations which simultaneously "resist" (protest) and "accommodate" (negotiate and reconfigure) remnants of colonialism. The Philippine state, in the face of its determination in cultivating these legacies, is seen here as that which legitimates a kind of "economic coercion" (San Juan, 2000) in the form of governed migration.

Further, I explore CJFF as an organization in two ways. First, to give weight to the importance of concepts of identity in creating and maintaining communities, I qualify CJFF as a kind of self-reflexive and identity-oriented "new social movement organization" characterized by: (a) a membership that includes actors who continuously practice the organizational objectives they pursue; (b) actions which serve as expressions of the global interdependence of our world, such as submersion in networks where new meanings are created and practiced; and (c) actions which have both visible and less visible results such as community construction, institutional change and cultural innovation (Melucci, 1995, pp. 113-114). Second, I also borrow from Clifford's (1997) use of the term as involving "contact zones of nations, cultures, and regions" (p. 238). As a "contact zone," a migrant-oriented organization as part of a diasporic community or overseas-based Filipino civil society becomes a space where its members negotiate through and engage in political struggles "to define the local, as distinctive community, historical contexts of displacement" (p. 238).

## NEOCOLONIALISM, GOVERNMENTALITY, AND MIGRATION

### ***The Americanization of Philippine Education***

At first glance, the occupation by the United States of the Philippines from the end of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century seems to have been more liberating than the Spanish colonial experience, with the Americans promoting free public education, in contrast to the Spanish policy of non-education of the Filipino "indios." As Smith (1945) advises, it is wise to bear in mind the fact that the essential purpose of the educational system has been, since 1901, political rather than cultural (p. 140). Finding the Philippines in political turmoil and convinced that the country was incapable of managing its own affairs, the Americans implemented "benevolent assimilation" as an approach to colonizing the Philippines. Deprived of systematic education under Spanish rule, Filipinos from every walk of life, as Smith observes, "have always felt that the key to political and social advancement was to be found in embracing the American ideal of

popular education” (p. 140). This comparatively benign American colonial policy, at least as contrasted with that of Spain, served to win Filipino loyalty and gratitude (Meadows, 1971, p. 338).

The educational system configured by the United States in the Philippines vastly expanded the social, political, and economic horizons of Filipinos, bringing more and more Filipinos into the mainstream of Western knowledge as well as increasing their self-knowledge – thus inflating their material and aspirational levels with a whole new range of “wants” (McHale, 1962, pp. 337-338). San Juan (2002) criticizes the US for its “gospel of capitalist rationality,” for its “civilizing” discourse of governance and for its “worldview of evolutionary progress” (p. 51). Propped up by a rhetoric of development, the Americanization of Philippine education proved to be successful, for the country continued to echo American education in its school curricula long after it was given independence by the United States.

It should however be noted that the Americans did not completely ignore the use of the Philippine national language by the Filipinos. Tagalog as a lingua franca was to be used in the actual teaching of democracy and nationalism to Filipinos, after the Philippines acquired the tools from Americans by which the country could be self-administered by educated Filipinos (Smith, 1945, p. 142). The success of the Philippine Commonwealth Government’s encouragement of the development of Tagalog literature and the usage of the native language, however, remains a contentious issue, for until today the clamor of a small number of nationalists to eliminate English as an official language of instruction in all educational levels is continually being ignored by the government.

In the American postcolonial situation after the Philippines gained its independence from the US, the use of the English language has already found a place in the country’s educational system as a standard language. After the Philippine Commonwealth and the declaration of the country’s independence from the US, the Philippine government under former president Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986) gradually restructured the Philippine educational system towards greater integration of the country into an increasingly globalizing world. From Marcos to the present, governments have repeatedly argued in favor of promoting the English language, as this is believed to be a condition for the global competitiveness of millions of Filipino overseas workers now deployed to about 200 countries worldwide. As President Arroyo (2003) has said, “the great comparative advantage of the Philippines is our rich human resources: highly skilled, well-educated, English-speaking.”

Not only has the government paid no heed to the calls of nationalist politicians and members of academe to de-emphasize the use of English as the main language of instruction, the agenda of Philippine education was also used to educate Filipinos in English in preparation for their future overseas. In 2006, President Arroyo issued Executive Order No. 210, entitled “Establishing the Policy to Strengthen English as a Second Language in the Educational System.” This policy further strengthened the place of English as a second language through the following provisions:

“English shall be taught as a second language starting with the First Grade;” *“The English language shall be used as the primary medium of instruction in all public and private institutions of learning in the secondary level,”* and *“As the primary medium of instruction, the percentage of time allotment for learning areas conducted in the English language is expected to be not less than seventy percent (70%) of the total time allotment for all learning areas in the secondary level [my emphasis].”*

Education, Arroyo (2006) admits, is “part of the legacy of America’s involvement in the Philippines” and in this age “never has the mastery of the english (sic) language been more important to (the Philippines’) national well-being.” As Executive Order No. 210 further states, its objective is “to develop the aptitude, competence and proficiency of all

students in the use of the English language to make them better prepared for the job opportunities emerging in the new, technology-driven sectors of the economy.” From the period of American colonial rule, the English language was transformed from being a mental and cultural colonizing tool to becoming an “accepted” component of Philippine education.

In the area of migration, the English language is being branded as a valuable colonial legacy which the Philippine state effectively uses in the promotion of the global competitiveness of the Filipino workforce. In the last five decades, the Philippines has seen the transformation of the English language as a developmental tool imposed by the Americans to push forward Western knowledge and rationality to becoming a “comparative advantage” in the global labor market.

### ***Labor Policy and Colonial Legacies***

The development of the countries’ labor exportation, like the evolution of its educational system in relation to the English language, may also be traced by looking at colonial legacies which have defined the kind of economic opportunities and ventures that the Philippine state has pursued (Guevarra, 2006, p. 524). Postcolonial/neocolonial Philippines, which has been run by elites who share American-dominated paradigms of “development,” continues to be export-oriented and has failed to resolve structural problems related to land issues remaining from the Spanish colonial era.

Programs for local agriculture after independence reflected the new Western rationality of the global marketplace. Quite similar to other former colonies in Asia such as India, traditional agricultural practices in the Philippines were widely replaced by commercial farming while home and community industries were replaced by feudal enterprises which were economically disadvantageous to locals. Also resembling the situation in other former colonies, infrastructural development in the Philippines was aimed towards integration into the world capitalist system, without much sensitivity towards the cultures and traditions of local communities.

In over three hundred years of Spanish rule, the Philippines saw the solidification of its capitalist-oriented infrastructure, providing a base for the further US-led liberalization of Philippine policies. During the 1970s, the Marcos government carried on agribusiness programs such as the so-called Green Revolution, an American-led program which sought to end world hunger through the use of modern technology, genetically improved seeds and fertilizer. This caused the country to be more dependent on the global economy and Western technologies, undermining self-sufficiency, ignoring the widening urban-rural divide, and causing the accumulation of debts among farmers (Collins, Lappe, & Rosset, 2000). In this situation, the cost factors associated with agriculture have been too expensive for small-scale farmers, leaving the only options of joining the labor force through local employment, or internal or international migration.

### ***Colonialism and Filipino Migration***

We recall that Filipino women in the pre-Spanish occupation period worked in the fields, raised livestock, and participated in trade with their male counterparts (Infante, as cited in Lauby, 1988, p. 474). It was the Spanish Code of Laws implemented in the Philippines that confined Filipino women to the home, forbidding women to transact business or dispose of property (Rojas-Aleta, as cited in Lauby, 1988, p. 474), bolstering a patriarchal foundation and instilling in the Filipino consciousness the notion that women’s main role is to maintain the household. Earlier literature has also identified the worsening economic conditions in the colonial period as a factor forcing women to engage in sex work.

Some literature suggests that American colonialism brought prostitution into the Philippines, since there was no record of its pre-colonial existence. It was during the American colonization of the Philippines when the configuration of gender and class was articulated in the sexual commodification of poor women pushed into prostitution by the economic pressures of poverty (McGovern, 2006, p. 4). During the American period, women's sexuality was turned into a source of profit in entertainment halls which catered to Americans in the Philippines. This gendering of entertainment work became prevalent in particular cities and towns in the Philippines where US military bases were located. From then on, entertainment work became an "easy escape" from poverty, and in the 1970s, the entertainment industry was "developed" to support the country's tourism program which seemingly included in the package the four S's – sun, sex, sea and sand (Matthews, as cited in Crick, 1989, p. 308) – to a generally Japanese clientele.

### ***Beginnings of Filipino Women's "Forced Migration" to Japan***

As a measure to combat deflation and to increase dollar remittances in the country, the Marcos administration resorted to a labor policy which created state agencies charged with the deployment of Filipino workers overseas (introduced under Presidential Decree 442 or the Labor Code of the Philippines). The objectives as stipulated by Article 12 of the Labor Code include: (Section c) to facilitate a free choice of available employment by persons seeking work *in conformity with the national interest*; (Section d) to facilitate and regulate the movement of workers *in conformity with the national interest*, and (Section f) to strengthen the network of public employment offices and rationalize the participation of the private sector in the recruitment and placement of workers, locally and overseas, *to serve national development objectives* [my emphasis].

Following the decree, the Philippines witnessed the rapid exodus of Filipino men and women to the Middle East, Europe, and the US, initially as construction workers and medical personnel. From reliance on neoliberal trade backed up by American economic rationality, the Philippines shifted to a strategy of exporting human labor. Filipino activists from the late 1960s to the present have provided critical analyses of the extensive Filipino overseas migration nurtured during the Marcos period and propped up by American imperialism. Quoting San Juan (2000):

There was no real Filipino diaspora before the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s. It was only after the utter devastation of the Philippines in World War II, and the worsening of economic and political conditions in the neocolonial set-up from the late 1960s to the present, that Filipinos began to leave in droves. During the Marcos martial law regime, the functionality of overseas contract workers (OCW) was constructed and/or discovered by the elite and its hegemonic patrons as a response to both local and global conditions. (p. 232)

Three decades later, after the institutionalization of labor exports from the Philippines what started as an interim strategy for debt payment and response to inflation has become a permanent and legitimized government program. The movement of Filipinos to Japan in the 1970s, apart from explanations which center on the Western-oriented internationalism adopted by Japan and the rest of Asia, may also of course be seen according to economic developments inside Japan, particularly the Izanagi boom (1965-1970) and the Heisei boom (1986-1991) – the upsurges of which caused labor shortages in the country. The Filipinos who first came to Japan were generally young females – and obviously, they migrated not to provide the much-needed labor for Japan's heavy industries.

Earlier studies suggest Filipino women were "pulled" to Japan by an income gap.

Ventura (2006) notes with frustration that people have often in the past written about Filipino migrant workers as if the issue was one of simple economic need (p. 162). The movement of Filipinos to Japan may have also been driven by the goals and dreams of individuals to upgrade their economic status for themselves and their families. As a former Filipina entertainer relayed to me when asked about her decision to come to Japan: "***Gustong-gusto ko talaga no'n!***" (I really, really wanted [to come here]!).

While it may hold true that women are themselves agents who can act on their own aspirations, it can also be remembered that it was during this same period that Japanese sex tourism in Asia was at its peak, and tourist spots like beach resorts and golf courses in the Philippines catered to a group that Ventura (2006) has called the "Japanese underground" (p. 165). The development of tourism to facilitate the needs of this underground market, as Sellek (1996) writes, was established in response to the internationalization of the sex industry (p. 166). The Marcos government propagated this local entertainment industry through outright promotion despite the common knowledge that what was really happening was prostitution hidden under the cloak of tourism. When civil society started to protest against this situation, the underground entertainment industry catering to the Japanese was legitimized under the banner of international migration and cooperation. As the Philippine Labor Code states, "recent local and international developments have imposed new demands and challenges on the existing delivery systems for labor and labor-related services." Such policy re-prioritizations contributed to the feminization of Filipino migration, through which the "needs" of both countries – lack of workers in Japan's entertainment sector and lack of jobs in the Philippines – were met.

### ***Governmentality of Migration in the Neocolonial Situation***

The present art of governmentality makes use of migration, far from being an interim strategy, but as a "pillar of the government foreign policy" (Soriano, 2007, p. 13). During the time of Marcos, the internationalizing policies on migration were used by the Philippine state as rhetoric to support the right to self-determination of its citizens. In fact, the idea of women being the new breadwinners in whichever type of work they are engaged (including entertainment) is also used by the government to support their rhetoric of "female empowerment."

Governments after Marcos continued to cultivate overseas migration, and now Filipino overseas workers have been accorded various heroic names: They have been called "modern-day heroes" (de Guzman, 2003) by the Aquino administration, "citizens of the world" by the former Chair of the Commission of Filipinos Overseas, Dante Ang (2005), "economic saviors" by Estrada (1999), and "overseas Filipino investors" by Arroyo (2001). To give credence to the contributions of Filipino overseas migrants to the country's economy, to recognize their status as somewhat accomplished citizens, and to laud their crucial roles in international diplomacy, they have been called the "new aristocrats" (Guevarra, 2006) and the new "ambassadors of goodwill" (Guevarra, 2003).

Also part of this governmentality of migration is the state's action of instituting protective laws supposedly to ensure the welfare of Filipino overseas workers. The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 (Republic Act 8042), which "aims to wind back the protective function of the state vis-à-vis its overseas workers," has been criticized as based on an endorsement of neoliberal, free trade thinking underpinned by the notion of deregulation and a manifestation of the adoption of a "victim discourse" with respect to the broader process of globalization (Ball & Piper, 2002, p. 1018).

The institutionalization of overseas labor migration, a policy direction which was deemed a necessary response to the global trend towards internationalization, continues to the present as a governmental program of poverty alleviation, employment and national development. As seen in the overview of Filipino migration I have outlined above, the

massive migration of Filipinos characterized by the significant participation of women became effectively normalized by seemingly inevitable tendencies towards economic progress. So far, I have illustrated the Philippines' context of feminized migration as an assemblage of issues related to the country's colonial legacies and neocolonial situation. Before I proceed to discuss how these issues of Philippine education, migration, and colonialism may intersect in looking at a particular organization's program for Filipino women in Japan, I provide some background on the emergence of Filipino civil society from the post-American period.

## DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

### ***Filipino Civil Society***

In discussing a project for development initiated by a non-governmental organization, it remains important to recall that it was under the Marcos administration, during a time of heightened internationalism in Philippine diplomacy and policies, that the country witnessed the emergence of a mass-based, nationalist social movement. Meadows (1971) traces this growth of the civil society from the 1950s, the period when a "new generation of Filipinos" emerged with a background and outlook quite different from those of an earlier generation, which had been framed by the experience of war and continued dominance of the United States in Philippine politics. In the face of neocolonialism, nationalists launched "an intense and emotional search for a national identity" (p. 338). During this period, a mass-based civil society emerged, manifesting in their actions the growth of a so-called "anti-Americanism" and anti-neocolonialism as frameworks for social action (p. 338).

It is likewise important to discuss the role of religion in Philippine social movements, due to the influence of Catholicism and religious groups in the country. In the early 1970s, the world saw better coordinated social action addressing issues in civil rights, and in the case of the Third World, protests against American-led dictatorships. "Liberation theology" or "peoples' theology" likewise emerged. During the 1960s, it was in fact in the Philippines and Brazil that mission-oriented "Basic Ecclesial Communities" or self-reliant sub-units of parishes were first created, long before liberation theology became a prominent framework for the community organizing of church workers (Nadeau, 2002). This activism bore fruit in 1986, when social actors within civil society called for the ouster of Marcos after nearly two decades of dictatorial rule. Since then, these actors have played important roles in the national affairs of the Philippines, and the country has been tagged as having a "weak government" but a "strong civil society" (Tigno, 1997, p. 117).

The social activist movement in the Philippines which emerged in the late 1960s did not only produce grassroots organizations and lobby groups; it was in itself a training ground for social entrepreneurs. Some veteran social movement actors continue to fill leadership roles in civil society or community organizations in the Philippines. I establish here that networks of civil society organizers, with roots that can be traced back to early organized social movements in the Philippines, also now comprise a portion of the labor migrants from the Philippines. The state-sanctioned movement of Filipino migrants has not only led to the sustained movement of Filipinos to many parts of the world and the formation of Filipino communities overseas, but also the exportation of groups of community workers and missionaries who now assume lead roles in organizing Filipino communities abroad. I call this group of leaders deployed overseas the "exported community workers" or "expert community workers" which then fill a portion of the "exported Filipino civil society."

Professional or expert community organizers are now being sent by organizations from the Philippines and other countries of migration, or being recruited by specific organizations in the destination country, as a part of a larger social movement project by

groups in the Philippines or elsewhere. Apart from organizing Filipinos in the destination country, the presence of these community workers-cum-migrants in the international migration system also creates and strengthens transnational social movement networks, as we shall now see in the case of CJFF.

### ***CJFF's Beginnings***

It is first important to note that CJFF's executive director Cesar Santoyo did not come from the "rank and file" of Filipino migrant workers in Japan, but was a *padala*,<sup>3</sup> dispatched as an "expert community worker" whose leadership background includes extensive experience in local (mass-based, grassroots and Church-based organizations in the Philippines) and overseas community-based organizing of Filipinos (for an organization for domestic workers in Hong Kong). CJFF is neither a registered non-profit organization in Japan nor a registered non-governmental organization in the Philippines, but a "sent mission" of the United Church of Christ Philippines (UCCP) to the United Church of Christ Japan (UCCJ). From its inception in 2001, the CJFF remains the only organization in the whole of Japan affiliated under the banner of UCCJ that serves foreign migrants.

CJFF receives contributions from groups with various church affiliations (Catholic, Protestant, Methodist): as a mission program, it is being hosted by UCCJ; it receives financial donations from the United Church of Christ Canada and the Global Ministry for Global Mission of the United Methodist Church; and a Japanese activist who worked with Santoyo in the past to coordinate Filipino and Japanese activists for a campaign against the implementation of an Official Development Assistance (ODA) project of Japan to the Philippines supports CJFF by providing free housing to Santoyo.

CJFF has adopted a general motto of ecumenical movements that acknowledges diversity: "That they may all be one." The network within which CJFF operates, grows, and survives shows its cooperation with varied political lines and religious dominations. It receives organizational and institutional support as well as material and financial contributions from Protestant and Methodist Churches while still co-implementing migrant-related projects with Anglican-supported organizations in the Tokyo area. CJFF also maintains friendships with community workers from Catholic and Muslim faiths both in Japan and the Philippines, and, finally, it keeps its strong links with political activists from the mass-based nationalist social movement from the 1970s as well as "mainstream" Japanese activists. Santoyo's approach to his "mission" for Filipino migrants in Japan was based on what he learned from his long-time exposure to Church-based organizing grounded on the concept of liberation theology. The CJFF used Basic Ecclesial Communities/Basic Christian Communities – applying different faiths in community organizing, matched with political activism – as its reference framework in drafting its "mission" for its development programs for Filipino women and their families in Japan.

### ***CJFF's Vision, Mission and Practices as Ideological Frames***

With the word "families" included in the organization's name, CJFF's vision of the Filipino community in Japan is one which transcends differences in religious denominations and cultures. While the use of the terminology may imply a firm grounding in "traditional" Filipino "family-oriented" conceptions of morality and social values (which were embedded in the Filipino psyche during the Spanish colonial period) or of gender relations (where the female is expected to play subjugated roles within the family), CJFF's conception of the term "family" has evolved. The prime consideration is that Filipino women have become "economically active persons" (Bohning, 1981, p. 28) in international migration, and thus, more active agents within the family as a basic social unit. Further, CJFF's usage of the term "family" mostly de-emphasizes the role of

the father because of the situation of Filipino families in Japan, where 40 percent of their marriages end in divorce (C. Santoyo, personal communication, March 2007). To further understand how CJFF puts its mission and vision into practice, I will outline some issues which the organization faces as it promotes the economic empowerment of Japan-based Filipino women.

*On "indoctrination."* The general aims of CJFF are to promote Filipino migrants' rights and welfare, and to contribute to the eventual multiculturalization of Japan. To quote the mission statement of CJFF in full:

We envision members of Japanese-Filipino families as a strong community, actively living in harmony with all people for the promotion of their rights and welfare, contributing their creativity for the enhancement of life's faith, culture and arts, advancing solidarity and cooperation with migrant support organizations and institutions in Japan and in the Philippines, and participating in building a multicultural society of Japan.

Grounded in Christian ecumenism, the CJFF practices a kind of counseling that acknowledges religious pluralism and cultural diversity, avoiding the practice of "mythical" applications of theology (Forrester, 1988, p. 57). While it is a joint project of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and Japan, CJFF downplays the religious indoctrination of its participants and instead opts for the creation of programs which seek to "invite" Filipinos as active participants in Church activities. An example of this project would be the Christmas Lantern (*parol*) Campaign initiated by CJFF. It is a tradition in the Philippines during Christmastime to display *parol*, which symbolize the star of Bethlehem that guided the Three Kings to find the Baby Jesus. According to Santoyo, the campaign, which invited women to create lanterns, was not only an income-generating project but a "very subtle way of evangelization." For instance, after a pastor displayed six pieces of *parol* outside her church in Hokkaido, six Filipino women visited for the first time.

*On program framing.* Some organizations in Japan, according to Santoyo, tend to provide merely an "ambulance service." For example, in cases of domestic violence, one who takes a superficial view of the issue may think that all that has to be done is to fetch the victim and bring her to the hospital so that she can be treated for her injuries. He points out that in some cases women's shelters can be likened to this kind of temporary – and reactionary – service. According to Santoyo, even some members of the police force do not know many of the new Japanese laws on domestic violence, and only send women home after they report abuses. He says that the role of NGO and other support organizations in this situation now should be to spread awareness and further strengthen the implementation of these laws. Acknowledging the efforts of civil society organizations in Japan, he says: "These laws did not emerge out of nowhere; they were [created] because of the efforts of NGOs and lobby groups."

*On Filipino migration.* Regarding how contemporary Philippine migration should be viewed, Santoyo says that one should look back at the US colonial period in the Philippines, when workers were first gathered for deployment to Hawaii, California, and other American states. According to him, an important factor connected to the international migration of Filipinos is the feudal or hacienda system in the Philippines, which concentrated the control of land into the hands of very few families. Hence, he says, "the tendency now is for people to look for other opportunities." Acknowledging that there was internal migration throughout the Philippines before the Americans came, Santoyo adds: "If you look at the case of migration deeply, the highlight should be on the lack of land reform and industrialization."

*On women's empowerment.* Asked about how he perceives empowerment, Santoyo replies: "You cannot separate economics from politics." To further elaborate his views,

he differentiates the approaches of two other Filipino-run organizations in Japan which were created to promote the so-called “empowerment” of Filipino women, particularly the former group known as “Japayukis.”

Organization A, he says, concentrates more on networking rather than on organizing. Organization B, on the other hand, is a community organization that operates under the assumption that empowerment has a political dimension. Empowerment as defined by Organization A is “to help the migrants” while avoiding the concept of political organization. This same organization recently published a book claiming that women are empowered from the anger they feel due to the oppression and aggression they regularly experience. Santoyo comments, “It is not about anger. Anger is mere result and effect.” Instead, he says that the notion of empowerment should be understood through the concept of justice and that “one has to be organized to be empowered.” He cites lobbying for policy reforms, skills and economic development, empowering of the oppressed and the weak, as important components for women’s empowerment. In implementing projects aimed at empowerment, Santoyo says: “We should ask who the real actor in empowerment is. I think that the best person to rely on is yourself.”

With the ideological framework of CJFF and its leaders’ orientations stated, I now proceed to discuss how these are applied in praxis. I first provide an overview of the organization’s recent activities.

*On political activism.* Since the organization operates with scarce financial resources, CJFF’s structure came to be composed of a single full-time leader or executive director (Santoyo), who uses his skills in mass organization to gather and work with various sub-groups who are pursuing similar aims as CJFF. In fact, CJFF’s uniqueness as an organization lies in its capacity to initiate the creation of grassroots organizations and to coordinate social actions through transnational networking. While the CJFF plans and implements activities for Filipino migrant families in Japan, it has other activities centered on political issues in the Philippines. Santoyo clarifies that not all of his actions are carried under the banner of CJFF. Being “somewhat” church-based, Santoyo says that he prefers to participate in more political activities “only in his own [personal or individual] capacity.”

One example of this is his personal participation in campaigns against the extrajudicial killings of political activists in the Philippines. Not necessarily “carrying the flag” of CJFF, Santoyo assisted in the dissemination of information about the issue to both Filipino and Japanese communities in Japan. This involvement, which may not “directly” involve Filipinos “locally” (i.e., those currently living in Japan), is linked to Santoyo’s continued engagement with his earlier established networks in the Philippines, Hong Kong and Japan. As part of the said campaign, Santoyo was in charge of inviting Japan’s Social Democratic Party leader and Senator Misuho Fukushima to serve as one of the judges for the People’s Tribunal Hearings held in March 2007.

Meanwhile, the political involvements of Santoyo like the campaign mentioned above, or poll-watching in the last Overseas Absentee Voting elections in Japan “to guide the integrity of the votes of migrants,” are not necessarily actual CJFF projects but self-expressions of his political beliefs. Nonetheless, his involvements in such activism lead to the shaping of his and the organization’s character as figures in the arena of community action of Filipinos in Tokyo. As another church-based worker commented on the apparent political activism of Santoyo, “He is Bonifacio while I am Rizal.” Bonifacio, in Philippine history, was the hero who led an armed revolution against Spain. The Philippine national hero Rizal, on the other hand, advocated a more propaganda-based and reform-oriented type of resistance. The NGO worker adds: “When you mention Cesar’s name (to the embassy staff), they’ll run away because they think that there is another signature campaign.”

To further examine the manifestations of issues which were discussed in the earlier sections – of governmentality, neocolonialism, identity and social movements – I now focus on one of the biggest, and perhaps most well-received, projects of CJFF since its inception.

## DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR FILIPINO WOMEN IN JAPAN

### *The Mission Program: Filipino Women as English Teachers*

In 2006, Santoyo organized a gathering of former and current Filipino women entertainers in Tokyo involved in various informal language tutorials in their respective neighborhoods. Initially, he got in touch with the women whom he had already met through CJFF's counseling service and networks. A group of interested women responded and organized themselves into what is now known as "Community and Home Based English Teachers" (CHOBET).

As I have understood during my volunteer work for CJFF, the term "CHOBET" refers to both of the following: 1) an organization of mostly Filipino women interested in English teaching as an "alternative trade" and career, and 2) education and training programs which serve as "contact zones" for the interaction of women who share the same goals of "skilling" and "re-skilling" through the development of capacity in the English language as a tool for teaching. CHOBET's organizational mission gives particular emphasis on skills acquisition as a source of empowerment, and on education as a means of developing mechanisms for collective action and lobbying aimed at greater and structural social change. As a program for skills training and development, CHOBET found as a useful component the capacity of Filipino women in the English language.

The training program given by CHOBET comprises a two- or three-day workshop which includes in its repertoire the following: the teaching of prominent educational philosophies (e.g., Steiner and Waldorf schools), lectures on various kinds of teaching methods which can be applied to community and home-based education, role-play activities concerning the teaching of English, and, lastly, actual demonstrations of lesson plans participants have been asked to design after learning teaching philosophies and methods.

Some say that most Filipino women in Japan have now "aged" – the majority having arrived in the late 1970s and onwards, working in the entertainment industry and later on staying to marry in Japan. As reflected in the demographic data of 73 participants who attended seven different CHOBET workshops from May 2006 to July 2007, around 61 percent (average age of 36) are, or have been, married. The data gathered through CHOBET indicates that 64 percent of all participants are from Manila and its surrounding vicinities, and 78 percent have finished or entered college. Ninety-four percent of the CHOBET participants were female, a figure which supports earlier claims of the highly feminized migration of Filipinos to Japan (Anderson, 2003; Philippine Migrants Rights Watch, 2004).

Interestingly, most participants seem to have intentionally left out the section of the questionnaire where they were asked to indicate their former and current occupations both in the Philippines and Japan. Of all the women, only four wrote that they were formerly entertainers in the Philippines, while not even one person wrote that she works in Japan as an entertainer. This omission or declaration of their experience in entertainment work may be an indicator of women's valuation of their status as migrants in Japan. CHOBET trainings allow time for group work, where women are able to share their problems and experiences in Japan. Not only does this provide a space for a discussion with an expert counselor (Santoyo), it also opens a chance for the sharing of thoughts among women who often find themselves in strikingly similar situations.

CJFF was established at a significant turning point, when the condition of Filipino

women in Japan was slowly moving in a different direction. While the issues of domestic violence and trafficking of women which were massively reported by the media in the early 1990s still exist, Santoyo has also heard women discuss “new” problems that they are now experiencing in Japan. Women now talk about upgrading, rediscovering, and learning skills lost after a long period of engagement in the entertainment industry. They also look for venues where new capacities can be acquired or where forgotten skills can be recovered. Filipino women in Japan, therefore, were/are “in transition.”

The materialization of these new or re-born aspirations expressed by women themselves, however, has proved to be difficult. Entertainment work remains an easy source of money, with women receiving from ¥1,500 per hour or from ¥10,000 per night. While some women are eager to “move on,” this has been difficult because of issues such as remaining obligations to their families. Often, they are mothers of Japanese-Filipino children, breadwinners for their families in the Philippines, or both – making the option of shifting to a different kind of work sometimes almost unimaginable.

The CJFF has identified two general problems that women face as they try to embark on skills training: difficulty in comprehension and economic insecurity. Filipino women who have worked in occupations other than entertainment have not only lost “touch” with their abilities; their experience as migrants in Japan has stripped them of their self-confidence as well.

Such is the case of Maria, who, before coming to Japan as an entertainer, worked as a teacher in a public school in the Philippines. Aspiring to go back to her former profession, Maria is now experiencing difficulty as she has been de-skilled during long years of entertainment work. When she attended the CHOBET training, she exclaimed that she “cannot even construct a decent sentence in English.” Other women are also discouraged by stories of discrimination by Japanese employers. One of the participants who graduated from a private university in the Philippines had been admitted as tutor in an *eikawa* (English conversation) school, only to be fired when the administration discovered that she still works at night as an entertainer to augment her salary.

To provide a better idea of the actual experiences of women as they seek to redefine and rejuvenate their identity and to reclaim a place in society, I provide below a case of one CHOBET member named “Rosa.”

Rosa recalls that English teaching and other jobs in the *kaisha* (offices) were not yet open to non-native speakers of the English language in the 1990s. Thus, despite being a fresh graduate of a medical course in the Philippines, there was no other job available to her in Japan besides entertainment work. Prior to coming to Japan, Rosa worked at the front desk of a hotel in Manila, and she noticed that her workmates began to leave for overseas work, one after another. Her sister, who was already in Japan at that time, encouraged her to come to Japan as well.

Rosa then found a “conservative” snack bar in the Tokyo area where she stayed to work. She was content with earning thousands of yen less than the other entertainers. Her work in the snack bar was only to sit in front of customers – unlike other *omise* (bars) where women’s salaries are dependent on the customers they “recruit” and the drinks they order.<sup>4</sup> She came to Japan only with a three-month tourist visa, but with better financial prospects before her, she decided to overstay her visa. She became involved with one of her customers, who then got her pregnant. However, she could not stay with her partner because the man was already married. For the next six years, she continued to work in the same snack bar until she decided to surrender herself to the Immigration Bureau so that she could finally go back home with her child.

At first, she intended to stay in the Philippines for good, finding opportunities where

she could invest her savings. However, there were not many options back home. She decided to try a clothing retail business. With a friend, she traveled to Taiwan to purchase clothes wholesale and resell them in the Philippines. Still, she was not content with the meager earnings from her business, especially after being accustomed to a more comfortable lifestyle in Japan. The environment was not good for business, either. At the Customs section of the airport, it is a common practice among Customs officials to overcharge taxes once they learn that the goods are being brought in for business, no matter how small the business may be. Hence, she decided to return to Japan in 1997, using another name and overstaying her visa once again.

She returned to the same omise to work, and by 1999 she had saved enough money for the airfare of her mother and son. A friend had encouraged her to bring her child back to Japan so that they could appeal for him to be granted official status as a Japanese national. The process takes a long time, however, and although she visited many organizations to request assistance, most of them only gave vague advice or even discouraged her.

In 2001, she was referred by a Filipino-run women's shelter to an NGO specializing in cases related to Japanese-Filipino children. With the help of the NGO, she and her family were able to receive a special permit to stay in Japan. The permit was granted just in time, for her deportation was already being arranged. She was already in detention as a police officer patrolling the neighborhood had stopped her on her bicycle to ask for her documents.

Her involvement in volunteer work started with the Japanese NGO which assisted her with the visa procedures. With eight other Filipino women, she became a key player in the "Nationality Campaign," a lobby program that has led to the filing of a petition now pending in the Supreme Court. Also at that time, she started to volunteer to teach her son's classmates in the daytime while still working at the club at night. She wanted to be involved in other jobs because according to her, "I was never satisfied even if I was well-compensated as an entertainer. I knew that it was not the kind of job that I wanted." Like other entertainers, she knew that she is qualified to be hired for other jobs, but sometimes the earnings in entertainment work are too attractive to give up.

At the time she started volunteering almost a decade after she first came to Japan, non-native speakers were still not widely accepted as English teachers. For her once-a-week work as an English teacher to her son's classmates, she only charged ¥500 per child. This was the reason why no one questioned her being given the position, because technically, she was only a volunteer teacher. Still, "I could sense then that something good would come out of it," she said.

Rosa also recalls that there were no seminars then for learning how to teach English, and even the Filipinos she met who came to Japan as teachers seemed unwilling to share their knowledge. She attributes this to a prejudiced notion that entertainers are unqualified for such professional occupations. Bookstores became her refuge. She searched for materials that could be used and figured out how to make lesson plans on her own. Eager to learn, she flew to Hokkaido for a teaching seminar which cost her over ¥200,000. She learned mostly by herself, often just trying to recall what she had learned in her grade-school years in the Philippines. Expressing how she felt while attempting to teach, she stated: "I would evaluate myself after each class, and I would feel bad if I did not perform well.... I loved and enjoyed what I was doing, very much unlike my job in the omise, which I hated until the end."

For Rosa, becoming a teacher has also given her a somewhat "refreshed," if not new, identity. Before, she was aloof towards the rest of society because of the

indifference of the Japanese towards night workers. Being a *sensei* [teacher], though, was different. She happily related how “Even the mothers of the children began calling me *sensei*. It’s a sign that I have finally been accepted.”

Like Rosa, many other Filipinos are now taking up English-teaching jobs in Japan, some in formal educational institutions. In 2006, about 100 Filipinos were hired as assistant English teachers in public elementary and junior high schools. In Ibaraki Prefecture, 40 percent of the foreigners employed by Selti, a placement agency, are Filipinos. The evaluation of teachers by the prefecture’s Board of Education has also given positive feedback on Filipino teachers, saying that they fare well even in comparison with native speakers and are able to relate effectively with children (Tutor, 2006). In recent years, placement agencies have mushroomed all over Japan. Since the terms of employment for English teachers are on a “non-quota” basis, the number of Filipinos employed as English teachers has increased significantly.

CHOBET also cites the following as its purposes: to serve as a groundbreaker to properly understand the situation of Filipino women in Japan and the ways and means to empower them; to develop consciousness among women and foreign migrant women on building social movements; to provide skills development and upgrading for English language teachers; and to promote the protection of women’s rights and welfare. The “balance” of CJFF shows notions of women’s development grounded in “economic empowerment” through skill acquisition and reacquisition. At the same time, women are invited to “subtly” participate in activism by being encouraged to organize themselves and become active agents of their own empowerment through skills training which they can use to improve their economic situation.

The CHOBET program pursues its goal of grassroots organizing by leaving important tasks related to CHOBET to an already active group of women leaders. For the early sessions of CHOBET, CJFF hired a Filipino woman who teaches in an international school in Tokyo to serve as the main educator for women wanting to start this so-called “community and home-based teaching.” However, while she was knowledgeable in the field of education as a professional teacher, the concepts of formal education and alternative community education are different. This somewhat displaced the original idea of providing women with an unconventional approach to teaching the English language. Thus, at the end of 1996 Santoyo invited Rosa to become one of CHOBET’s main community organizers-cum-trainers.

Upon review of the ideological framework of CJFF as reflected in the views of Santoyo as its leader and as seen in its involvement in what could be seen as forms of “contentious politics” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 20), it can be stated that CHOBET as a program for women shows an interesting mix of priorities and ideology. The program uses the idiom of “global competitiveness” – signifying the current situation of Filipino women as speakers of the English language and of Japan as a country which has taken the route of internationalizing its educational system. The venture of the CJFF in training women to teach English further responds to the propagation of English usage as part of Japan’s internationalist policies. Such policies aim to support, through new approaches to education, the cultivation of “Japanese with English Abilities.” In addition, this new policy thrust is aided by the liberalization of the Worker Dispatch Law, broadening the scope of labor deployment to fill positions in the English teaching profession.

Some entertainers who have joined CHOBET, and even those who are already working in educational institutions, admit that their English skills may not be sufficient to be teachers of the language. A CHOBET graduate shares her struggles coming up with lesson plans: I asked my mother to send me teaching materials from the Philippines. So before, I would use “Made in the Philippines” materials. One time, I told my students, “A’ is for *atis* (Filipino for sugar apple).” It was only when the children asked, “*Sensei, atis tte nani?*”(Teacher, what is *atis*?) that I realized I still have a long way to go.

The same CHOBET member, who, even before participation in CHOBET had established her own community-based teaching program, says that it is not really because of the English language that she and other former entertainers are being trusted by Japanese mothers to provide an alternative education for their Japanese children. The fee of ¥500 per child, which is the suggested fee to be charged for a 50-minute community- or home-based teaching session (¥5,000 for every 50 minutes, for a group of ten students), is not a bad deal for the Japanese. While the children attend lessons, their mothers can leave for work or do some errands. In a way, this type of teaching becomes a less costly alternative to daycare. Santoyo adds that CHOBET is also a venue where women “can express care and concern for people, most especially children.” Hence, the CHOBET curriculum for teaching uses the English language in addition to what else teachers can offer the children. The English language “adds spice” to the program, but is not necessarily its central feature.

The use of the English language as an “empowerment tool” for women, as seen in the case of the CHOBET program, may also be viewed as a creative reinterpretation of the Philippines’ neocolonial legacy. In its one year of existence, CHOBET has attracted the attention of Filipinos who have all been educated in English as a second language – hoping that their long years of being educated in English in the Philippines can at least be used in Japan. Filipino women in Japan, at least those whom I met through CJFF, see English teaching as a possible alternative to night work.

This development shows that organizations which in some ways have a progressive orientation can find new means of transforming normally contentious issues into “options.” To paraphrase Santoyo, “If we were in the Philippines, our cry would be ‘No to the English language!’” Indeed, protests against the propagation of English in the Philippine educational curriculum continue today. However, the context of the organization is more complex. It is located in a migration destination, and its clients face difficulties related to issues of identity, such as having low self-esteem due to stereotypes attributed to them. As seen in the case of CHOBET, the English language is perceived by Filipino women migrants as a “realistic” empowerment tool, a form of capital which they can control (and improve), depending on their aspirations. This indicates that the ideologies of leaders and organizations, in the context of migration, are sufficiently fluid to accommodate and negotiate with enduring realities.

## CONCLUSIONS

I have argued in this chapter that the institutionalization of the massive and highly feminized overseas labor migration from the 1970s was the Philippines’ response to an earlier era of US-led internationalization. While proclaimed by former presidents of the country as inevitable interim strategies that lead to economic progress, migration policies more realistically reflect the neocolonial politico-cultural configurations of the Philippines. In the face of continued labor exportation from the Philippines to other countries, transnational linkages among non-governmental organizations, such as those in Japan, have developed and led to the formation and strengthening of an overseas-based Filipino civil society. I have provided here an illustration of what now comprises a fraction of the Filipino diaspora – the leaders of migrant-organizations who may have not necessarily risen from the ranks but are “expert” or “professional community workers” who leave their “home” (the Philippines) to represent or work for groups of Filipinos living overseas. I have also illustrated that a portion of today’s migrants-cum-community leaders are being “dispatched” on a particular mission or involved in advocacy related to the propagation of social movements. I have contended that although community leaders may be, or may have been, affiliated with a particular social movement or form of activism, the knowledge created through and out of program framing, dynamics within community organizations, and the methods by which goals are sought and conceptions of development are understood, remain largely context-specific.

This was seen in the case of the CJFF's CHOBET program, which introduces English language teaching as an alternative option and career opportunity for former and current Filipina entertainers in Japan. In the context of migration and the particularities of the migrant experience, ideological frames are negotiated to accommodate the needs of members seeking an organization's direction, particularly those connected to the transformation of their image as foreign women in Japan.

Moreover, while CJFF's leader is apparently rooted in, and partly identifies with, the nationalist and anti-imperialist tradition of a certain sector of Philippine civil society and thus adopts a critical view towards internationalist educational policies, CJFF has subverted one of the main manifestations of American neocolonialism and transformed it into a tool for the empowerment of migrants. While the use of the English language as a medium for protest against neocolonial domination is not a new development within social movements in the Philippines, it has interesting implications within a context of labor migration. Rather than indicating the migrants' further submission to the capitalist global order and/or the community organization leaders' co-optation into the very system that they are challenging, it can instead be seen as a radical subversion of a cultural product – originating in the home country's colonial past, reinforced by current economic realities, and promoted by the government in its labor and educational policies – from an instrument for the preservation of hegemony into a tool for active and sustained resistance. By serving as a means for the migrants' upward social mobility, English language skills, in effect, facilitate the empowerment of Filipino migrants as a community, strengthen their capabilities for organizing, and increase their opportunities for political engagement in an international arena.

With regard to the impact of gender and the intersection of gender issues with migrants' concerns, it may be said from this study that the gendered terrain of Filipino migration, particularly to Japan, has necessitated a particular approach towards actions within civil society. Just as the feminization of migration has implied that women are now taking more active roles in the economic sphere (in a sense, transgressing the traditional gender-based public/private divide), the proliferation of new social movements has likewise allowed women to emerge as key players in political advocacy on a transnational scale.

While CJFF's leader is, notably, a male, the organization has recognized from the beginning that it needs to consider gender in mapping out its goals and programs. In its emphasis on empowerment, it has encouraged women to organize among themselves and engage in concerted action on issues affecting Filipinos, both abroad and back "home." The heightened participation of Filipino women in transnational social movements may yet become a significant factor in the evolution of issues within the international migration context – one that could have a profound effect on the politics and processes of social movement organizations, both at the micro level and as part of broader political and economic developments.

## Notes

1 This chapter is based on my master's thesis, "NGO Micropolitics: An Ethnographic Case Study of a Filipino-run Community Organization in Tokyo," submitted to the University of Tokyo in February 2008. All interviews with NGO workers and other ethnographic data were gathered during one year of volunteer work with CJFF from October 2006 to October 2007. Underlined words are Japanese and Bold-Italicized words are Tagalog.

2 Those classified under Tier Two are countries whose governments do not fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standards but are "making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards" (United States Department of State, 2006). There are critics of this classification system, however. A multinational poll conducted by World Public Opinion (2007) indicated that many people feel the US should not act as a self-declared

“global cop” on this issue.

3 **Padala** literally means “sent.” The term is often used by Filipinos to refer to “gifts” sent from abroad to the Philippines. For instance, a **balikbayan** (homecoming) box full of imported goods can be called a padala from migrants for their families. I use the term here to refer to people being sent by organizations to another organization or another country to fulfill a particular mission.

4 Some women find this kind of “competition” rather challenging. A former entertainer who is married to a Japanese man and who owns a sari-sari (general merchandise) store in Kanagawa says: “**Madaling pagkakitaan ang club kasi konting bola-bola lang, may pera na**” (It is very easy to earn money in clubs. You get money out of fooling Japanese). Some scholars in the past have focused on such “opportunism” of women entertainers. However, as I learned from the women whom I interviewed, most of them have actually adopted this kind of attitude as a survival strategy. As one former entertainer explained, “**Kung ikaw ang maloko ng customer, malas mo. Kung ikaw ang makaloko, swerte mo**” (It’s too bad if a customer fools you. If you’re the one who is able to fool the customer, then you’re lucky).

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