

## The Dialectics of Transnational Shame and National Identity

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...I enquired why he did not...revisit his country. "Why should I do so?" he replied, "There is something to regret everywhere; here I am well enough, my master treats me as if I were one of his kindred, I am well paid, and could save money if I wished; in my own country I know I could not do better, and perhaps should not fare as well; therefore, I prefer remaining here" (Warren 1981:221).

I remained two weeks with my master... Although I was well treated by him, I felt that I had...to return to my family and village (*Ibid.*:231).

Since then she has learned nothing of her family. In regard to her new marriage, she had no qualms... but she was determined not to be separated from the young man (*Ibid.*:247).

Told Juan he was now a free man...[but he] seemed very melancholy. Mahomet addressed a few words to him when handing him over and burst into tears. Juan wept and Mohamet's wives howled... (*Ibid.*:28).

Better opportunities in a new place, separation from family and community, marital dissolution, emotional attachment between server and served: these themes could well be those of today's Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs), and the statements cited above could well have been

uttered in the context of present-day international labor migration. But, in fact, they belong to a different era. Appearing in the admirable study by James Warren (1981) from where I had culled the above extracts, these statements were recorded in the context of the slave raiding and slave-master relations as practiced by the

Sulu Sultanate in the late nineteenth century. The slave workers in Sulu's external-trade driven economy were captured from various parts subsumed in what today we call Southeast Asia—Ilocos, Cavite, Cebu, Catanduanes, Albay, Samar, Iloilo, Menado, Gorontalo, Bugis, Moluccas, Makassar, Kelantan, Patani, etc.—and forcibly brought to the Sulu zone. As coerced migrants, the Sulu slaves spent a life of captivity vestiges of which may be observed in the contemporary OCW phenomenon (cf. Hing this volume). Certainly, Sulu's slavery and present-day contract labor migration share a common ancestry in global capitalism, albeit issuing from different stages of its evolution. But one aspect that was conspicuously absent in the reports of roughly a century ago was the sense of national identity on the part of the slaves. Abducted from various parts of the Philippines and island Southeast Asia, they were treated equally as *banyaga* ("chattel-slaves", Warren 1981:215). The slaves themselves did not express their social identities in the anachronistic categories of 'Filipino', 'Indonesian', 'Malaysian', or 'Thai'. Whatever geographic attachments they cherished were limited to the highly specific entities of family or village or to the ports or townships from where they had originated. Ethnic identities were then extremely fluid in Sulu as elsewhere in the region.

Of the innumerable quotes cited by Warren, only one referring to a Spaniard betrayed any identification with a nation: "The Spaniard had lived for fifteen years in the interior of [Sulu], where his master treated him very well, and his only reason for escaping was

an unconquerable yearning to behold his native country once again" (Warren 1981:250). I find this brief quote suggestive of the man's sense of territorial bond with his homeland, the nativeness of which became even clearer and dearer to him from the remoteness of his captivity in Sulu. But in longing to see his literal country and not necessarily those dear to him (who might not be traceable after fifteen years, or whose lives might have taken a course with which he would not be happy), his cognitive nation was characterized by the erasure of people. But the physical terrain of his land of birth was different for, despite the years of separation, it could be imagined as unchanging and eternally welcoming, probably buttressed by the vision of a map that remained vivid in his memory, his native land thus becoming the object of the fondest yearning. The Spanish slave's love of nation as expressed in the naturalistic vocabulary of the homeland, following Benedict Anderson's (1991: 142-4) argument, is rather analogous to Jose Rizal's *patria* in his "*Ultimo Adios*" in which the great patriot, while awaiting his execution, said his moving farewell to a nation literally of land and sea. Apart from this Spaniard, however, the reports on the other slaves in the Sulu Sultanate quoted by Warren showed no affective ties to a modern nation. Also markedly absent was any personal or collective feeling of shame at their enslavement. On the contrary, it was not unusual for slaves to feel contented at the fair treatment they received and to relish the material advantages they reaped from their forced migration.

At about the same period of history, however, at the other side of the globe the young and wealthy *ilustrados* from the Spanish Philippines who lived in Europe, mainly to obtain a university degree, were displaying passions that were undoubtedly tied to an emergent nationhood. A number of newspapers in Spain printed articles the *ilustrados* found offensive and insulting not just to their individual persons but to a collectivity—the ‘Filipino people’, *los indios bravos*—with whom the mainly Chinese mestizo *ilustrados* identified (cf. Schumacher 1973:55-56,213-6). For instance, the Filipino was pictured as “no more than a big child...lacking even the beard which is the sign of virility in a race,” and his supposed racial inferiority was further underscored: “What does the poor *indio*, weak in body and weak in mind...understand of all this chatter of motherhood and brotherhood, of civilization and of culture? ...Bodies without clothes, brains without ideas...an inanimate heap of human entities...” (*Ibid.*:56).

In response to one such slew of invectives, Antonio Luna, after failing to obtain the right to reply to a “series of insults” from a Spanish writer, recounted in a letter addressed to Rizal dated 26 November 1889 that he “felt the compelling need to look for Mir Deas and spit on his face” (Terra 1996). Luna’s letter reported ‘hat:

Upon finding him, I asked who he was (as I did not know him), I told him he was dishonourable, a coward, a despicable low-life. I spat at him, then flung my calling card on his bespattered face. The result: a lot of disorder, confusion and riot...

The series of insults which he directed at us...asked for no other reply than what I did. With luck, I hope he accepts my challenge to a duel, to death if he so wishes. In this way, I would like to show that we Filipinos have more honour than this cringeing [sic], grovelling insult-monger and coward...

I think I am satisfied that by doing this our dignity would be enhanced. ...

This is called for, it is unavoidable if he continues to malign the good name of the Filipino (*Ibid.*).

After making an appeal to Rizal and other compatriots then in Paris (whom he expected would be reading his letter) to support their own paper, the *La Solidaridad*, by taking out subscriptions, Luna’s last line read: “Greetings to all and share the news with our fellow countrymen” (*Ibid.*). Clearly, the expatriate Luna like Rizal had cultivated the national imagination: shared by these *ilustrado* exiles was the conception of a community, an anonymous mass of countrymen linked by a common land of birth. More than that, these fellow sojourners in Europe were imagined as sharing the same sentiment of revulsion at the racial slurs that maligned “the good name of the Filipino.” Luna could probably envisage his countrymen identifying with his bruised feelings and cheering him on for the feat of bravery and retribution he had singlehandedly achieved on behalf of them all. Hence his reminder to Rizal to “share the news.”

The Sulu slaves and the *ilustrados* demonstrate contrasting patterns of

migration and nationalism in the late nineteenth century. The early Philippine nationalists reacted to the felt humiliation at the racial abuse of an inchoate collectivity they believed defined their social identity. Among the peripatetic elements of the native intelligentsia, the feeling was most acute in the imperial metropole where they aspired to prove their parity with and gain acceptance from the colonial overlords. The insults that negated such aspirations seemed to have strengthened the perception of separateness and difference, as well as the resolve to defend the dignity and honor of the Filipino as defined by the *ilustrados*. From its early beginnings Philippine elite nationalism was thus intertwined with colonial racism, resulting in a profound sensitivity to the shaming of the nation-cum-race and in an insecurity borne of the Filipino mestizo elite's internalization of such racism (Aguilar 1995). In contrast, the fishermen, peasants and artisans enslaved in Sulu at the same historical period were positively unaffected by any notion of nationalism. But neither were the *ilustrados* concerned about the Sulu social system which was virtually unlinked to the elite's concept of the nation.

At the close of the twentieth century, the embeddedness of nationalism in migratory movements is unravelling in new dimensions. Educated Filipinos overseas of middle and upper class extraction—regardless of political persuasion—are anxious that the Filipino diaspora has compromised what they perceive to be the dignity and honor of the nation. Some elite nationalists outrightly refer to the OCW phenomenon as an embarrassment to the nation. Writing from New York,

Ninotchka Rosca calls the participation of Filipinas in the international labor market as the Philippines' "shameful export" (Rosca 1995). How I came across Luna's letter is instructive of other elite attempts to come to terms with bruised national feelings. In a news feature entitled "Bad Press, 19th Century" that appeared in *The Filipino* (published in London with a readership in other parts of Europe), Luna's letter was quoted in full, but in its English translation, precisely to encourage "Filipinos in Europe [who] are regular recipients of deprecating, racist and abusive coverage by the media, whether it be in the news, documentaries or comedy skits" (Terra 1996). The aim was to reawaken the spirit of Luna among the paper's largely middle-class readership most of whom merely "endure" the "racist drivel," "shrug it off," or rationalize the abuse "philosophically" (*Ibid.*). In other words, well-heeled Filipino migrants in Europe are immobilized by attacks on their social identities, as if insults and humiliation are the common lot of the Filipino.

In contrast, the contract workers, this time free migrants compared with Sulu's slave captives, do not necessarily see—despite individual misfortunes—their own sojourn overseas as a tragedy for the nation. But, unlike the Sulu case, international labor migration has a strong connection to nationness, hence to the broader pattern of transnationalization (Basch *et al.* 1994). "Bro. Gino," the columnist who gives public advice in the tabloid *News Today* in response to letters from OCWs, counsels migrant workers in the post-Contemplacion era: "*Kung gagawa tayo ng kapalpakan, hindi lamang pangalan natin ang mapapapansama kundi pati ang ating labi* (If we misbehave or do something wrong, it is

not only our name that will be tarnished but our race)" (Dormiendo 1995:3). Apart from negative individual behavior (*kapalpakán*) that may reflect badly on "our race"—nationality and race are here conflated—going overseas for employment is not deemed by the contract worker to be a shameful act. That the labor migrant moves about with the badge of his or her nationality is, however, irrefutable.

The scattering of Filipinos to various corners of the planet has undoubtedly exerted a profound impact on national identity and consciousness, affecting the non-migrant population in the Philippines as well as the different classes of migrants overseas. This essay explores recent changes in the Filipino world view while seeking to analyze the interconnections between the international migration of labor, Filipino nationhood, and what may be broadly termed as social class. The thoughts and propositions laid out here have been influenced unavoidably by my own personal experiences of having lived in several countries in the course of my studies and working life, although my stay overseas has been punctuated by annual visits to the Philippines lasting several weeks. In writing this article, I have also drawn from formal interviews and casual conversations with Filipino professionals and domestic workers in Singapore, where I lived for three years from 1993 to 1996. In the sections that follow, I discuss what I observe to be the transformations in the Filipino national imagination, the imprint of the exilic experience upon the national identities of Filipino workers overseas, and the contestatory challenge posed by ordinary OCWs to the definitions of the

nation preferred by Filipino elites and professionals.

### *Nationness and serialization*

As Anderson (1991:166) notes, Filipino nationalism "has been, for a century now, on the trail of an aboriginal Eden," in other words, stunted in its growth, unable to move beyond its embryonic stage following the symbolic birth of the nation in 1896. This predicament of Filipino nationalism I attribute not merely to the stultifying effects of colonial racism nor to the relative weakness of the Philippine state, but more fundamentally to the aborted serialization and pluralization of the national imagination of the Filipino. As can be learnt from Anderson's (1991) brilliant study, the birth of the modern nation did not occur in obscurity or isolation but rather the national idea emerged when its creole pioneers were enabled in the late eighteenth century to envisage, through print-capitalism and bodily journeys through administrative state structures and spaces, the territorial jurisdictions in the Americas as constituting separate imagined communities. Bound by the fatality of birth outside Europe, the innumerable but finite members of each of the national communities formed a comradeship distinguishable as the creole 'us' from the metropolitan 'them'. Territorialized, relativized and serialized, the dynastic realms in Europe subsequently underwent a similar horizontal transformation. But the relativization of the national political community necessitated the existence of other entities from which the nation could be conceptualized as a community apart, from which the nation

could be differentiated by its supposed uniqueness shared by everyone within but not by those without. Thus the birth of the national idea occurred in a historical epoch in which a number of nations were forming coevally involving the simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion. National consciousness emerged in a world of plurals: an indispensable prerequisite to the nation was its Others.

Moreover, the nation was given discursive and pictorial representation as a person framed in social intercourse with other nations-*qua*-persons on an international stage. The embodiment of collective identity, the nation was seen as part of a series of other nations, all of them imaginable as persons that by their very existence constituted a so-called 'community of nations'. Emerging from the absolutist past, modern nationalism partook of the ideology of individualism accentuated and legitimated by capitalist relations of production: nations were thought to be separate, unique, and equal, a dogma that translated into the political principle of national sovereignty. Nonetheless, international parity was always unstable in a collection of individuals not connected, indeed separated, by nationality since, much like individual persons, nations competed for ranking and dominance in a hierarchized world. In any event, sufficient human qualities were projected onto the nation, despite its being a reified object of representation, a subject of devotion, as well as an empirical political reality, such that the nation could be concomitantly fetishized as though it were like you and me. The consequence has been that, as Geoffrey Benjamin

(1988:12) observes, "international relations have been conducted as if they were inter-*personal* relations, to the extent that as much attention must now be paid to a country's supposed honour and shame as to its economic or political condition."

If my understanding of the birth of the nation as related to the serialization of nations-as-persons is correct, the meandering of Filipino nationalism on its primeval path can be explained as resulting from the truncated serialization of the Filipino national imagination. Emerging in the late nineteenth century, Filipino nationalism surfaced in a context of modular, imitable nationalism in a world of multiple nations. Certainly, the early Filipino nationalists, by their travels through Europe, Asia, and North America, began to more firmly visualize their land of birth as a nation amidst other nations—albeit their *Filipinas* was "behind times, far behind" (Schumacher 1973:57) and had to do a lot of catching up to attain the admired civilized status of the older nations. Their nation, for instance, needed to devise the sacred symbols of the nation found elsewhere as markers of authenticity, such as a national language with its own grammar and orthography. The initial attempts at such construction elicited in Rizal the remark purposefully written in Tagalog: "*Sinoman ay makapagsasabi na tayo'y mayroon ng ating sarili* (Anyone will now be able to say that we already have our own [orthography])" (Gonzalez 1980:6). The "*sinoman*" (whoever) stood for all the nameless, countless Others who were thought of as scrutinizing, from the outside, their nation and who would find that it possesses its "own." To the early nationalists,

therefore, the Philippines was imagined in a universal field of nations and not just in relation to 'Mother Spain'—especially after the disillusionment with the Propaganda Movement's assimilationist goals in the mid-1890s resulted in the support for independence by some of the most notable *ilustrados*. But this pluralistic and universalized world view of the early Filipino nationalists was shortlived: it did not withstand the radical impact of the acquisition of the former Spanish colony by the United States, an event sealed by the 1902 U.S. victory in the Philippine-American war. That impact persisted even after decolonization in 1946.

But why should the *inter*-national context fade from the Filipino national imagination? Some of the causes may be found in the nature of the United States as a colonial power, being at the same time the one hegemonic power in the world-system for most of the twentieth century. Other nations apparently faded in importance and relevance, as the Philippines became tied to what seemed as the only other nation that mattered on earth. Across the Pacific, the United States cast a long, heavy, formidable shadow that engulfed its only official colony, the Philippines. At the same time, the Filipino elites sought, cultivated and enjoyed the patronage and tutelage of the United States, which provided the Philippine agrarian capitalist class unprecedented opportunities for the accumulation of wealth through privileged access to the U.S. export market. In the well-known case of sugar, as with other primary exports, Filipino elites did not have to think in terms of a diversified international market, for the focus was circumscribed since the start of the present century to

a singular target: the U.S. market with its lucrative concessions to the colony-cum-client state. The cognitive eclipse of a world market where Philippine sugar could possibly be sold lasted until 1974, with the expiration of the Laurel-Langley Agreement; before that time, the structural inefficiencies of the local sugar industry could be ignored due to the guaranteed purchase price of the U.S. market (for an overview, see Nelson 1988). The configuration of the Philippine-U.S. political economy indelibly shaped and constricted the global landscape of the Filipino collective psyche. To be sure, there existed millenarian movements of the folk nationalist type that remained in a separate moral sphere and were not heavily influenced by the U.S.-dominated national imagination of the ruling class (Ileto 1979, Sturtevant 1976). By and large, however, the Filipino national imagination for most of the present century was dominated—and enjoyed its dominance—by the United States.

The trajectory of Philippine history tied the nation-and-state in a highly asymmetrical dyadic relationship to the U.S., a relationship that has been described as "*Compadre Colonialism*" (Owen 1971), suggesting not equality (after all, there are several types of the *compadrazgo* including one between landlord and tenant) but a tilted arrangement of patronage and dependence to such an extent that other nations faded from the Filipino's mental map of the world. In such peasantist patron-client dyads, the position of the individual client is usually fragmented and atomized from other clients even of the same patron. Transposing the normative behavior of their own peasant clients to

their new national role as the indigenous ruling class of a client state, the Filipino agrarian elites of the Philippines comported themselves in the role of the *compadre*, subordinate and dedicated to a single patron. Thus, after a fleeting moment in the late nineteenth century, the Philippines effectively ceased to be seen by its own dominant elites as an element in a series, a parade, a tableau of nations which, though ranked, showed a simultaneous relativization-serialization of a multiplicity of nations on the world-historical stage.

That other nations existed was undeniable. But those other countries did not constitute the Others by which the Philippines saw and defined itself. The Philippines was a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) from 1954 until 1977 when it was disbanded, and of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from its inception in 1967, but such memberships were largely upon the bidding of the United States, and very few Filipinos saw their country as definable by individual countries ('neighbors') in a region, much less by a region ('neighborhood') that itself was a post-World War II construction (Emmerson 1984). As in a *compadrazgo*, the Philippines was atomized from its 'co-villagers' in Southeast Asia. Only the patronal country across the Pacific Ocean mattered. Furthermore, while there was awareness of the *bombay* (South Asian) and the *intsik* (Chinese) in Philippine society, they occupied the blurred border zone of 'the alien', and were not seen as representative nationalities from which the Philippines differentiated itself. Only the United States was the Philippines' Other.

As a result, the U.S. was turned into a national obsession, the cornucopia from whence came chocolates, PX goods, movies, fashion, Texas fighting cocks, etc. As a result, the Philippines became even more insular. If, in the area of foreign policy the Philippines mimicked the United States, it was not deemed to be a source of embarrassment to other nations which were, in any case, of not much consequence to the Filipino agrarian and eventually real estate, financial and manufacturing classes. And when members of those privileged classes became radicals and communists starting in the 1970s, their overriding concern was to loosen the grip and cut the ties of American influence on the Philippines. But their cognitive framework was marked by a certain similarity with those of their conservative elite counterparts: both saw their country in binary terms dominated by the United States. One fraction of the elite was a mirror of the other. The overpowering effect of the U.S. is evident among many leftist nationalists whose loathing for U.S. imperialism, even in the 1990s, is based on the assumption of a binary opposition in U.S.-Philippine relations, seemingly unmindful—as I have noted elsewhere in connection with the GATT treaty debate (Aguilar 1995)—that the world has moved on to a more multicentric political-economic configuration. This binarism is evinced by the fact that after 1986 the earlier slogan of leftist groups, "U.S.-Marcos dictatorship," has not been dropped even as "Aquino regime" or "Ramos regime" has conveniently been substituted for "Marcos dictatorship"; the coupling has remained impervious to national and world historical changes.

The mesmeric effect of the U.S. on the national psyche was also evident



in the flow of migrants to the United States which, after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Law Amendments, saw the trickle of Filipino migrants—generally male agricultural workers during the first half of this century—turn into the proverbial flood. The relaxation of quotas on Asian immigrants saw highly-skilled professionals from the Philippines move to the United States during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s (Gupta 1973). Health-related professionals and practitioners were overrepresented among this generation of migrants for whom colonial ties and related training schemes had made the move to the United States seem predictable (Ishi 1987, Espiritu 1996:40). For instance, the inflow of nurses to the U.S. accelerated after the 1965 Amendments, the licenses issued to Philippine-born registered nurses jumping 2.7 times from 1965 to 1966; their numbers steadily increased until, exceeding the numbers from Canada and England, they accounted for nearly half of nursing licenses issued in 1975 (Ishi 1987:291). A “new wave” of Filipino migration to the U.S. which started in the early 1980s—at about the same time when other Filipinos were spanning out to other parts of the world—has been characterized, however, by a greater heterogeneity in age, occupation, education, and points of origin in the Philippines, making for more palpable social class and status distinctions among migrants (Medina 1984, Espiritu 1996, Vergara this volume).

Perhaps suggestive of the mentality of the post-1965 migrants are the parents of a Filipino-American whom I met at Cornell University in upstate New York where he went for his under-

graduate education in the late 1980s. He recounted to me what I interpret as his parents' project to totally sever ties with the Philippines as a nation. To ensure that the children did not acquire a Filipino identity, his parents prohibited any display of the Philippine map in their home in California. While this behavior testified to the powerful symbolism of the map as a floating emblem of the nation (Thongchai 1994, Anderson 1991:170-8), it also revealed an extreme consequence of the overwhelming effect of the U.S. on Filipino social psychology. This example of denial of any connection with the Philippines might be extreme and atypical, but it was symptomatic of the excessive valorization of the U.S. in the Filipino national imagination. Occurring at a time when ‘ethnicities’ were being rediscovered in the United States by hyphenated Americans (Anderson 1994: 324-5), such anachronistic denial of the past transpired precisely because the actors were Filipinos whose minds were fixated on a singular America they had imagined in their pre-migration days—as though their own presence would not dilute the putative purity of America, for their emigration was seen less as a move to a strange new land but more as a homecoming. For the greater part of the twentieth century, the U.S. overshadowed the collective memory of Filipinos.

#### *Re-serialization: Dismantling the Philippines-U.S. binarism*

Sometime after the 1965 Amendments in the United States, I suspect that Filipinos who wished to realize the

possibilities of a life abroad but could not enter the U.S. began to look elsewhere for alternatives. Moreover, other factors converged in the historical conjuncture of the early 1970s that triggered the march of labor from the Philippines to countries other than the United States. In the domestic scene, the economy had not yet been affected by the oil crisis of the late 1970s but the political situation had become volatile and uncertain, the Plaza Miranda bombing in 1971 being a traumatic symbol of the period which culminated in the declaration of Martial Law by then President Ferdinand Marcos in September 1972. At the same time, a reconfiguration of the New International Division of Labor (NIDL) was occurring such that Filipino as well as other Asian workers were considered more appropriate to meet the labor requirements of immobile construction capital in oil-rich Arab Gulf states (Gibson and Graham 1986). After first trying the labor markets of neighboring Arab countries, the Arab Gulf states decided on non-Muslim Asian workers for a complex of reasons, including their neutrality in the Islamic politics of the region, their low cost but high productivity, and their racial distinctiveness which made for easier control (Margold 1995:285-6, Smart *et al.* 1986:102-3). The confluence of unrealizable dreams to go to America, the uncertain domestic situation, and structural changes in the global political economy led in 1972 and 1973 to the first major surge in the number of applications for overseas work lodged with the Department of Labor and Employment (Gonzalez 1995).

Since 1974, the outflow of OCWs has been regulated by the Philippine state but the labor migration flows have proceeded relentlessly, with increasing numbers—many later departures dominated by women—finding employment in various parts of Asia and Europe, while the employment prospects in the Arab states petered out. The flow of economic exiles out of the Philippines further accelerated in the crisis years of the 1980s. Recruitment agencies, legal and bogus, as well as personal networks built by earlier migrants, eventuating in complex “migrant institutions” (Goss and Lindquist 1995), have been ferrying Philippine nationals to many places around the world previously unimaginable to Filipinos, reportedly including Siberia. Even the Catholic Church has been implicated in such a global migration complex, with Filipino priests in Rome precipitating the influx of Filipina domestic workers to Italy (cf. Tacoli this volume). Spain, too, yes the forgotten ‘Mother Spain’, has witnessed an avalanche of the *indio*—during archival research in Madrid in 1989 I still heard the word mentioned as a derogatory term—with Filipino labor migration becoming perceptible starting in the late 1970s (Molina 1992:100). Many historically unprecedented, socially unexpected, culturally unrehearsed, and politically unplanned episodes have characterized the Filipino diaspora since the early 1970s.

Once Filipino workers began to disperse themselves around the world, the edifice of Philippine-U.S. binarism began to crumble. As Filipinos trekked to various corners of the earth in search

of better employment opportunities and alternative lifestyles, the international imagination of the Filipino which had lain dormant was reawakened into a robust vibrancy it had never known before. The erosion of the U.S.-Philippine bipolarity was further aided by a global context of unprecedented change in which American political-economic hegemony has been challenged at certain historic moments by the oil cartel, the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, the evolution of the European Community, the rise of Islamic militancy, and the relentless chasing of profits by multinational capital. Moreover, the seeming marginality of the United States in the People Power drama that unseated the Marcos dictatorship in 1986 was not lost to many Filipinos. But, I believe, it was the global Filipino diaspora which commenced in the 1970s and its aftermath that released the Philippines from its singleminded focus on the United States. The transnational linkages and communication sustained by Filipino migrants overseas with their kin and other social networks in the Philippines ensured that non-migrant Filipinos saw and heard enough of those other countries for them to imagine a plural world.

By the early 1990s, the diaspora has made the Filipino nation imaginable and definable in relation to Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Oman, Italy, England, United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), Germany, Spain, Hongkong, Kuwait, Greece, Taiwan, Japan, Brunei, Qatar, Norway, Singapore, Saipan, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Vietnam, Switzerland, Micronesia, Australia, etc. etc. etc. The jigsaw-like global nomadism of Filipino transmigrants has compelled the official and nurtured the popular imagination

to think of the global stage in a deeply serialized manner. The overpowering dominance of the U.S. has diminished in the popular national imagination (although not among many old elites and staunch leftists). The Philippine nation is thus once more a nation among many. The global dispersion of OCWS, both domestic service workers and professionals, has consequently buttressed *nation-building*, not so much in monetary terms (which has been more than significant and is widely recognized), but in terms of the resuscitation and fortification of the Filipino national imagination. No longer is the U.S. the sole Philippine Other. The word 'abroad' has acquired multiple referents, consistent with the re-serialization and re-pluralization of the Filipino international landscape. Even Filipino migrants in the United States have had to relativize their own presence in the U.S. vis-a-vis the global Filipino diaspora (see, for example, Schoenberger 1994).

Emblematic of this new cosmopolitanism is the recent popularity in the Philippines of *shawarma*, a Middle Eastern meat dish. For some time now, returning contract workers from the Arab Gulf states—"Saudi" being the convenient Filipino shortcut—have asserted the reality of their sojourn overseas and their apparent success, gained through hardship (a literal squeeze of sweat, but also capital's squeeze of surplus value), by emblazoning such slogans as "*Katas ng Saudi*" (Juice of Saudi) at the bottom rear of *jeepneys*, especially in Metro Manila. The slogan itself has multivalent meanings in that, in publicly announcing their overseas employment, "Saudi"

becomes the fruit that is pressed and squeezed that then leads to a new fruit, the *jeepney*, in a process of signification that inverts the exploitative work experience to assert the OCW's human agency. Recently, the non-migrant Filipino palate has been commercially introduced to an alien food item, the *shawarma*, and the public response has been overwhelming. Ironically coming in the heels of the public outcry against the March 1995 hanging of Flor Contemplacion in Singapore—as though to reaffirm the popular legitimacy of overseas employment—the “Saudi” dish took Metro Manila “by storm” later that same year (cf. Baos 1996). By mid-1996, there were already numerous *shawarma* makers and outlets all over the country, bearing many localized adaptations, including the substitution of beef and chicken meat because “Filipinos found lamb rancid” (*Ibid.*).

The enthusiastic public response to a Middle Eastern cuisine can be read as a definite expansion of the Filipino world view, especially as the Filipino palate is generally not known to be spicy and exotic. Moreover, *shawarma* is emblematic of a cultural politics that undermines American influence in the Philippines, a point perceptively noted by journalist Mike Baños (1996), who begins his news feature with the paragraph:

The hamburger had a headstart with nearly a century of American culinary imperialism to ensure its future in the fast food haute cuisine of us gullible colonials. But the Middle Eastern sandwich they call the *shawarma* has made

even faster inroads into the mass consciousness of eternally chomping Pinoys, thanks to the word-of-mouth endorsements and testimonials of thousands of our overseas workers who first encountered the hot, tasty dish back in the Middle East.

Sounding like a stereotypical leftist nationalist and forgetting that the American hamburger is an element of global culture that has successfully undergone localization through Jollibee, Baños betrays one foot still caught in the American conceptual matrix by referring to the dish as a “sandwich.” Nonetheless, his other foot is global: his celebration of *shawarma* is suggestive of the erosion of the U.S.-Philippine binarism for indeed the Philippine significance of *shawarma* is positively cosmopolitan and pluralistic. In another trenchant sentence, Baños sees the Philippines as metaphorically allied with the late Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, and Syria's Hafez Assad through what appears to be a gastronomical connectedness of anti-U.S. imperialism built upon *shawarma*. But, ultimately, the credit goes to the OCW. In Cagayan de Oro City one *shawarma* stall owner considers “the raves” by OCW returnees as an “indicator of success,” gleefully declaring “They tell us we got the taste of the shawarma they get in the Middle East” (*Ibid.*). In the guise of international labor migrants, ordinary men and women have built from the bottom up a new internationalist perspective, the *shawarma* even transforming the OCW into an icon of authenticity in the Filipino's globalized world.

### *Insult and Identity in the International workplace*

Does the transnationalization of the Filipino migrant worker erode his sense of national identity? Has the exodus led to denial of Filipinoness, or has the experience actually deepened national identity? To arrive at some answers, while acknowledging the impossibility of capturing the rich diversity of migrant experiences of an estimated four million Filipinos who work overseas, I shall provide a rough, composite sketch of what I believe is the modal situation of the contract worker (which excludes the important but minority cases of physical and psychological abuse, and other forms of bodily torment and exploitation).

Usually of richer peasant or modest middle-class background, the first-time labor migrant, whether male or female, experiences the new country of employment as strange and out of the ordinary, disorienting and even intimidating. Ecologically, the heat of the desert or the cold of winter requires instant adaptation. Socially, not only are family and friends missed, but the taken-for-granted familiarity of the homeland stands out by its absence. The labor migrant may marvel with excitement at the infrastructures of modernity, and relish the easy availability of grapes, apples, and chocolates which carry a high prestige value as learned from the American past. But the worker must learn to conform with the cultural norms and abide by the legal system of the country of employment. The well-tested cultural tools acquired in the Philippines to maneuver through society are challenged even as they are the only

known repertoire for adjusting to a different locale. Quickly the labor migrant must learn to cope with strange new languages, accents, modes of dress, and other cultural idiosyncrasies. Adjustment to cuisine and even meal-times may be particularly demanding: depending on the country, the OCW confronts such disconcerting practices as drinking soup directly from a common bowl or eating noodles everyday for breakfast. Some of what would be considered improper or undesirable in the Philippines are all of a sudden normative, such as strong bodily odors. Under the new circumstances, matters of shame in the homeland such as an extramarital affair—with a person of another nationality to boot—no longer prick one's conscience: a maids' magazine in Singapore declares: "*Huwag kang mabibigla kung si Pining ay nakikipaglingkisan na parang sawa sa Isang Tamil*" (Do not be surprised if Pining clings like a snake to a Tamil) (Rue 1995:38). The OCW lives in a world upside down from what s/he had previously known.

For many peasant migrants from the rural areas or those whose overseas employment marks their entry to the formal labor market, the regimentation of industrial capitalism is an unsettling new experience. Even those with exposure to industrial work in the Philippines are stunned by the amount of overtime work that may be demanded of them. For teachers, nurses and other semi-professionals in the Philippines, taking on low-status jobs such as that of a domestic worker or a mere hospital orderly requires considerable fortitude and revaluation of self-esteem. Most labor migrants do not feel challenged

or fulfilled by the work itself, as may be gauged from a sample survey of workers in the Gulf region that showed as much as 75 percent saying they did not learn any new skills (Smart *et al.* 1986:111). Apart from the monetary returns, the meaning of overseas employment needs to be sourced from outside the work process itself. In the course of adjusting to their new phase in life, not a few labor migrants have been led to question the meaning of existence, especially when feelings of loneliness and homesickness set in. It is not unusual for a crisis of identity to beset the labor migrant. The individual is fragmented and atomized, working for and along peoples of other cultures, with no basis of group solidarity, much less identity, that can forge a meaningful connection between a Filipino contract worker and a Libyan supervisor, a Taiwanese boss, or a British employer. Under the conditions of economic exile in a foreign land, the crisis of social identity becomes ever more acute in the event of familial and marital problems in the Philippines. A network of Filipino friends becomes an invaluable source of social support for the overseas worker.

On top of the physical, social and cultural dislocation, the contract labor migrant—as an individual operating ineluctably within the cultural framework of the homeland—shoulders another burden, that of a liminal person, as soon as he embarks upon the journey overseas. Indeed, the travel undertaken by the OCW can be seen as a modern, secular version of an old religious ritual in Southeast Asia, in which an individual embarked upon a long-distance sacred pilgrimage to gain knowledge, mature in experience, confirm one's calling and

prove claims to magical prowess and spiritual endowments (Fox 1987). Even at present, shamans in the Philippines undergo such a metaphorical and symbolic journey (Magos 1992). Millenarian movements have done the same, what Ileo (1979) calls the *lakaran* through religio-magical mountains. In the case of the OCW, overseas employment is valued as a form of secular pilgrimage in a quest for economic bounty and life experience (cf. Tacoli this volume). Despite the perils of pride, Maruja Asis (1995:341) observes that "Exposure to other cultures and other nationalities...have earned for migrants the mark of learned men." Morphologically akin to the religious journey, the OCW's secular pilgrimage is highly valued in Philippine society, as it is in other societies such as Indonesia where it has been said that "If one has not been to Malaysia, one has not yet become a man" (Mustain 1992). International labor migration is a journey of achievement.

Having embarked on the ritual of a labor contract pilgrimage, the labor migrant's identity is somehow suspended, gradually affirmed through remittances, but the ritual is not consummated until the economic journey reaches its completion with the return to the homeland, there to bring home economic and cultural capital: economic savings, the usual appliances, narratives of exploits, and cultural artefacts. (Which home with an OCW in the Gulf region has none of the Middle Eastern carpet proudly displayed on the wall?) Many are actually aware of the risks involved in this secular pilgrimage but, drawing on the Filipino's gambling mentality (Aguilar 1994), they willingly undergo—many via illegal migration—the experience of economic

exile to reap its many rewards. Like the ritual that gambling is, the economic journey is a rite of passage in which the labor migrant is neither here nor there, the individual's beingness somehow suspended until the status of a successful returned OCW is attained (cf. Turner 1967).

But even with a broad awareness of the challenges of a journey of achievement, many are still unprepared for the verbal, sometimes bodily, assaults that labor migrants have to bear. I have known of Filipinas in Singapore who felt shocked and deeply humiliated at being called "stupid," "liar," at other times "loose," by their domestic employers. Filipino men in the Gulf region suffer "psychic disintegration and startled outrage at the negative images ('dogs,' 'tools,' 'slaves') that assault them in the international workplace" (Margold 1995:275). The sexualities of both men and women are threatened, caricatured, and suspended, but the usual modes of redress they could resort to in the homeland are repressed until, unable to tolerate any more indignities, the affected persons decide to flee. Especially as they are an international underclass, that is, aliens residing within the country of employment but outside of its national class structure, foreign workers cannot seek protection from non-existent citizenship rights; the situation is compounded by the official unwillingness of many countries of employment to sign international labor conventions (cf. Gonzalez this volume). Culturally, socially and legally, many dominant societies of employment confer the status of non-being upon migrant workers who, in addition to the internal terms of the economic

pilgrimage, are thus positioned in a site of double liminality.

Because of the internationalized context of contract labor, however, the affronts to the migrant worker's dignity and humanity are mediated by the prism of nationality. Indeed, the labor migrant is a special kind of "stranger" in Georg Simmel's sense of being spatially near yet relationally remote to the people of the dominant society: as strangers, they are not apprehended as individuals, but as a "certain type" (1971:148). Their differing circumstances and individualities are obliterated, for it is within the power of the dominant society to label and stereotype, generally in terms of race and nationality for that is how the dominant society views itself in the first place. When expressing preference for "Filipino maids" Singaporeans use categorical notions of race and nationality, such as Filipinas are "clean" (compared with other racial groups reputed to be "dirty"), they are "fast learners," they "speak English" (Kee *et al.* 1994), and—unwritten but also commonly heard—their skin color is not "too dark," ascribed traits molded by racial/national grids of thought. But the more pernicious categories generated by the hegemonic discourse go along such lines as: the Filipina is a maid because, first and foremost, she is a Filipina; if she is "loose" or "stupid" that's because she is a Filipina; the engineer is a troublemaker because he is a Filipino; the construction worker is a "dog" because he is a Filipino. In such cases, the individual migrant worker's crisis of identity and social liminality becomes inseparable from his or her Filipinoness. Hence any defence of self-worth, dignity and honor is also mediated by

nationality, in various forms of responses that somehow say, "You say and think I am like this, let me show you that *we Filipinos* are not like what you say and think we are." Issues of personal and social identities merge and converge, and the resolution of this double crisis leads to a reinforcement of the worker's identity as a Filipino.

In a remarkable essay that analyzes the undermining of Filipino masculinity in the Middle East, Jane Margold (1995:277) recounts the story of Avelino, an Ilocano migrant to the Gulf region. On his "first day" at work, Avelino underwent what seemed a ritual initiation: the Italian foreman called out to him to bring over the hammer, but the Italian used the Arabic word, *jacus*, for hammer. The foreman became furious because Avelino would not follow his order, until finally the foreman himself took the hammer and shoved it on Avelino's face, shouting "*jacus, jacus, jacus.*" Avelino then described his reaction:

There were Egyptian, Pakistani, Eritrean, Indian (workers) watching. And we are five Filipinos in that group...at that point, I was in a place of humiliation. I decided, it was our first day. I grabbed the hammer from him... Then I throw it, almost hitting his feet. I tell him, this is *martillo... Martillo, martillo*. Then I again got the hammer and almost hit him with it.

In this narrative told in the Ilocos, the listeners could visualize Avelino confronting the gaze, not of fellow workers, but of nationalities. Notice the seriality

of the nations-as-gazers in his account, including even a rather obscure Eritrean. They could well have been Rizal's *stinoman*. Hence the challenge to Avelino was both personal and national. In resisting the humiliation of self, his thoughts were also of himself and his companions as Filipinos. And he did retaliate in what Margold notes as a choreographed, hence muted, response through the controlled tossing of the hammer while repeatedly shouting back the Filipino word, as if to say, "*Martillo* is how we Filipinos call this thing; you'd all better learn the word." Indeed, Avelino recounted the story I think to underline his personal courage and, at the same time, his successful defence of national honor. He continued by saying that the Italian was dumbfounded that the Filipino and Italian words for hammer were both *martillo*. Instead of seeing a Mediterranean historical connection, Avelino then moralized by saying:

So right after that, when he saw my response, that Filipinos are not cowardly, ready to fight, management conducted a meeting. They said in the meeting: these are the characteristics of the Filipino. They are sensitive, but they have brains... They respect us because if we hear insults, we will make trouble instantly. Particularly the Europeans, they underestimate us. But then they find out that we have a brain... after that, no more trouble.

Avelino reaffirmed his male self, while concomitantly defending "the Filipino," particularly as a brave thinking being



("with brains") despite what others may see as a humble, low-status person. From Day One, therefore, Avelino as an OCW reinforced his Filipinoness. But for his comparative restraint, Avelino's action was an echo of Antonio Luna's passion.

In the classic formulation by Frank Lynch (1973:16), the experience of migrant workers such as Avelino's strikes at *amor propio*, an adjunct of shame (*hiya*), that which is concerned about "core" individual human attributes culturally valued in Philippine society the injury of which produces a reaction that "is liable to be violent." As Michael Pinches (1991:183) also notes, "active ridicule or condescension...tends not so much to arouse inner feelings of shame or inadequacy as it does to arouse anger and resentment." In the international workplace where the personal is intertwined with the national, the affronts to self are affronts to nation as well, but fear of draconian laws results usually in measured hostility. In the diaspora, self and nation are objects of assertiveness and the basis of sometimes subtle, sometimes overt resistance. The resolution to the emotional injury, when it arises, is localized and does not lead to a shamed denial of Filipinoness. Moreover, the presence of contract workers in the land of economic exile is not delegitimated. Yet they discover an assured identity even without hegemony. Later I argue that the typical OCW's reaction to insults and ridicule differs from the shame felt by avowed nationalists and by higher-status workers (professionals) similarly employed overseas.

To what extent do Filipinos at home know about the intimidation and humiliation of labor migrants? In the main, incidents of verbal abuse are largely concealed by individual OCWs from family and friends in the homeland. Migrants nurture an attitude that, out of context, non-migrant compatriots will not understand their struggles overseas. Moreover, revealing such experiences would tarnish the glow of the OCW returnee's achievement. As one of Jane Margold's respondents said, "At home, no one tells the whole story, that Saudi is for the Arab only, not for people of other races" (1995:288). She also observed that "Remarkably, male migrants to the Middle East had hardly spoken publicly of their trips. Even wives were often surprised to hear the details that emerged during my interviews with the men" (*Ibid.*:292). If we bracket aside the sensationalized stories of maltreatment that appear in the Philippine media, it can be said that the everyday pain of overseas work is usually hidden from others; if stories are told, they are usually recounted as part of the adventure, by then framed as a successful odyssey the emplotment of which leads to the affirmation of self and nation.

The collective silence by OCWs about their everyday ordeal is probably one reason for the undiminished value and legitimacy of overseas employment among non-migrant Filipinos. As some studies in the early 1980s revealed, regardless of the level of overseas migration the Philippine communities studied were characterized by a general perception that many residents had been

acquiring vocational skills, and that many parents had been "encouraging" their children to do so, to enable them to obtain overseas employment (Go and Postrado 1986:141-2). Even at the height of the Flor Contemplacion episode, the flow of illegal labor migrants from the Philippines to Singapore continued, and while the total outflow of OCWs in 1995 declined it happened in large part because of stricter government screening rather than the disfavor of overseas work per se in the eyes of the average Filipino (Yulo 1996). For migrant workers, departure is not feared. What is dreaded is the end of the economic pilgrimage which, should it be a failure, would consume the returned migrant with personal shame (*biya*). In the course of the pilgrimage, however, migrant workers seek solace and refuge in the randomness of luck and the possibilities of deploying individual cunning, skill and precaution which characterize the gambling mentality. A 1994 study of Filipinos in Japan concluded that "Although the respondents had heard of cases of exploitation and abuse, they attributed it to luck and carelessness" (*Manila Chronicle* 1994a). Hence all the more reason not to divulge the everyday struggles of overseas employment unless one is resigned irreconcilably to a fate of bad luck.

But despite the concealment of many details of personal insults from family members, the overall experience of OCWs that lead to a reinforcement of national identity must have percolated to their neighborhoods in the Philippines as to heighten the sense of Filipino identity even among the non-migrants. A study of respondents from four

"migrant-sending communities" showed that an overwhelming 90 percent, if given a chance to choose, would retain their Philippine citizenship and would not exchange it for any other, a rate substantially higher than those found in earlier, non-migration-related studies on preferred citizenship (Asis 1995:328,342-3). The diaspora's re-serialization of the Filipino national imagination would thus appear to have transnationally buttressed Filipinoness in the homeland itself.

The labor migrants' silence about indignities suffered outside the country suggests that the only people with whom they truly share the sorrows and joys of overseas work are their fellow labor migrants. Indeed, the varieties of pain largely concealed from family and friends need to be dealt with while the worker is overseas, hence providing the basis for the establishment of friendships, groups and communities in exile. Even upon their return, it seems that only fellow OCWs can truly comprehend the depth of the shared experiences, making them into exilic communities even in the homeland.

#### *Shame and social division In the Filipino diaspora*

Apart from self-cum-national defence in the event of ridicule, the fact of physical absence from the land of birth also deeply etches the idea of the nation among labor migrants. Whereas in the Philippines social identity may be based on the discourse of 'regions', overseas the migrant's identity is organized in terms of the fatality of birth in a common homeland. The usual question on meeting another Filipino

overseas is, "*Saan ka sa atin?*," literally "Where are you [from] in what we call our own?" While the concern is to establish a possible regional or sub-national connection, the question does not detract from a shared understanding of "what is our own," which is "our" homeland. By implication, the here-and-now where "we" find ourselves is "not ours," for it belongs to "them" (the dominant society of the country of employment). Hence, belonging to a nation is articulated as a form of possession that one continues to "have" despite departure from the homeland. But this portable possession is linked to an external reference point: a definite slice of earth and sea the materiality of which can be pointed out on a world map, and the territorial absence of which is compensated for through disembodied emblems and the mobile discourse of "our own" (*sa atin*).

Moreover, language, which according to Anderson (1991) is the cradle of nationalism, is a transportable signifier of national community. In the exilic communities of OCWs, the language debates that have so agonized various elites in the Philippines dissipate and seem irrelevant. Labor migrants even see no need to abide by elite pretensions to constitutionally rechristen Tagalog as "Pilipino" or "Filipino" (cf. Gonzalez 1980). Although the different regional languages are also frequently spoken, overseas there is a taken-for-granted quality to Tagalog as the *lingua franca* of Filipinos. Conversations that seek to connect with strangers-but-connationals are routinely started in Tagalog; videos of Philippine films are unremarkably in Tagalog; magazines that tell the latest gossip about movie stars are in Tagalog;

Filipino employees of remittance and *baitkbayan*-box freight agencies and of Filipino prepared food outlets routinely speak in Tagalog. The modularity and presumed knowledge of Tagalog permits the formation of a roving Filipinoness overseas.

Moreover, positioned as an outsider to the geographic boundaries of the state, the labor migrant can objectify the nation even as it becomes more subjectively felt. While OCWs may not see 'Philippine fields' in English meadows or Arabian deserts (pace Anderson 1994), they already carry in their minds the powerful symbols and imageries of the nation as to make it an object of fond yearning—as in the case of the Spanish slave in Sulu a century earlier. Through overseas employment, the familiar link between land of birth and the self is loosened, exteriorized, only to be merged once more in the imagination as "my native country," "*sa atin*," from which the labor migrant is temporarily separated. The simultaneous distancing and attachment is deeply felt: a literal decentering that is set aright on one's return—which is also a recentering for the exilic self. If one has been on a flight to Manila with a planeload of Filipino OCWs returning home for the first time or after a long absence, usually for the Christmas holiday season, you would have experienced the profoundly emotional re-centering nationalist experience as the plane touches down and the workers applaud, cheer, shout, and laugh. In one such flight, a homecoming worker from the Gulf region told me when he saw the landscape beneath the plane, "*Ang ganda talaga ng bayan natin*," roughly conveying that "The beauty of our country is unparalleled."

For one whose economic pilgrimage was reaching some point of closure, the exilic experience moved my seat mate to express the same fundamental statement as Rizal's in his *Ultimo Adios*.

But the journey this man embarked upon in leaving the country, as countless of OCWs have also done, assumes a certain parity and equality among co-sojourners. During an unfinished ritual, the liminal beings constitute an undifferentiated lot, in Victor Turner's term, a *communitas*. Similarly, all labor migrants are somehow equal and undifferentiated notwithstanding occupational and salary differences. In other words, unless tempered by experience, OCWs assume that all Filipinos they meet abroad are also OCWs like themselves. A middle-class Filipina friend of mine, for instance, who met her Singaporean-Chinese husband in New York but was then living in Singapore was seen taking her toddler for a walk, and some Filipina domestic workers accosted her and inquired, "*Pinakasalan ka?*" (Did he marry you?), assuming her to be a maid who had borne a child to her Singaporean employer. A female cousin of mine who lives in Vancouver as a school teacher was holidaying in Singapore when, tired from doing the rounds of a shopping mall, she sat down in a bench coincidentally beside a Filipina domestic worker who asked her about her employer in Singapore. These two ladies politely explained their respective situations, and the migrant worker's assumption of parity had to be altered. Nonetheless, the notion of sameness is pervasive and persuasive. The magazine published in Singapore called *Manila Press*, which regularly features numerous letters of migrant

workers seeking advice on a range of personal concerns, a pen pal column, and photographs of Filipino migrant workers in Singapore's touristy places declares itself "The No. 1 Magazine for All Filipinos"—despite being specifically catered to contract workers. The OCW version of the Filipino diaspora is generalized and universalized.

However, in countries of employment such as Singapore where the OCW version of the diaspora ironically parallels the dominant society's racial stereotype of the Filipino as a maid, the higher-status Filipino professionals, most of them in the corporate sector, struggle with the imagery with which they are unavoidably lumped. An obviously highly-educated Filipina's letter to the *Straits Times* (ST) in 1993 evokes the struggle of middle-class Filipinos with what they feel to be a demeaning and humiliating image of the Filipino arising from the predominance of conationals in domestic service occupations (Tan 1993). The published letter reads in full as follows:

"Are we for sale?" asked my daughter, who is on holiday in Singapore.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"And why are we cheaper than Sri Lankans and Indonesians?"

"Oh," I said, finally realising she was looking at the Classified Ads Section for domestic helpers. "Well, it must have something to do with market supply and demand."

"Look, there is even a Fiesta Filipino Promotion! We are at discounted prices! They must have overstocked on Filipinos!"

"Strict control, obedient," she went on.

"Are you reading the pets section now?" I asked.

"Nope," she said, "still with the Filipinos."

"No Day Off can be arranged! What is this," she continued, "are we prisoners?"

"Look," I said, finally joining her, "even diamonds are at drastically reduced prices! That should make us feel better."

We were laughing so hard we had tears in our eyes.

In addition to evincing the seriality of Filipinos along with Sri Lankans and Indonesians, the letter-writer's connection with contract workers via nationality is demonstrably undeniable, and a sense of empathy is expressed by suggesting that Filipina maids are equally precious "diamonds"—a strategy taken, it seems to me, primarily for the writer's self-worth rather than the maids'. Moreover, the conjoining of laughter and tears betrays an ambivalence and unease at the commodified image of the Filipino, their cheap and pet-like traits, and the treatment accorded them like "prisoners"—again, largely for the benefit of bourgeois self-esteem. Indeed, in the Philippines the middle and upper classes would precisely want maids they can get on measly wages, who are docile, and who would obey their every whim and command 24 hours every day. Elites cringe at the image of maids overseas because, in the homeland, maids are not "Filipina maids," that is, nationality is elided there but overseas nationality is at forefront to haunt the wealthy Filipino traveller and white-collar worker.

Certainly, the maids-dominated image of the Filipino has remained a vexation to Filipino professional workers in Singapore where the estimated 65,000 Filipinos are mainly in domestic work. When occasions arise in which "the good name of the Filipino" is compromised, they do respond but in a manner that dissociates themselves from domestic workers. One such incident occurred publicly in March 1994 in a local television game show, which elicited a letter from the head of the "Filipino Association of Singapore." Published in the *Strait Times*, the letter described the incident in these terms:

...one of the contestants was asked to describe "Things Found In A Playground". Among the words flashed on the TV screen [to inform homeviewers] was "maid".

For want of a more suitable description, he said: "Filipino! Filipino!"

This caustic remark elicited strong reactions from members of our community who felt slighted by such a careless remark and felt it was derogatory to our image as a people (Aviado 1994).

The letter pointed out that it was a taped show, it could have been edited, and the producers "should have exercised greater sensitivity regarding segments or remarks which could be deemed offensive to any people or race," but the government television station would not "accept responsibility for statements made by the contestants" (*Ibid.*). The letter concluded with what it admitted to be "the points we wish to make":

As the contestant was asked to describe "things" in a playground, it must be stressed that "maids" are not things or chattels. They are human beings who must be accorded due respect and dignity.

Not all Filipinos are maids. A large percentage in Singapore and around the world are working in the professional force. Therefore, allowing such insensitive remarks on air is misleading and gives the misconception or wrong impression that "Filipinos are generally maids". Besides, not all maids are Filipinos (*Ibid.*).

Before pronouncing the usual refrain heard from Filipino white-collar workers in Singapore—"Not all Filipinos are maids"—the letter-writer could not but confront the humanity of their conationals, the maids, who are the objects of the dominant society's racial hubris. But the shared humanity is at a very basic level, for the paramount concern is to rectify the supposedly "wrong impression" in an attempt to deny the reality that domestic workers constitute the overwhelming majority of Filipinos in Singapore.

As a consequence of the maids-dominated image of the Filipino, many professional workers feel a deep-seated sense of shame and humiliation. And they know that derogatory comments and arrogant sniggers by the dominant society occur not just on television but even in their offices and residential districts. To cope with such oppressiveness, many tend to erect social and discursive boundaries that segregate them from the domestic workers.

Moreover, since the acquisition of a Singaporean citizenship is a remote possibility largely because of Singapore's laws, Filipino professionals who feel bereft of a potent legal barrier of separation from the maids emphasize their skills, higher status, and more privileged social backgrounds to contest the totalizing stereotypes parleyed by the dominant society. The higher-status labor migrants that the professionals are thus drive wedges that divide Filipino workers overseas and negate the undifferentiated quality of liminal beings undergoing the ritual of economic pilgrimage.

Perhaps they do so because for them overseas employment is not the secular pilgrimage that it is for ordinary OCWs. Rather, their participation in the international global market—which provides them satisfaction from the work process—constitutes definite career paths that may not end back in the Philippines. Indeed, working overseas has been described by one professional I met as a form of "addiction": "it's like drugs." In addition, for many of them the category 'maid' suggests a person they would not consort with in the Philippines, so there is no reason to resocialize their behavior overseas. But the more pressing motivation in creating a wall of division from ordinary contract workers, it appears to me, is that many professional workers who do so have absorbed the dominant society's ideological materialism, cutthroat competition (*ktasuisim*), racial biases, and the dynamic of arrogance and shame generated by the state's eugenics policies (Benjamin 1976, Heng and Devan 1992, Wee 1995). Women professionals, including those constrain-

ed by Singapore's stringent labor restrictions to become full-time housewives, are particularly apprehensive—especially if they are of darker skin—of being mistaken for a Filipina maid; thus, according to my informants, they dress in such a style that nobody would get the “wrong impression.” Men similarly attire themselves to emphasize their higher status. The public presentation of self of many a white-collar worker is crafted to create class distinctions and, ultimately, conceal their Filipinoness—from Singaporeans as well as from ordinary OCWs. Some of these professionals have internalized the attitudes and values of the dominant society to an extent that Filipino expatriates in Indonesia that I have met complain about Filipino professionals in Singapore.

Absorbing the dominant society's racially stigmatized definition of Filipinoness, middle-/upper-class professionals are thus among the most sensitive to the underclass image of their nationality in Singapore. (Analogously, non-resident Filipino graduate students in Australia are most sensitive to the Filipina-brides image [cf. Holt this issue] such that, when one was asked by an Australian male, “Why do you export your women to us?” his retort was, “Why do you buy our rejects?”—suggesting a similar entrapment in the dominant society's racial-sexist discourse.) Keen to avoid the tainted stereotypes, Filipino professionals construct physical, symbolic, and discursive separations from fellow nationals whom they believe compromise the national image. In Singapore they even segregate themselves from fellow Filipino professionals whose skin pigmentation and attire they

mistake for an ordinary contract worker. As though to contest the Filipino's public image generated by ordinary OCWs (or mail-order brides for that matter), higher-status white-collar workers mouth the romantic incantation also often heard in the Philippines: “*ang galing talaga ng Pilipino*” (the Filipino is really capable/full of prowess), a self-congratulatory myth that serves as a balm for the unacceptable realities. But the one aspect that cannot be denied is their Filipinoness. In countries such as Singapore with an endemic racism, the remolding of the category ‘Filipino’ from nationality to race lends Filipinoness an immutable character, a *sui generis* quality, and a primordial integrality that cannot be done away with. Hence the attempts to camouflage a putatively tangible object and the appeal to the dominant society: “Not all Filipinos are maids.”

The overall response is a genre of shame (*biya*) which, again in classic Frank Lynch terms, refers to the “*uncomfortable feeling that accompanies awareness of being in a socially unacceptable position*” (1973:15, italics in original), in this case, the “socially undesirable role” (*Ibid.*) of being migrants, foreign workers that managed to slip through the official dragnet of labor controls, aliens in the country of employment no different from the domestic workers whose presence they would rather wish away. There is also shame in the undue focus by an Other—the dominant society—on the problems of one's homeland, on the potential inferiority of conationals, on the ‘weaknesses’ of the ‘race’ that, by implication, one carries ‘in the blood’. In the Philippines the structures of inequality produce “a sense of inferiority” and a

"subordinate consciousness" among the poor, "a sense of disapproval [that] lends itself most to accommodation to the existing social order," as Pinches (1991:177,179,181) observes. In the transnational context, the tables are turned: the professionals and middle-/upper-classes are uncertain about their position in the country of employment so, analogous to the poor in the Philippines, their deep-seated "subordinate consciousness" leads them to an accommodationist stance vis-a-vis the dominant society. More accepting of their lower status, ordinary OCWs, on the other hand, feel this need less acutely than the professionals.

To avoid direct humiliation and its unpleasant consequences, many Filipino white-collar workers in Singapore momentarily conceal their nationality in public. In addition to the manner of dressing already mentioned, another strategy involves that modular aspect of nationness: language. For instance, conversations with Filipino companions when aboard a taxi are suspended to avoid the feared rude comments or gestures by the Singaporean driver who might detect their nationality through their speech or accent. A mother who picks up her son from school tells me they follow the no-talk-in-the-taxi rule rather strictly to avoid the shame of being 'put on the spot'. What makes the racial slurs particularly painful, according to one professional, is that "fellow Asians" (*kapwa Asyano*) are heaping the abuse on them. Uncritically using the analogy of dogs (hence accepting the assumption of 'white race' supremacy), he says that in the U.S. all Asians are dogs and the Filipino is not singled out, but in Singapore the dogs are ranked,

with high pedigree dogs at the top and declassed mongrels at the bottom—to which Filipinos belong. The Filipino professional, in effect, feels he is no different from the Asians that dominate him, but his Filipino nationality puts him irremediably into a category that is a target of racial scorn by the dominant society.

But despite the disgrace and shame felt by the non-manual labor migrants, they remain in their overseas employment and endure the contradictions largely for reasons that bind them with the domestic workers: economic. At the same time, however, they feel that the higher monetary rewards overseas mean they are gaining the respect for their expertise which has been denied them in the homeland. Moreover, in a manner inaccessible to manual workers, the advanced training in the technical aspects of their profession is seen as valuable for their personal advancement. In a process that keeps them craving for more ("like drugs"), the professional career overseas that valorizes their self-worth compensates for the shame that devalorizes their nationality. Thus a trade-off: nationality is offered on the alter of shame to satisfy the professional side of life. For some, various forms of rejection in the homeland are balanced by recognition overseas. Social marginality is accepted as the price of bettering one's self. To reconcile the conflicting desires of nation and self, many professionals privately jeer at many aspects of the dominant society, recite the incantation "*ang galing talaga ng Pilipino*," socialize only with a small number of fellow Filipino professionals and create a virtual ghetto, while some insulate themselves by not reading the



local newspaper to avoid confronting negative news about the Philippines and the Singaporean spin to such news. Life is pervaded by a hallucinogenic effect.

Given this context, in the wake of Flor Contemplacion's execution many Filipino professionals in Singapore became extremely sensitive about their social identities, particularly as Singaporeans referred to Filipinos as "stupid" and "irrational" in the course of everyday conversations and in the official press (ST 1995f). Feeling deeply troubled by the perceived Singaporean mocking, ridicule, and criticism of the national character—precisely because they cannot avoid the label 'Filipino'—some gave public statements admitting they felt "embarrassed by emotional outpourings back home" (ST 1995e). One said "her country was making itself look ridiculous in its rage over the incident" (*Ibid.*). Another claimed "she was proud to be a Filipino, but that Filipinos back home should realise that sometimes, the truth hurts" (*Ibid.*)—which would resonate in an editorial of the *Straits Times* (1995c) bannered as "Truth will set Filipinos free." Some Filipino academics who gave press interviews in Singapore merely essentialized so-called Filipino culture and politics—"it's in the blood"; "it's election time"—without analyzing the historical conjuncture and as though they stood outside that culture, thereby falling into the same hegemonic discourse of the Singaporeans (Fernandez 1995). The justice of the execution and the appropriateness of the actions and reactions of both countries are beyond the scope of this essay, but what I would like to highlight is the core of the reaction of Filipino professionals in Singapore: the myth of

dissociation from the domestic workers was dashed by the unavoidable spotlight on nationality generated by this incident. Ultimately, they wanted to say, "Not all Filipinos are maids," and desperately sought to distance themselves from both the domestic workers in Singapore and the 'shameful' "emotional outpourings back home." While they could not do much about the latter, they could at least, at that crucial moment, wish away the presence of the domestic workers: as the person who claimed to be proud to be a Filipino also said, "No Filipino maid is [a heroine]... The Filipino maid is a victim of our [Philippine] system. There would be no Filipina maids in Singapore if the Philippines could create jobs at home" (*Ibid.*)—as though those comments did not apply to the Filipino professionals overseas.

#### *Transnational shame and challenges to social hierarchies*

Except for the belief in the fairness of Singapore's justice system, the conservative sentiments of the Filipinos who spoke out to the press in that country were echoed on the other side of the globe by the more radical Rosca who bemoaned "the acquaintance with death" by "Filipina migrants" as a "perverse kind of 'hero,' an export in an economy that depends on her bondage and crushing self-denial" (1995:527). Common to their dissimilar perspectives is the blaming of the 'system'—the Philippines and/or capitalism as represented by World Bank policies—as the culprits of outmigration, in the process denying male and female labor migrants their human agency. In the process, too, all labor migrants are painted as victims. There is a refusal on

the part of these commentators to acknowledge the calculus of risks and the gambling mentality of Filipinos that play a part in the decision by individuals to emigrate. If ever the departure for overseas work was coerced, the pressure would usually come from unconscionable and opportunistic parents. For labor migrants who, to repeat, do not come from the most poverty-stricken segments of Philippine society, their overseas employment is neither a state-mandated move nor an indecent type of work of which they feel ashamed. Indeed, at the height of the furor over Contemplacion's execution, the vast majority of domestic workers in Singapore opted on their own to stay, with only a tiny proportion taking the Philippine government's offer of free plane travel back to Manila. To be sure, there was the economic imperative to keep their jobs, but the decision to remain in Singapore was also a tacit statement that OCWs did not find their working conditions totally deplorable and absolutely intolerable as radicals and the media portrayed it to be.

Ultimately, the shame and embarrassment felt at the participation of Filipino men and women in the international labor market springs from the sense of a 'loss of face' for the nation as imagined by various elites. In late 1993, maids were banned from using the main elevator of an exclusive 34-storey apartment building in Hong Kong, with a notice written in Tagalog and Chinese that read "Notice to domestics: Please use the service lift" positioned beneath another sign stating that dogs were not allowed in the residents' lift;

the Philippine government protested the policy it called "discriminatory" and suggested it violated "the inherent dignity of the human being" (ST 1993). In early 1994, about 1,200 maids were rounded up during a surprise Palm Sunday raid at a Catholic Church in Kuala Lumpur, which the *Manila Chronicle* described as "high-handed," "scandalous," and "racist" (ST 1994a,b). Later in 1994, the *Manila Chronicle* (1994b) published a news feature entitled "The Sorrows of OCW Juan" accompanied by a cartoon drawing depicting Filipino males as modern-day slaves to the Pharaoh-like Arabs of the Gulf states. The denouement came with the hanging of Contemplacion in March 1995, which erupted in a specifically feminized pathos of the nation (Aguilar 1995).

In the aftermath of the execution, Rosca has complained that the Philippines "puts more women into the overseas labor market than any country in the world" (1995:522), complementing the humiliation felt by elites, the upper- and middle classes, and concerned intellectuals in the Philippines who detest the thought that the country has become, in their mind, the servant of the world. It is as though the nation is at the bottom of a global pecking order, a position that magnifies their sense of inferiority a thousand fold. The stereotyping of Filipinos as domestic helpers results in a diminution, in Fermin Adriano's (1994) words, of "the level of respect accorded to most of our people when they travel abroad and met by the immigration officer in the arrival area"; unwritten is the fact that "most of the people" sensitive to this humiliation are the elites and intellectuals.

There is, however, one salutary element in that, in the felt shame over the OCW phenomenon, the audience is not limited to the United States. In fact, the U.S. is no longer the main audience, replaced as it is by the wider consociation of nations, a plurality that is now densely packed in the word 'abroad'. Thus, ironically, the transnationalization of shame is indicative of a re-serialized view of the global stage, a perspective imbued with the principle of parity among the various nations-as-persons. But this presumed parity has not been formally undermined, otherwise one could imagine a resolution in the United Nations condemning the 'servanthood' or 'enslavement' of the Philippines relative to other nations.

No, what has been undermined is the control by Philippine elites—the ruling class, the middle classes, and various intellectuals—over the international image of the nation, for whom it is all a matter of appearance as they never really know what it means to be of the poorer classes, to work as a maid or a construction worker, and to be a labor migrant. Hence, official elite nationalism feels bruised by international labor migration, while the popular nationalism of men and women who migrate and their communities in the homeland is even revitalized. The latter, indeed, have come to define and defend the nation in terms beyond the control of patronizing elites, who would otherwise not oppose as demeaning the international movement of high-caliber Filipino experts, consultants, intellectuals, and of Filipino capital itself such as San Miguel Corporation's ventures to overseas markets. At bottom, the shame is over

the loss of the elite, and pretentious, face of the nation. Whereas the poverty, corruption, violence, lawlessness, injustices, and large-scale loss of lives from man-made disasters in the Philippines have not been deemed sources of shame for these elites, the economic exile of OCWs who come to realize the dignity of honest labor in the international context is felt as inordinately exposing the nation to international humiliation. The nation, that is, as Philippine elites would prefer it to be seen on a globalized stage.

International labor migrants do pose a challenge in ways that symbolically invert the hierarchies of class and status long regnant in the Philippines. In the first place, foreign travel is no longer the sole prerogative and luxury of elites. While OCWs may work in low-status jobs, they do carve out moments when they redefine themselves as tourists in the country of employment, consequently undermining the exclusivity of the elites' tourist experience. Moreover, through capitalist consumerism, labor migrants are able to purchase branded and other prestige goods the OCWs' access to which effectively deconstructs the awesomeness of, say, Rustan's as a bastion of elite consumerism in the Philippines. At the level of consumption, the labor migrants' objects of desire can be met, a certain parity is attained with the wealthy, and the mystique of Philippine elites suffers erosion. In one town, for instance, the street where returned migrants from the Gulf region resided is locally referred to as "Ayala Avenue," suggesting a discursive elevation of a rural area to the elite corporate world of the country's financial capital (cf. Asis 1995:336). In addition, the returned OCWs can sponsor feasts,

host dinners, or treat wealthier friends to restaurants and pubs in a manner that proves the successful sojourn and permits the migrants to appropriate the elites' culturally validated display of economic surplus. In the long run, through the subvention of children's education or through entrepreneurial activity, the labor migrants and their families may experience a measure of upward social mobility. In the shorter term, however, the challenges to elites are largely symbolic and patterned after the elites' style of conspicuous consumption (hence few OCWs return home without bodily adornments and many aspire to build an imposing house). Nonetheless, the stint overseas, which may last for a decade or more, reverses the subservience on the part of formerly lower-ranked members of Philippine society.

Perhaps in reaction to their social distance from OCWs in manual work, Filipino professionals in Singapore are subjected to palpable inversions of status hierarchies. One professional informant recounted to me an incident in which, on a basketball court, contract workers excluded him from the game saying, in Tagalog, "*Ang Pilipino para sa Pilipino*" (the Filipino is for the Filipino), suggesting somehow that the professional by his elevated status and the known snobbishness of the class segment he represented did not belong to the exilic community of migrant workers. This professional felt disowned by his conationals. In shops catering to Filipino customers, professionals who may happen not to be native speakers of Tagalog are ridiculed when they speak in English, often with flawless proficiency. While some professionals may

be personally innocent, the public scolding and ridicule they receive from their own conationals is a rebuff to the usual language affectations of Philippine elites. Thus, even overseas, labor migrants discover a certain assertiveness that challenges the hierarchies of class and status so highly valued in the homeland. The OCWs execute their own levelling mechanisms on a transnationalized but class-divided nation. On their return to the Philippines, contract workers bring with them a confidence and cosmopolitanism that will no longer hold in awe Filipino elites, even as the reclaiming of the homeland produces a deeper attachment to the nation which remains the principal site of meaning for the sacrifices and challenges experienced overseas.

#### *Nationness at the close of the twentieth century*

Eric Hobsbawm has argued that the late twentieth century has been characterized by the "declining historical significance of nationalism" (1990:170). Certainly in some older nations there has been "a crisis of national consciousness" (*Ibid.*:179). In the relatively more recent nationalisms of Southeast Asia, however, the close of the century is witnessing a strengthening of national identity and consciousness amid a more tightly globalized world. Philippine nationalism is finally coming on its own after nearly a century in its "aboriginal Eden" through a combination of events: the pride in the celebrated People Power of 1986, the closing of U.S. military installations in 1990 and the successful transformation of Clark and Subic into industrial zones, the economic boom under the manager-ship of President Ramos, and most

recently the hosting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) summit meeting. But the events just mentioned are more pertinent to the visions of the nation by various Philippine elites. What I believe has solidified popular nationalism has been the overseas migration of labor that commenced in the early 1970s, a spontaneous movement that has compelled the elites to reconfigure their cognitive map in terms more internationalist than the hitherto Philippines-U.S. binarism of both radicals and conservatives. (Since international sports such as the World Cup are not integral to Philippine popular culture—basketball being an outgrowth of the old binarism—the only other globally serializing realm for Filipinos is constituted by international beauty pageants, but I do not think they have as much profound impact as international labor migration.)

Overseas labor migration has fostered deeper attachment to the nation on the part of millions of contract workers and, apparently, their communities in the homeland. The project of defining and building the nation has been wrestled by ordinary men and women away from various Philippine elites, a process occurring in a deterritorialized, transnational context. Within the Philippines, overseas employment has also resulted in greater integration of the national idea by making migrants from the Muslim South enter the ambit of regulatory agencies of the Philippine state, which has been necessary because international migration occurs in the context of an interstate system. Moreover, the tamed but visible public support for Sarah Balabagan, who stabbed her employer to death during an

attempted rape in the U.A.E., provided an opportunity in 1995 for the dramatization of national solidarity with Muslim Filipinos. The case underscored that a Muslim OCW had less in common with Muslims in the Arab Gulf region, but more in common with her Filipino conationals regardless of religion. Thus, even before the signing of the peace accord with Nur Misuari in September 1996, the case of Balabagan had provided a subtextual discourse of Filipino Muslim's incorporation into mainstream Philippine society.

More than any other contract worker, however, the sensationalized case of Contemplacion has triggered a reorientation in the tasks of Philippine diplomatic, consular and labor offices overseas. Responding to public pressure, state institutions have been forced to provide priority attention to the needs of labor migrants who otherwise in the homeland would need to comply with the mechanics of personal patronage (*palakasan*). Indeed, in the homeland the discriminatory treatment of maids—in the most elite places they are socially marked by their uniforms and restricted access to certain spaces (not radically different from the Hong Kong lift incident)—at the hands of their fellow Filipino employers has not drawn any protest nor compelled a reorientation of the state bureaucracy. That the case of OCWs has prompted a deliberate reorientation of the state apparatus—appropriate not only because of the millions of foreign exchange in remittances sent to the homeland but also because in their everyday lives they are the proud defenders of the nation—is another form of inversion of established hierarchies in the Philippines. The state

apparatus which has always served the ruling classes has been forced to render service and provide accountability to overseas workers in a way that internal issues such as agrarian reform have not quite achieved. Thus, amid the state's circumscribed territorial jurisdiction and its effete control over international labor market forces and transnational capital, the populist demand on the state to protect transnational labor has been accelerating.

While the responses to a globalized constituency may spring from specific electoral aims in the homeland, there is also the potent motivation for and desire by Philippine elites to eliminate possible sources of transnational shame for the nation-*qua*-themselves. But for these elites to feel embarrassed is already a major accomplishment of popular nationalism. Previously, concerned merely with their own class, political and symbolic interests, Filipino elites did not feel embarrassed by their vassalage and clientship to their counterpart elite U.S. interests because they profited from that arrangement. In realigning the state to meet the contract workers' interests—voting pro-Libya against the U.S. in the United Nations, championing migrant labor issues in various international fora—Philippine elites are acting on behalf of the nation without them deriving any direct personal gain from this change other than to avoid humiliation in a re-serialized world. They have reacted so as to cease having to imagine themselves in the shoes of the less privileged, so as to cease having to confront the humanity of those they routinely take advantage of at home. Despite the contradictions of elite and state responses, on the whole international labor migration has posed a

profound challenge to Filipino nationalism as the project of national elites. After all, the nation is theirs (*sa atin*).

At the same time, in the international workplace Filipinoness is becoming overtly racialized in the context of the hegemonic discourses in the countries of employment. The peopleness of Filipinos is apprehended as a separate nationality-cum-race and solid barriers of separateness are erected against others who also call themselves Asians. The myths of purity and homogeneity beloved by nationalisms are being refurbished by the gaze and actions of consciously racist Others, transforming the Filipino into a so-called race. At the same time, the objectification of Filipino labor migrants as a separate people, an alien citizenry, a different nationality, and a distinct race located outside of the national class-race structure of the country of employment—an international underclass—makes even the poor working classes of the latter country feel superior and privileged. They can comfort themselves with the thought that they do not have to handle the most menial jobs or emigrate to earn a living. Confounding and obfuscating both the capital-labor and state-civil society divides of a given national-social formation, the presence of foreign workers (while troublesome in situations of massive unemployment) is a handy tool of regime maintenance in a low-unemployment country like Singapore not only because of foreign workers' cheap wages and real economic contributions, but even more because national elites acquire legitimacy in the very perceptions of debased Otherness that their own lower classes develop vis-a-vis the labor migrants.

As internal divisions within the dominant society of employment are refracted by the presence of labor migrants, the 'host' country also improves its sense of nationness. Moreover, as in the Contemplacion affair, the play of Us-versus-Them aroused national passions not only in the Philippines but in Singapore as well. As one Singaporean wrote,

the burning of the Singapore flag [by Filipinos in the Philippines] should not have happened. The flag represents the nation and the burning of the flag signifies contempt of the nation.

So we cannot sit back and do nothing about the incident and the expression of "shock and outrage" represents clearly the feelings of Singaporeans (Fu 1995).

Filipino actions in Manila were interpreted as "Singapore bashing" (Ghosh 1995) and connected, as reactions in the official Chinese and English newspapers revealed, to other cases of international 'attacks' against Singapore, Flor Contemplacion thereby joining Michael Fay as the foremost symbols of anti-Singaporeness (Wang 1995, Pereira 1995). At moments when Singapore is not "bashing" and "insulting" other countries but rather becomes the one "on trial" for its "misdeeds" (ST 1995d, Tan 1995), collective feelings of vulnerability are aroused and most Singaporeans regardless of social background empathize with their nation's beleaguered state. Indeed, in his National Day Rally speech Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, echoing Asad Latif's (1995) analysis of the "Filipino outrage,"

attributed the Philippines' "Singapore-bashing" to the country's "small" size (ST 1995a), the "cross which Singapore must bear" according to Tan Sai Siong (1995). Despite the admission by two Nominated Members of Parliament concerning "one disquieting fact" about Singapore's justice system—that there is no proper system and no procedure for the review of fresh evidence in cases where persons sentenced to death have lost the final appeal (ST 1995a)—the overwhelming reaction of Singaporeans was to believe in the absolute correctness of their state-cum-nation, their defence solidifying as the diplomatic row worsened. As in the 1989 mandatory caning of overstaying Thai construction workers which soured relations between Singapore and Thailand (Sullivan *et al.* 1992), the execution of Contemplacion strained relations between Singapore and the Philippines—the countries involved in both episodes feeling that their respective nation's 'face' and 'personhood' had been on the line.

In Singapore's case, incidents such as Contemplacion and Michael Fay produce a synergy between state and society. In the face of the perceived threat to as well as envy of their country, Singaporeans articulate their sentiments in precisely the same terms supplied by the state managers (Goh 1996). The international negative publicity on Singapore thus contributes to regime maintenance. Moments of international media attention also unify a society otherwise officially divided along racial lines which, in the everyday world, yield to the primordial salience of race over nationality. Conjunctures such as the Contemplacion affair are opportune times to remind Singaporeans they are

one. A tacit admission of insecurity over their country's size and economic achievements which are inextricably dependent upon foreign labor, capital, and markets, Singaporeans have also been advised to "grow thicker skin and stiffen our spines against more, and possibly even more unfair, onslaught than we have so far experienced" (Tan 1995)—a reaffirmation of the official 'besieged fortress' mentality. But bracing themselves for unwanted world attention means rallying behind the

one-party state. Ultimately, the nationness of Singaporeans of all social classes is reinforced in the face of external criticisms, but this happens well within the framework prescribed by their own elites which only fleetingly glosses over its official racial divides. And it is within *this* framework that many Filipino professionals in Singapore negotiate the contradictions and ambiguities of their own sense of nation and transnational shame.

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