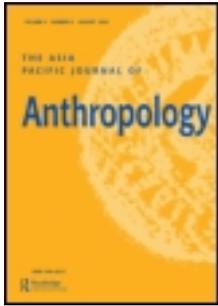


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# Transnational Relationships, Transforming Selves: Filipinas Seeking Husbands Abroad

Hannah Bulloch and Michael Fabinyi

*The desire of Filipinas to find husbands abroad, particularly of European extraction, is difficult to ignore for the anthropologist who continually finds him/herself positioned as a potential transnational dating agent, chat-room tutor or even highly eligible marriage prospect. Extending analyses that view this phenomenon as multifaceted and irreducible to economics, we situate the search for transnational marriages in the context of imaginings of self and other. Drawing on ethnographic research in two areas of the Philippines, we consider some of the ways in which Western men are constructed as desirable marriage partners, relating this to broader imaginings of national difference. We then argue that finding a foreign husband may be about more than changing personal and familial circumstances, more even than a desire for the romanticised other. The desire for transnational marriage can be seen as part of a process of self-actualisation: a quest for knowledge and experience of the world through which a paradox of self and other can be reconciled and the self remade.*

*Keywords: Transnational Relationships; Philippines; Siquijor; Palawan; Self And Other; Occidentalism; Gender; Marriage Migration; Balikbayan; Resubjection*

The present paper deals with discourses of desire in the Philippines. Drawing on our ethnographic experience in two distinct provincial lowland areas of the archipelago, we delve into aspects of the cultural logic underlying a popular desire among Filipinas to enter into relationships with foreign, and particularly ‘white’, men. As such, this is not a paper about marriage migrants per se; rather, it is about the *idea* of transnational romance as it predominates on a number of small Philippine islands. Many of the diverse motivations compelling Filipinas to seek husbands abroad have been well documented and we do not aim to rehearse an inventory of them here, although we

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point to the relevant literature. Rather, drawing on the work of Bulloch (2009),<sup>1</sup> we consider the desire for transnational relationships in the context of constructions of self and other as manifest in imaginings of national difference. We argue that constructions of the Western man as a desirable partner is, in part, an expression of Occidentalism. Although portrayals of the West in our field sites are not without ambivalence, they posit the West as superior to the Philippines in certain fundamental respects. Portrayals of the Western man tend to agree with these broader idealisations, whereas Filipino men are, in large part, contrasted negatively. From this perspective, the perceived physical, moral and economic characteristics of foreign men are all expressions of a broader understanding of the Philippines' relationships with the foreign. Following this consideration of meanings of the other, we then turn to the self and the transformatory potential marriage migration offers Filipina selves. We pick up on arguments that theorise labour migration as a form of resubjectification. Extending these arguments to marriage migration, we place them in the context of Occidentalism and a particular paradoxical relationship between self and other. We suggest that the desire for marriage migration is linked to perceived teleological life trajectories that stem, in part, from (neo)colonial relationships.

Most studies exploring Filipina transnational relationships have focused on interviewing established couples or conducting fieldwork through marriage-brokering mediums and introduction agencies, such as websites. Our fieldwork among predominantly working-class residents in rural and urban areas of the Calamianes Islands of Palawan and on the rural island of Siquijor in the Central Visayas afforded us a different view.<sup>2</sup> When we conducted ethnographic fieldwork independently of one another in the Philippines, initially neither of us had intended to investigate issues of transnational relationships; it was not the prime focus of our respective research projects. However, we soon found ourselves positioned in ways that made transnational relationships, or at least the desire for them, hard to ignore. We were assailed with requests for 'pen pals' in our home countries of New Zealand and Australia (and by email, letter and phone, the requests keep coming); we were privy to countless conversations concerning relationships with foreigners; we found ourselves—two young, unmarried Caucasians, without children—looked on, in different ways as a woman and a man, as prime romantic candidates; and we encountered and heard about many women in our field sites who had married Western men, settling abroad or in the Philippines. (Relationships between Filipino men and Western women were comparatively uncommon.) Here, we provide an analysis grounded in the hopes and expectations—many of which go unfulfilled—expressed to us by Filipinas in our field sites in the Philippines and in the broader local and national discourses in which these are embedded. In doing so, we do not want to suggest that all Filipinas share equally in the constructions and desires about which we write, but we draw on general themes that were pervasive in the areas in which we lived. Both field sites are predominantly rural, lowland, working-class locations. Siquijor is a Cebuano-speaking island, which is ethnically fairly homogeneous; the residents of the Calamianes who Michael worked with were migrants from various parts of the lowland Philippines. As such our sketch

applies predominantly to the rural Christian lowlands and may pose little resemblance to elite urbanites, Indigenous peoples or some Muslims, among others.

### **Perspectives on Transnational Relationships**

Popular perceptions of romantic relationships between Filipinas and foreign men typically tend to assume that Filipinas enter into such relationships primarily out of economic motives. Some streams of academic research also view these relationships through a lens of economics, depicting such women purely as victims of commodified relationships (e.g. Glodava & Onizuka 1994; Chun 1996; Villapando 2000). Although economics is unquestionably important to considerations of transnational marriage, as our own work shows, we join other writers in arguing that transnational relationships cannot be reduced to economics alone. This body of literature has made various criticisms of the 'commodified relationships' perspective, arguing, for example, that it ignores any sense of the agency of women involved in transnational relationships (Yea 2005, p. 469; Robinson 2007 pp. 493–4) or that it assumes a 'tension between economy and desire' (Robinson 2007, p. 491). Constable has argued that '[t]his attempt to polarize love and pragmatics and to represent them as discontinuous represents a particularly western perspective and bias' (2003, p. 128; see also McKay 2007a).

This more recent literature has tried instead to demonstrate the diverse motivations towards, and experiences of, transnational relationships (e.g. Constable 2005). 'These relationships are linked . . . to a wider political economy, to personal circumstances, cultural notions, and global imaginings, all of which contribute to the politics of romance' (Constable 2003, p. 111). In particular, a number of writers have highlighted the role of imaginings of national difference in motivations to enter into transnational relationships—how individual identities and characters are perceived as determined or strongly influenced by national identity. In her discussion of how economic and sexual desires can 'coalesce' among Filipina migrants to Sabah in Malaysia, Hilsdon draws links between perceived individual and national characteristics:

Here desire followed a logic in which Filipino women of my study made comparisons between Malaysian and Filipino men and found (middle class, modern) Malaysian men more physically attractive than (poor) Filipinos. Filipino men are thought 'romantic', but Malaysian men 'more responsible'. The former frequently become demasculinised and undervalued in the process, like their economically impoverished country. (Hilsdon 2007, p. 183)

Constable has argued that relationships between Filipinas and US men must be considered within the political economy of the historical relationships between the US and the Philippines (2003, pp. 91–115). Suzuki (2005) has also shown that Japanese–Filipina marriages can be understood in part with reference to fantasies that each partner holds about the other's country. The present paper extends this focus on

the ways in which perceptions of national difference can shape discourses of transnational romance. Our analysis begins with a discussion of how the West is typically represented in the Philippines.

### **Deficient Self and Sufficient Other**

#### *Knowing the West*

There is a broad tendency in the Philippines to conflate phenotype or physical appearance with nationality. The white person, regardless of their country of origin, is an *Amerikana/o*. For example, during her fieldwork, Hannah protested to a friend, Inday, that she was always being mistaken for an American when she is, in fact, a New Zealander. ‘You may be from New Zealand Hannah,’ Inday, adept in cultural translation, pointed out, ‘but the fact that you’re white means that you’re part of the American race. That’s how people see it here—it doesn’t matter what country you come from, you’re all Americans.’ It was also common for people to understand Western countries, whether European, Australasian or North American, as states of the US. The West was homogenised and collapsed into America (see also Lauser 2006, p. 322).

As outlined elsewhere (Bulloch 2009), the idea of America occupies a predominant position in dominant Filipino imaginings of the world. It is quintessentially other and, seemingly paradoxically, part of the self. It is at once known and unknown; strange yet familiar. As colonial subjects of the US, Filipinos adopted aspects of American culture. They became one of the biggest English-speaking countries in the world; basketball became the most popular national pastime for young people; American fashions in dress and homewares were appropriated; and American movies, television and music became popular. These mingled with local cultural phenomena, reshaping both. Filipinos were taught by the Thomasites—American schoolteachers in the Philippines at the beginning of the twentieth century—and got to know American soldiers and missionaries and learnt about the US in their school curriculum, which was, in fact, the US curriculum. As the only Christian country in Asia, they felt an affinity with the US and came to feel that they knew the US. This preconceived familiarity with the US struck Jean-Paul Dumont when he did fieldwork on Siquijor around 1980:

As individuals we were unseen: their looks at us did not penetrate at all but slipped off us to lose themselves in a different, preestablished, and faraway horizon. One indication was the altogether stupendous lack of curiosity that townspeople exhibited toward our particulars. Any questioning of our enterprise, any scrutiny of our past, any insistent examination of our mores was at best superficial. Rather, they did not relate to us as individuals but as Americans, according to a technically prejudicial and extraordinarily rigid preunderstanding of what the States was all about. Inasmuch as such an attitude left little or no room for our individual behaviours to contradict the model of America that they carried around with them, not only were we objectified but we were preconceived as well. We were, from their

viewpoint, the United States they had always 'known', at once experienced and imagined. Since, in a sense, they had invented us, any intercourse with us had to remain absolutely unchallenging and ultimately was only a form of association among themselves. (Dumont 1992, pp. 30–1)

Through knowing the US, Filipinos in a way possess it; it becomes part of the self. Rafael (2000), p. 208) goes so far as to suggest that 'Thanks to the Thomasites and those who came in their wake, Filipinos were led to think of themselves as if they were North Americans; that is, as other than who they were supposed to be'. He quotes well-known Filipino journalist Conrado de Quiros: 'Most of us are expatriates right *here* in our own land. America is our heartland whether we get to go there or not' (Rafael 2000, p. 208, emphasis original). However, because few Filipinos actually get to travel to the US, although it is part of the self it is simultaneously unattainable, unknowable. This is a contradiction to which we will return below.

In another dimension of our paradox, much of what Filipinos 'know' of the US sets it up as a binary opposite of the Philippines and, in this regard, America is the ultimate other. As we will see, the characteristics of each become vastly exaggerated as the US (into which the West is collapsed) is idealised as a luxurious paradise and the Philippines denigrated into a poverty-stricken mess. This is part of a broader tendency for Filipinos to see themselves as, in some respects, *racially* inferior; as '*just* Filipinos' in contrast with somehow more adequate Americans (see Bulloch, 2009). Although some degree of outward deference towards ex-colonial masters is not surprising, what needs to be emphasised is the extent of national self-abasement in the Philippines. Indeed, anthropologist Niels Mulder, who has worked extensively throughout south-east Asia, including neighbouring Indonesia, observes that 'the sheer frequency and quantity of negative evaluations of self and country in the Philippines are so baffling that they strike both foreign observers and Filipinos themselves as extraordinary' (Mulder 1996, p. 181). To an anthropologist, this may be counterintuitive. This sense of inferiority runs counter to the norm of believing in the superiority of the groups to which one belongs and judging all other cultures by the standards of one's own, entailed in the notion of ethnocentrism. Mulder attributes it to the education system, as a legacy of American colonialism, as does Renato Constantino. Through US textbooks 'education became a miseducation because it began to de-Filipinize the youth, taught them to regard American culture as superior to any other' (Constantino 1974, p. 39).<sup>3</sup>

We proceed by discussing three ways in which the West is contrasted positively with the Philippines and how these manifest themselves with regard to constructions of Western men as marriage partners. These are economics, physical appearance and certain specific moral characteristics. However, to say that Filipinos have self-deprecating tendencies and in many respects idealise the West is not to say that Filipinos see Westerners as unambiguously better than themselves. Indeed, as Ira Bashkow (2006, p. 13) observes in another subaltern context, Westerners 'are morally ambiguous figures which are evaluated differently depending on people's purposes

in the context of speaking'. It is important to stress that in some cases inferior and at other times superior values are projected onto them.

### *Discourses of Difference and Desire*

People in our field sites tend to be acutely aware of the economic differences between the Philippines and the US. In response to Hannah's systematic questioning, Siquijodnon often characterised the US as the richest place in the world and the Philippines as the poorest. Furthermore, the West tended to be perceived as homogeneously rich and as a place where everyday hardships did not exist. Purged from rural Filipinos' image of the West was hard work, poverty, inequality, destitution, violence and the day-to-day discomforts of life. The construct of the Western man comes to personify this wealth. Thus, although the desire for a transnational relationship cannot be reduced to economics, the economics of any relationship between foreign men and rural Filipinas is inescapable. Indeed, as McKay argues with reference to Filipino migrants and remittances, 'emotional nurturing and economic provision are not separable' (2007a, p. 191).

In Siquijor and the Calamianes, women who had foreign boyfriends were frequently the subject of envious discussion and gossip among their peers; 'you've hit the jackpot', friends would tell them. Some women would spend considerable time and money at Internet cafes, searching online for potential romantic partners. If this involved the use of messaging programs with cameras, women would dress up for the occasion. Such time and effort spent was explicitly spoken of as an 'investment', through which they hoped to gain a financial return. Being rich was explicitly evoked as a means to attract women in the Philippines; as one fisherman said, 'here in the Philippines it doesn't matter if you are ugly. If you have money, many girls will follow you'. Such views were epitomised in common sayings in both field sites such as 'no money, no honey'. A brief example of how economic considerations were fundamentally important to a potential relationship for Filipinas can be seen through the story of Maria.

Maria, a 27-year-old woman from the Calamianes, had managed to cultivate three romantic relationships simultaneously. One was with a Scottish businessman named Brian who had met her while she was working as a hostess at a bar in Japan and who had been paying her college fees since her return to the Calamianes. The second was with a younger American businessman in his thirties, Jim, who had also met her in Japan and who maintained a romantic interest in her after he returned to the US. They wrote emails, text messages and spoke on the phone and he subsequently visited her in the Calamianes for a short holiday. He returned for another holiday the following year, when he subsequently proposed an engagement to Maria. During this period in the Calamianes, Maria had also developed a relationship with a third boyfriend, a Filipino named Bong.

After Jim's proposal to Maria, she and her family and friends were involved in an intense discussion about what her plans should be. Some family members told her

that she should reject Jim's engagement offer and maintain the relationship with Brian, citing the fact that he had already shown that he was willing to support her by paying her college fees. Other friends, however, rejected this approach and advised Maria that she should accept Jim's offer of engagement. 'He is in banking, that is a good business' one older female friend told her. 'Also, he is much younger. He has a good future, he is committed to you now, but you don't know when Brian is going to confirm the relationship' another advised. Not one friend spoke for the Filipino, Bong. Although there were undoubtedly numerous reasons why the foreigners were preferred to Bong—the potential vices of Bong, as we describe below, were probably high among them—prominent was the way in which the economic characteristics of the foreigners were perceived as highly important.

Popular Filipino notions of beauty tend to be favourable to Caucasians. In particular, like many other south-east Asian countries, having paler skin is viewed in the Philippines as more attractive than darker skin. Although this is deeply tied up with notions of class, it also correlates with perceptions of wealth and ethnicity. Other characteristics defined by popular consensus as attractive include a prominent nose, straight hair, tall stature and a 'heart-shaped' face. In contrast, a flat nose, dark skin, curly hair, short stature and a 'square' or 'round' face are considered unattractive. Thus, a continuum of beauty is established that correlates sharply with both ethnic and class characteristics. At one end are members of Indigenous minorities, particularly those groups with especially darker skin and curly hair. Then follow working-class Filipinos, fishers and farmers, whose skin is browned from work in the sun. Then, well-off Filipinos with paler skin and Mestizo Filipinos. Mestizo Filipinos in particular dominate advertising and television in the Philippines and are considered exceptionally attractive. At the top of the beauty scale are Caucasians, who are typically foreign. As a male friend told Michael once, 'God has given every gift of beauty to the foreigner'.

Asking women about their motivations for pursuing Western men, their answers often spoke of the moral characteristics they perceived were typical of Western men. In particular, they spoke highly of the ways that Western men were thought to be more faithful than Filipino men. 'Foreigners stick to one . . . Filipinos have many!' was a common refrain among rueful Filipinas both researchers spoke to. Filipinas talked of their distrust of Filipino boyfriends; constantly jealous and watchful for any signs of their faithfulness waning. They described how Filipino men would typically have several girlfriends at the same time, using several sim cards on their mobile phones so they would not be found out. This is similar to the findings of Constable, who reported the perception that:

Pinoys<sup>4</sup> only want women who are 'beautiful and sexy', whereas US men 'are mostly looking for someone who is very sincere and loving and caring . . . Foreigners are not just chasing beautiful Filipinas. They like Filipinas because they are nice women, honest and loving'. (Constable 2003, p. 108; see also Lauser 2006, p. 322)

In addition, Filipino men were perceived as being prone to vices other than infidelity—gambling and drinking were other characteristics seen as belonging more to Filipinos than to foreigners. Indeed, in the village in which Hannah resided, a group of women decided that, because she had not entered into any relationships with local men, she must simply not like Filipino men. Upon coming to this conclusion, the women proceeded to nod approvingly and commend her ‘good sense’.

Although Filipino men were regarded as prone to vices, they were also seen as holding women to far stricter standards. In particular, they were thought highly intolerant with regard to virginity. A discussion Michael had with one middle-aged Filipina illustrates this. They were talking about a local prominent businessman who had grown up in Manila and had come to the Calamianes to do business.

Michael: And he’s married to Rosa isn’t he?

Jennifer: No he is not married to Rosa! His real wife is back in Manila! Rosa is only his mistress . . . Carlos has a very modern attitude to marriage, he doesn’t care about the past. I respect him for that.

Michael: What do you mean he doesn’t care about the past?

Jennifer: Yes, because it is well known here that Rosa has had boyfriends in the past. She used to go around with foreigners, she even went to the USA with a man who wanted to marry her but she decided not to once she got there. She came back to the Calamianes after that. So Carlos, his attitude is like the foreigners. You don’t care about the life of the woman in the past, all that matters is the relationship now. But Filipinos, *ay!* They will go on and on about everything that has happened before and go back to it all the time. If, on the wedding night, the man finds out that the woman is not a virgin, he will not accept this. Then, any time there is an argument about anything at all, he will bring that up again, and go back to it again. This is the thing that poisons the whole relationship.

Foreigners were marked out as having more tolerance in this regard, and as being more accepting of divorced women. Women with ‘a past’ or with children from an earlier marriage are sometimes viewed essentially as ‘damaged goods’ in the strict Catholic society of the Philippines, particularly in the rural areas such as where we worked.<sup>5</sup> Among others, Hilsdon has analysed the expectations of femininity in the Philippines, arguing that *mahanin* (demure, virtuous) represents ideal womanhood. This idealisation of womanhood ‘presupposes the virtue of the Virgin Mary and the preservation of moral values of home and domesticity, marriage and motherhood’ (Hilsdon 2007, p. 175; see also Pei-Chia 2003, p. 196; Lauser 2006, p. 332). Such expectations of Filipinas to become a ‘Madonna’ (Hilsdon 1995) contrasted with local views about Western women. Indeed, an anecdote related by one Filipino fisherman indicates the ways in which some Filipinos viewed the morality of Westerners when it came to women. Vicente was drinking with a group of friends and joking about the different ways of life in the Philippines and the West. ‘You know, things are different in foreign countries’, Vicente remarked. ‘In Germany, there are lots of places where you are not allowed to smoke. People actually obey this law! But even though they obey this law, if women have sex before marriage, it is ok!’ All the other fishers burst out laughing in astonishment at this. Vicente and the other fishers found it

astounding that people in Germany obeyed laws over something as insignificant as smoking indoors and yet found it morally acceptable as a society to have sex before marriage. As Lauser has argued, '[w]hereas women are theoretically expected to be virgins at marriage, men are not' (2006, p. 324). Such a widespread view made it difficult for women with 'a past' to establish a relationship with a Filipino and increased the perceived appeal of foreign men.

This also points to the fact that Filipino women are situated in a context where white women are the most sexually objectified, portrayed on posters and karaoke videos as sexually available, provocative and promiscuous. Indeed, pornography of white women is publicly permissible in the Philippines, whereas pornography of Filipinas is not. The virtue of the Filipina is defined, in part, in relation to the promiscuity of the white woman. Thus, Filipinas do not present themselves as submitting to the Western male's fantasies of the exotic other. Nor are they acting simply out of economic motives. They are responding, in part, to their own fantasies of the exotic other (the rich, handsome, tolerant, faithful, white male). However, as the paradox of self and other discussed above indicates, this othering is only ever partial and it is also the sense that the Western male is familiar, even in his difference, that makes him desirable. In the following section we extend this analysis, showing that transnational relationships are not only about a union with the (idealised and familiar) other, but also about remaking the self.

### **Remaking the Self**

Many authors have suggested that Filipino migration abroad involves transformations of the self (Aguilar 2002; Pei-Chia 2003; McKay 2007b; Bulloch 2009, Lauser 2006). Aguilar (2002) theorises the journey of the Filipino labour migrant as one of self-discovery and achievement, a 'secular pilgrimage' 'eventuating in a new sense of self' (Aguilar 2002, p. 413). Comparing it to an ancient religious journey, he casts the:

Stages of labor migration, starting from desiring to work overseas through to the period of overseas employment until the return to the homeland . . . in the terms of a ritual journey that eventuates in the marked transformation of the sojourner's person. (Aguilar 2002, p. 414–15)

Whereas Aguilar focuses on labour migration in particular, we draw on McKay's (2003) findings that labour migration and marriage migration in the life trajectories of Filipino migrants to Canada are closely implicated with one another. Because they are not distinct categories, we suggest that Aguilar's analysis of labour migration could be extended to certain forms of marriage migration. Aguilar's sketch coincides with one of the author's own observations on Siquijor (see Bulloch 2009) and is vividly expressed in one of Hannah's informant's exclamations in describing why she wanted to migrate (through marriage or other means) to a Western country: 'If I'm going to come back and still be the same person it's not worth it!'<sup>6</sup> However, ordinarily, as Aguilar points out, migrants (or, we would add, potential migrants) do

not explicitly describe their journey abroad in terms of self-transformation, but various statements and performances taken together nonetheless indicate that it is perceived and experienced as such by many.

Like Aguilar, McKay argues that resubjectification—that is, ‘the production of new subject positions’ (McKay 2007b, p. 192)—takes place through migration. She points out, ‘Filipinos recognize the transformations engendered through migration by ascribing a new identity—*balikbayan*—to returned migrants’ (McKay 2007b, p. 201). *Balikbayan* refers to a returnee from abroad and is applied nowadays to both Filipinos who have settled more or less permanently overseas and overseas contract workers. It can also apply to Filipinas who marry foreigners but choose to live in the Philippines—they acquire a kind of honorary *balikbayan* status due to their connections abroad and the fact that they have the option of living overseas. Indeed, international marriage offers the potential to achieve the high status identity of the *balikbayan* without many of the disadvantages that being an overseas migrant frequently entails (albeit with another set of challenges). More highly prized than labour migration, Aguilar (2002, p. 423) refers to a successful transnational marriage as ‘winning the jackpot’. International marriage offers the possibility of acquiring *balikbayan* status without necessarily having to reside abroad for a period and without the hard, and frequently low-status, work of domestic help or entertaining. Although we recognise the range of ascribed identities and the diversity of actual experiences among women when these marriages take place (e.g. Lauser 2006 p. 334–5; McKay 2007b, p. 192–3), marriage to a Western man offers one of the strongest paths to ‘resubjectification’ as *balikbayan*.

That the *balikbayan* ‘attains a prestigious new self in the place of origin’ (Aguilar 2002, p. 419) was apparent in Siquijor and the Calamianes. Migrants abroad often become the main contributor to the household income and, through this increased economic role, their status is elevated among their kindred. They may engage in practices of conspicuous consumption and generous gift-giving and display a changed habitus. McKay (2007b, p. 202) identifies a ‘series of performative practices that might be described as a “*balikbayan* style” [that] enabled local people to recognize returned contract workers and visiting American emigrants alike’: ‘fairer skin, a particular style of movement and presentation, distinctively imported clothes, and the use of make-up’ (McKay 2007b, p. 202). Furthermore, according to Aguilar (2002), they may return with a new sense of confidence and self-esteem through their associations with the outside world:

Labor migrants derive a sense of achievement in having literally seen the world, interacted with foreigners, and conquered any feelings of inferiority, fear, or apprehension in dealing with non-nationals. The migrant returnee is a new person who takes pride in having imbibed various aspects of another culture, learnt a new language, and experienced a different order of things—they have a cultivated and more cosmopolitan view of the world. (Aguilar 2002, p. 431)

Through increased knowledge of the world, the *balikbayan's* local cultural capital has increased. Altogether they seem worldly and sophisticated. And, having become more like the 'superior other', their status is elevated. They are generally looked on with envy and treated with deference.

Tsing (1993, p. 217) points to a process of 'self-actualisation', similar to Aguilar's 'journey of achievement', with regards to local women in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. However, unlike Aguilar, Tsing is not looking at labour migration, rather at cross-cultural relationships. In a chapter entitled 'Alien Romance', she recounts three stories of women who had entered into relationships with foreign men. The women's stories challenged her initial stereotypes, born out of Western popular and academic discourses, of such women as victims. In a context where female travel is limited owing to the dangers of male aggression, the women's journeys into new geographic and cultural terrains spoke of bravery, and their personal growth of knowledge and experience of the world. Of one woman, Tani, Tsing states:

With her story, she established a connection in which she implied that we were both woman travellers, unafraid of the dangers of male sexuality. In this context, her story re-signified my position as well as her own; we were women with initiative and experience—not women lacking male protection. This was a position from which both of us could acquire knowledge, as well as the authority to offer that knowledge to others. (Tsing 1993, p. 219)

Thus, these women present themselves as acting upon their own aspirations, and growing as people through their relationship with the other.

Explorations that cast cross-cultural experiences as a form of self-transformation provide productive avenues for thinking about Filipina marriage migration. However, if the self is perceived to be changing through its relationship with the other, we argue that this needs to be contextualised within locally dominant discourses of self and other. Here, we briefly seek to emplace these arguments about self-actualisation in the dominant constructions of America described earlier. We suggest that remaking the self is, in part, about reconciling the paradox of self and other through incorporating the other into the self and vice versa.

Recall Rafael's comment that Filipinos were led to think of themselves as if they were North American and de Quiros's comment that Filipinos are expatriates in their own land.<sup>7</sup> These are strong statements but, in our field sites, we certainly perceived a sense of affinity and familiarity with 'America' (as a pseudonym for the West). But even as the West stands as known, it is unknown because most Filipinos have never been there. This is the first paradox of the self/other relationship. Thus, there is a sense that going there is the actualisation of a teleology. If the West is an extension of the self (or, rather, the self is an extension of the West), it follows that there is a self-fulfilment in going to the West or in uniting with it through marriage. This gives particular form to the journey of learning and self-discovery that Aguilar and others speak of above.

In the second paradox of the self/other relationship, for many Filipinos in our field sites, although the West is part of the self, it is simultaneously counterpoint to the self. It is constructed as rich, whereas the Philippines is poor; beautiful whereas the Philippines is plain; efficient whereas the Philippines is inefficient; modern whereas the Philippines is traditional etc.<sup>8</sup> These are seen as qualities belonging not just to places, but also projected onto people. In this regard, the West becomes a geographic and cultural terrain where perceived deficiencies in the self can seemingly be abridged. Filipinas marrying and travelling abroad can indulge in consumption, partake of experiences and imbibe knowledge that seems denied to them in the Philippines. They can become the cosmopolitan people they perceive Western others to be. In this process, the Filipina is not seeking to erase the existing self, but to remake herself. Consequently, going abroad is not about *escaping* the Philippines as it is about expanding the space, both geographic and social, in which one has to manoeuvre in the world. Indeed, many Filipinas Hannah spoke to expressed their wish to have a house both in the Philippines and abroad and, ultimately, to retire in the Philippines. The world out there is one of opportunities, it is a place to be explored, experienced and known, but the Philippines will remain home.

### **Conclusion**

The present paper has aimed to build on anthropological literature that considers transnational relationships from multiple perspectives (e.g. Constable 2005). Such an approach rejects other accounts that have focused primarily or exclusively on the economic aspects of such relationships. Although these financial elements are important, we have argued that a more nuanced approach is to situate these motives within broader contexts. In particular, we have suggested that desire for transnational relationships needs to be considered in the context of local discourses of self and other. These can be explored productively through local-level ethnography. Here, we have focused on constructions of the West in two predominantly rural lowland areas of the Philippines, as well as the potential a union with a Western man may seem to offer for remaking the Filipina self. We do not suggest that the foregoing discussion exhausts the subject; rather, we offer it in the hope that it will open productive avenues for further exploration of the issues.

Filipino imaginings of self and other have been shaped by (neo)colonial forces. These imaginings centre upon a paradox whereby the West is at once part of and simultaneously counterpoint to the self. In this context, the Western male and the country that contains him is known and familiar. But what is known stands primarily in terms of (but not always) difference and superiority. A union with a Western man is a union with the West that seems already established and yet just out of reach. It is in part about embracing the desirable qualities that he and his country are constructed as possessing. However, it is also an opportunity to discover another part of the self and to incorporate difference into the self, thereby remaking the self into a worldly person.

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## Notes

- [1] *In Pursuit of Progress* (Bulloch 2009) explores categories of development and modernity on Siquijor Island, Philippines. This includes exploration of discourses of self/other and modernity, and dreams of personal and familial progress through migration.
- [2] Michael conducted ethnographic fieldwork in rural and urban areas of the Calamianes Islands in Palawan for twelve months between September 2005 and January 2007, while Hannah conducted twelve months of fieldwork on Siquijor Island in 2005, returning for a month in 2007.
- [3] This seems likely to be only a partial explanation, although it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into further explanations here (however, see Bulloch 2009).
- [4] 'Pinoy' is another term for Filipino.
- [5] This view was often less present among richer classes, as the earlier anecdote about the businessman from Manila indicates.
- [6] For further analysis of this statement with regards to processes resubjectification through migration and imagined cartographies of modernity, see Bulloch (2009).
- [7] Without explicitly connecting it to constructions of self and other, Aguilar (2002 p. 443) similarly suggests that some Filipinos may feel like 'strangers in one's country'. Such potential migrants, he explains, are 'acutely aware of the failings of their society. With low-status workers suffering various forms of degrading treatment at the hands of co-nationals, these potential migrants – whose educational credentials do not match the present work – experience a hint of the sojourner's liminality'.
- [8] Bulloch (2009) explores these constructions in more detail, including ways in which the West is *negatively* contrasted to the Philippines.

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