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**MIGRATION, POLITICAL ECONOMY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
THE POST IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA ¹**

CHRIS CUNNEEN and JULIE STUBBS ²

Introduction

This paper arose from research conducted on disproportionate levels of violence against Filipino women in Australia, in particular high victimisation rates in cases of spousal homicides compared to other Australian women. The research led to a consideration of the intersection between gender, ethnicity and first world/third world relations. Violence against Filipino women in Australia is examined with reference to the material and symbolic dimensions which shaped their experiences as immigrants and their postcolonial identities. This paper could be read as a challenge to simple notions of culture conflict by demonstrating the importance of specificity in the manner in which post-colonial identities and representations are constructed, and the need for specificity in understanding practices such as violence against immigrant women. The gendered and racialised nature of the movement of women across national boundaries, and their subsequent exposure to more extreme levels of violence, gives the research a broader focus than simply the experiences of Filipino women in Australia.³

We pay particular attention to the Internet as a site for the representation of Filipino women and a marketplace for buying and selling women. The Internet now represents a significant international site through which Filipino women are represented as partners for sex or marriage. The Internet also exemplifies the manner in which economic privilege and access to technological knowledge and resources reinforce hierarchies based in 'race' and gender and reproduce inequality within and through cyberspace.

Methodology

With the assistance of the Filipino community, we documented all known deaths or disappearances of Filipino women and their children throughout Australia over the period 1980-1995. In addition to this material, we examined the available official sources of data on homicide, consulted with and took submissions from Filipino communities and relevant agencies from across the country. Where available we also considered coronial inquiries, court transcripts and judgments in relevant homicide cases and media reports of deaths of Filipino women. This material was supplemented by consultations with government and non-government organisations during a visit to the Philippines in 1997. Sources of official data concerning the country of birth, race or ethnicity of the victims of homicide are limited and incomplete. The 27 cases we have identified are likely to underestimate the total number of deaths of Filipino women (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997: 29-31).

¹ A earlier version of this paper is forthcoming in the International Review of Victimology

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³ The research is reported in Cunneen and Stubbs (1997). The results of our research should not be construed as casting all relationships between Filipino women and men from advanced capitalist countries as exploitative. Nor do we wish to depict Filipino women as hapless victims (see Mohanty 1988). Indeed, Filipino women within Australia, as in the Philippines, have been active and effective political actors. To recognise the factors which make Filipino women vulnerable to violence is not to deny their agency in resisting that violence, and in seeking to redress it. Nor do we wish to construct a singular representation of 'the Filipino woman'. In fact, we go on to examine the consequences of damaging racialised and sexualised stereotypes of Filipino women.

The active promotion of international marriages with Filipino women was identified in consultations as a key concern. Given the central role of the Internet in promoting such marriages we undertook a search of the Internet using conventional search engines to locate sites which focussed on Filipino (or Asian) women as marriage partners. There are numerous sites which have such a focus and we present material from selected sites to illustrate our arguments.

Homicide and Violence Against Filipino Women in Australia

Filipino women living in Australia are almost six times over-represented as victims of homicide. While for 1989-1992 the annualised rate of homicide for all women in Australia aged between 20 and 39 was found to be 1.0 per 100,000, the rate for women born in the Philippines was 5.6 per 100,000. They were also more likely to be victims of homicide than were Filipino men in Australia. This pattern is contrary to that for almost all other immigrant communities in Australia. It is usual for homicide rates to be higher for men than for women (Kliewer 1994).

In all but one of the homicide cases for which information was available the offence had been committed by a man who had been married to or had been otherwise involved in an intimate relationship with the female victim. None of the men responsible were themselves Filipino. With a few exceptions, they were all Australian citizens. However, consistent with the ethnic diversity of Australia, the offenders came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The men were born in countries such as England, Poland, Malta, Holland, Italy, United States and Spain. As we explore further in this article, what is important is not the particular ethnic background of the male offender (nor the converse essentialist notion that all men are the same, Jefferson 1996), but rather the specific nature of power embedded in particular social relations. This is consistent with the argument that simple notions of cultural conflict are not sufficient in analysing the factors which contribute to Filipino women's vulnerability to violence in Australia.⁴ What is at stake are relationships between third world women and first world men and this involves at least three inter-connected dimensions: gender, ethnicity and political economy.

This latter finding deserves comment since it marks a significant departure from the pattern of homicides for women generally within Australia. In spouse homicide cases, victims and offenders typically come from the same country of origin. The fact that Filipino women who were the victims of homicide in this study were killed by men who came from a different country of origin to themselves reflects immigration and marriage patterns for Filipino women in Australia. Australian immigration policy is very restrictive and the primary mechanism by which many women qualify for entry is through their relationships with men (Fincher et al 1994: 54, 80). Since migration from the Philippines to Australia is heavily biased in favour of women, the Filipino population in Australia is made up of a significant number of women married to Australian resident men who are not from the Philippines.⁵

There were large differences in the ages of the victims and the men with whom they had been in relationships. The average age difference between partners was almost 13 years. However, in a third of cases where information was available the age difference was 20 years or greater. The data on age difference from the survey of deaths and disappearances conforms with a

⁴ Sellin's argument that primary cultural conflicts may arise from migration is insufficient to explain Filipino women's heightened vulnerability to violence, a vulnerability which is not shared by Filipino men nor other immigrant women (Sellin, 1938).

⁵ Approximately 70% of the 47,692 Filipino women living in Australia at the time of the 1991 census came to Australia as spouses or fiancées of Australian residents (Bureau of Immigration and Population Research 1994).

number of studies that have found that Australian men sponsoring Filipino women as spouses or fiancées tend to be much older than the women (Robinson 1996: 59; Tan and Davidson 1994). It should be noted, however, that in some of the homicide case studies the age difference was extraordinary. In one example, the young woman was 15 years of age when 'JS' married her in the Philippines. He was 38 years old.

The age of perpetrators in this study also tended to be older than those in other comparable Australian homicide data (Polk 1994:2). The oldest male in the homicide data which we analysed was 62 years of age and the average age was 44 years. This pattern of a significant difference in age between the woman and male partner is something that we return to below in our analysis of markets for marriage and sex. It is commonplace for Internet sites promoting marriage or sex with Filipino women to stress the youthfulness of the women and that the age of the man is no barrier to the relationship.

It was possible to determine where the couples met in only 12 of the cases examined. In three quarters of these cases, the couples met in the Philippines with clear evidence in four cases that agencies promoting marriage, 'pen pals' or domestic help were involved. In a further case the man had gone to the Philippines with three male friends in response to a popular television program that depicted the ease with which Australian men could find wives in the Philippines. Evidence also indicated that one of the men had made contact with an introduction agency seeking another Filipino partner in the days immediately before he killed his current Filipino wife. Many of the men had previously been married and two had previously been married to Filipino women. While there was no evidence that any of the men included in this research had relied on the Internet as a means to locate a Filipino partner, the various mechanisms which they had used now largely have been supplanted by the Internet.

In 11 of the 18 homicides for which information was available there was evidence of previous domestic violence directed towards the woman victim by her partner or ex-partner. In several cases there clearly had been escalating violence in the period leading up to the homicide. Consistent with the findings of other research concerning spousal homicides (Wallace 1986; Polk 1994:36) a number of the women had either separated from their partner or were in the process of doing so at the time of their deaths. One of the ironies in relation to the initiatives taken by the women to leave their partners was that in media coverage of the event, and or in court hearings concerning the homicide, their actions were painted as representing licentiousness and immorality (see also Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994). They were represented as the (morally) *abusive* partner because they had left the relationship. The desire for 'life in the fast lane' became a popular media phrase, drawing on constructed images of Filipino women. In other words, there was a distinctly *racial or ethnic* interpretation given to the actions which ignored the violence the women were attempting to escape.

In many case studies it was clear that the perpetrator also had been violent to other women prior to their relationship with the Filipino woman discussed here. In two cases there was evidence that the man's previous wife had sought legal protection due to his domestic violence. In another case, the man convicted of murder had also faced previous allegations of the attempted rape of two girls aged 13 and 14 years. In a further two case studies, the same suspect emerged in the deaths of two Filipino women. This suspect also had a de facto relationship with a third non-Filipino woman who had disappeared. His two children also alleged that he abused them. In two further cases, men in the study had previously been married to non-Filipino women who had died or disappeared in suspicious circumstances.

Violence and the post-immigration experiences of Filipino women in Australia

Domestic violence is primarily an expression of power and control by men over women. The imbalance in power between men and women is likely to be even greater where an Australian man, familiar with cultural norms and practices, rights and entitlements in that country, sponsors a woman from another country. Women who immigrate to Australia as the sponsored partners of Australian residents are likely to be particularly vulnerable. They may be dependent on their partner in many ways including for information about their new home, support in becoming settled in Australia and in terms of their immigration status and access to citizenship. Research also suggests that financial abuse, in which women are denied access to money, may be common in sponsored relationships which are abusive (Australian Law Reform Commission 1994: 218).

While Filipino women in Australia share many of the experiences of other immigrant women, such as settlement problems, isolation, high unemployment and the under-valuing of their skills, and a lack of knowledge about and access to legal rights and social services, there are particular features which operate to make them especially vulnerable. Their experiences and needs are distinctive (Women's Legal Resources Centre 1994: 24-26). Their vulnerability arises both from those factors which provide the context for, and the impetus towards their emigration from the Philippines, and the stereotyped misrepresentation of Filipino women, and of Asian women more generally, as compliant, ultra-feminine and servile.

Women from developing countries like the Philippines are seen by a lot of men from developed countries as "objects" to be easily sold and traded, with no dignity or feeling. Domestic violence, in general, is characterized by such attitudes but the global issue of economic and political power between "developed and developing" or "rich and poor" countries give further power and control to the male in this imbalanced relationship (Migrant Women's Emergency Support Service, and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre, submission on file with authors).

It is important to emphasize that:

Filipinas married to Australian men may be particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, not because they are Filipinas, but because of the ways in which many of these marriages are contracted and the mythology about submissive, infinitely tolerant women from that country which still prevails in some quarters of the Australian community (Filipina-Australian Marriages and Domestic Violence Working Party, South Australian Department of Community Welfare 1988: 14).

Concerns also have been raised about domestic violence against other immigrant groups such as Thai, Indonesian, Fijian and Malaysian women in Australia (Migrant Women's Emergency Support Service, & the Domestic Violence Resource Centre). In the United States it has been argued that women from Asian and Pacific regions suffer greater exposure to sexual harassment because of 'racialized ascriptions (exotic, hyper-erotized, masochistic, desirous of sexual domination) that set them up as ideal-type gratifiers of western neocolonial libidinal formations' (Cho 1997: 205).

In summary, the deaths of Filipino women in Australia, like homicides of Australian women more generally, commonly involved previous domestic violence, separation and disputes concerning child custody. However, there were a number of features which marked them out as distinctive. These were: the rate of homicide victimisation was markedly higher for Filipino women than for Filipino men or for other Australian women; a much higher proportion were intimate homicides than is the case for homicides of Australian women generally (where there was a known offender all but one was a current or former spouse or intimate partner of the victim); the offenders were each from a different ethnic or cultural group than their victim; the offenders tended to be much older than the victims; many of the

offenders had been previously married; where data were available the majority of the couples had met in the Philippines and in approximately half of those cases an introduction agency or some other mechanism promoting international connections with Filipino women had been involved.

The Framework For The Analysis

No adequate understanding of the context in which the vulnerability of Filipino women to domestic violence in Australia arises can be developed through a singular analysis of gender, or 'race' or class. A more fruitful approach needs to consider the manner in which particular constructions of 'race', gender and class intersect and are mobilised in the representation of Filipino women, and 'Asian' women more generally (Crenshaw 1991; Daly and Stephens 1995; Messerschmidt 1997). As we demonstrate below, the different forms of power and knowledge which define the position of Filipino women in relation to first world [Australian] men are also sites of the broader social, economic and political transformations along the axes of gender within a postcolonial framework. While culturally dominant discourses do not necessarily determine masculine and feminine behaviour (Messerschmidt 1997: 10-11) the intersection of race, gender and international relations situate the immigrant Filipino woman in such a way that she has limited prospects for resistance or opposition.

The research shows that gender has both a symbolic meaning (the particular representations of Filipino women as desirable for first world men) and a relationship to the developing political economy of the Philippines within the global sphere (Filipino women as important foreign exchange earners) (see also Ong and Peletz 1995: 2). Within international markets for labour, marriage and sex, those privileged both by their place in raced and gendered hierarchies and by economic resources, are well placed to dominate in both the material and symbolic realms.

It is particular racialised and gendered stereotypes of Filipino women which contribute to the commodification of Filipino women and render them accessible to men with economic power. It is 'the links between the gender meanings and material forces that shape communities, nations, and transnational arenas, and the negotiation of everyday life' (Ong and Peletz 1995:1). A key concern of this research has been to identify 'how Asian women's sexuality is packaged and sold internationally, and how this feeds off and into representations of colonial and third-world women as passive/exotic' (Pettman 1996: 195).

Migration, gender and political economy

The migration of Filipino women to Australia for the purpose of marriage, which is central to this research, cannot be understood simply as a matter of individual or family choice. Migration, in various forms, is one of a number of strategies actively promoted by the Philippines government in the name of development, and in response to the poor economic conditions and high unemployment within the Philippines. For instance World Bank figures for 1992 indicated that average per capita income for the Philippines was US\$730 as compared with Hong Kong US\$11,490, Singapore US\$11,160, Malaysia US\$2,320 and Thailand US\$1,420 (Heyzer and Wee, 1994: 36). Poor economic performance in the Philippines has been associated with a legacy of dependency and subservience to the IMF, World Bank, foreign banks and transnational corporations (Boer, 1988; Pettman, 1996). Such strategies have arisen in the context of the marked inequalities between first world and third world countries, and are endorsed by international agencies which have a role in promoting structural adjustment. Structural adjustment policies have had a particularly negative impact on women, in both the formal and informal economy (Afshar and Dennis 1992). International policies promoting the deregulation of trade have also had negative

consequences for women workers in the third world, including the Philippines (Sharma and Anes 1994).

The export of women from states such as the Philippines is 'part of the international politics of debt, and of poorer states search for hard currency in the form of remittances, as well as reflecting the lack of employment opportunities at home' (Pettman 1996:191). The deregulation of trade, and the internationalisation of labour markets has sustained and entrenched an international order in which women from developing countries are themselves 'traded' as workers, or wives. The pattern through which some countries acquire brides and others supply them 'roughly reflect[s] their relative positioning in the international political order' (Pettman 1996:194).

The Philippines government has promoted the export of labour and has the largest migration flow of workers in Asia (Lycklama 1994: 15-16; Wall 1995). Emigration and the export of labour are acknowledged as part of the country's national employment policy, with a range of incentives to lower the cost of emigration and with government regulation of mechanisms through which remittances are sent back to the Philippines (Raj-Hashim 1994: 122-3). Filipinos who have migrated to, or who are working on contracts in other countries remit in excess of A\$1 billion to the Philippines annually (Boer 1988; Pettman 1996: 71), and this is the country's top foreign exchange earner (Cahill 1990: 30). As Heng has argued "[i]n contemporary Southeast Asia, the state, at its most benign, is a fiscal beneficiary of the exploitation of women, and at its least benign, an active agent structuring the exploitation itself" (1997:32).

International relations also have had a significant effect on internal migration and on gender relations within the Philippines particularly through the impact of military bases. The large US bases in the Philippines which operated until 1992 have had a profound effect on the local people, the economy, and gender relations. The most obvious expression of such effects lies in the prostitution industry and its close connection to military bases. The US military presence attracted a large workforce of men and women to service its needs in a range of legal and extra-legal ways (Enloe 1989). In addition to those employed directly by the military, the decline of agricultural employment in rural areas resulted in many Filipino women migrating to the areas around the bases to work in prostitution and the entertainment industry. Enloe (1993: 149) estimated that 100,000 Filipinos worked 'in the entertainment business' around the bases.

The closure of the military bases has resulted in economic hardship for many workers, especially women (Santos 1992). No planning was in place to address the needs of the women (Enloe 1993: 158). Sex tourism is now being actively promoted in the name of national development in areas around what were previously military bases. As McClintock argues '[t]he international politics of Third World debt and the international pursuit of commercial sex have become deeply entwined' (1992: 92). The export of labour, and of women for the purposes of marriage are also reflections of these factors (Marginson 1996: 18). According to Barry, 'sex tourism and mail-order bride marketing are the two major sex industries built up from military prostitution' (1995: 138).

There are clear connections between what, on the surface, may appear to be distinct practices: prostitution; tourism; overseas contract work especially in the form of domestic service and the export of women for marriage. Each of these practices is often state authorised or sponsored in the pursuit of 'development' and foreign exchange, and may be implicitly endorsed by structural adjustment policies promoted by key international agencies. The fact that such strategies are viable, reflects more than just the demand for immigration by rich countries seeking domestic workers, entertainers or wives from poorer countries. Such

strategies also work because they are consistent with profoundly raced and gendered stereotypes about the 'nature' of Filipino women, and Asian women more generally.

Representations of Filipino women

The racialised and sexualised stereotyping of Filipino women and Asian women does more than construct them as exotic. As Truong has recognised, 'emphasising the 'otherness' of the East, the sexual availability of Eastern women and the culture of their poverty' has two important effects. It 'creat[es] a distinct national identity to attract consumers' and 'legitimi[z]es' oppressive practices by relegating them to the culture of a particular ethnic group and thereby helping to ease the conscience of the consumers' (1990: 200). Myths about 'naturally' submissive and sexually accommodating Filipino women act to authorise particular forms of masculine power and control over women. The process of racialisation functions to obscure the oppressive role of particular forms of international relations, and gender relations.⁶

One feature of these representations is the inscription of power onto the body. Following Foucault (1979), the body is a site of shifting historical and cultural inscriptions of power and knowledge. However, Ong and Peletz (1995:6) have added a further dimension by arguing that these inscriptions of power/knowledge on the body are differentiated along axes of gender, 'race' and class, and occur within colonial and postcolonial formations. The bodies of Asian women are inscribed with characteristics which position them within a particular postcolonial context. Cho (1997: 205) has argued that there is an interweaving of colonial and military domination with sexual domination in the representations of Asian women which creates the 'ultimate western male fantasy'.

The various features inscribed on Asian bodies are directly connected to the construction and marketing of national (female) identities (Ong and Peletz 1995). For example, Boer (1988:7) makes reference to construction of images of Filipino women in Philippine Airways brochures and other commercial publications:

Most Filipino women have a natural femininity and beauty unequalled by any other race. They are indeed fiercely loyal, very industrious and extremely dedicated to their families. They are not materialistic. Money is not their God. They enjoy a good yarn, a laugh and a happy song. They love having babies, they make wonderful mothers, great lovers and companions. Western women cannot compete with them in any of these qualities! Even many women of other Asian origin cannot. What more any red-blooded man could wish for? (Josef Holman, *Pilipino Magazine* Vol 2, No 3, June-July 1988, cited in Boer 1988: 35).

Other Asian airlines also use their hostesses as a focus in their marketing (Heng, 1997: 32, 38).

The representation of Filipino women as submissive and obedient can have a number of effects. Boer has argued that this construction is used as an 'excuse' for exploitation by brothel owners, and the exploitative work practices of transnational corporations (1988:7; also Truong 1990). These representations of Filipino women also contain the contradictory

⁶However, this racialising process is not simply patterned through 'East/West' relations. It is shaped, fundamentally, through economic power which transcends simple cultural or 'racial' dichotomies. For example, Japanese economic superiority over Korea has allowed the construction of Korean women by Japanese men as racialised 'other', allowing the commodification of Korean women for sex by promoting their alleged submissive qualities (see Mitsui 1984: 66). The movement *within* Asia of domestic workers from poorer to wealthier countries may also employ racial stereotypes in determining preference for particular women ((Lycklama 1994; Pettman 1996).

elements of fear and desire which characterise Western male imaginings of Asian women (Robinson 1996:54; see also Rizvi 1993). In this reading, desire is represented in the image of the 'luscious compliant beauties who are sex slaves to first world men'. Fear is evident in the prophecy of marriage failure, duplicity on the part of the woman and miscegenation (Robinson 1996:54). At one level, the representations of Filipino women fit within the concept of 'emphasised femininity' developed by Connell (1987) which stresses fragility, compliance, acceptance of marriage and so forth. Yet we argue that these idealised representations of women are also deeply racialised.

Since the late 1970s there has been a particular discourse around the issue of 'mail-order' brides in Australia which constructs Filipino women as 'meek, docile slaves, oriental beauties with shady pasts, passive and manipulable, but also grasping and predatory, using marriage to jump immigration queues' (Robinson 1996:54). Our analysis of media reports surrounding the murder of Filipino women in Australia shows the use of stereotypes of the women as being promiscuous, irresponsible and predatory. In one case a media report referred to the murdered woman as 'vivacious, glamorous and never short of boyfriends'. The report consciously articulated a predatory view of 'M' who 'bleeds men dry' and then 'dumps them'. M had been found handcuffed and stabbed to death. There was no suspect in this case and no apparent connection between her death and reported 'lifestyle' (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997: 75-76).

In another murder case of a Filipino woman the media reports represented the male perpetrator as the victim.

He wanted reconciliation, had even had plastic surgery soon after separation to improve his chances with a wife ten years his junior but Gene remained resolute. Charlie was fed up. If necessary he would go back to the Family Court. That would be, he knew, an expensive process. Now unemployed with a back problem Charlie could ill afford the expense... His beloved Gene took everything leaving him with Alice and a fridge (*The Sun*, 4 July 1990, cited in Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994:131).

Evidence from friends of the murdered woman suggest 'his beloved Gene' left him because of domestic violence (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997: 69-71).

Gender in cyberspace

Masculinity and fantasy on the Internet

A key to unpacking the dynamics around the disproportionate use of violence against Filipino women in Australia is through a consideration of masculinity and the relationship between masculinity and fantasies of power, desire and sexuality. How are masculine fantasies created about particular groups of women like those from the Philippines? How do *representations* of gender and 'race' intersect within these constructed fantasies and work to inscribe the bodies of women with particular male-defined characteristics? What is the relationship between representations of the fantasised 'other' and the use of male violence? In other words, following Messerschmidt (1997), how do some men use violence to 'accomplish gender'.

The commodification, marketing and sale of Filipino women provides an insight into this process (Cooke 1986). There is a particular construction of Filipino women as perfectly fulfilling the desires of male fantasy. We have explored this issue further through the marketing schemes currently available on the Internet. Since the banning of introduction agencies in the Philippines, and with the growth in use of the Internet, the Internet now

represents a significant mechanism through which women, and particularly Filipino women, are marketed. The Internet is both a marketplace in which commodities and their symbolic attributes are exchanged, as well as a medium through which communication occurs.

Some Internet sites offer detailed information on how to go about meeting 'foreign women' for the purpose of marriage, and offer advice about the quality and cost-effectiveness of the many introduction agencies which are available internationally. Other Internet sites operate as introduction agencies with extensive catalogues of women to choose from. Among the services available on the Internet are titles such as '*How to find foreign women seeking American husbands*', '*Mail order brides from the Philippines*' and '*Your bride is in the mail*'.

Many Internet services specify that they offer inter-racial introductions. Some sites focus especially on Asian women (for example, promoting books such as '*Women of the orient: Intimate profiles of the world's most feminine women*' by Boye de Mente, and '*Fantasy Islands: A man's guide to exotic women and international travel*'), and some are specific to Filipino women. One California based agency is listed on the Internet under the heading '*Filipinas seek foreign men*'. This agency offers a range of services including, for \$5.00, the names of 'three hot room mates, 20, 21, and 23' who are ready for marriage to 'men of any age'.

A point that is striking about the representation of Asian and Filipino women as 'perfect partners' is that the sex tours and the marriage introduction agencies are in fact different sides to the same phenomenon (see also Cahill 1990: 65). This interdependency is reinforced on the Internet through interlinking and cross referencing between Internet sites. Sites which offer introductions to women seeking marriage partners also have links to other sites offering 'erotica', sexualised images of Asian women, and sex tour information. For example, the 'Philippines: Girls - Travel - Business - Penpals' site offers links to 'Asian Babe of the Month', 'Asian Angels', 'Asian Fantasy', 'Mewow Filipina', etc. Some sites offer both sex and marriage introductions. For instance, one site has four categories of tours to the Philippines: general sightseeing, wife seeking, x-rated, and diving tours. This service promises that the 'wife-seeking tour' will ensure that 'the new women you meet will be generally 'good' girls but there will be plenty of bar girls there too and you will surely encounter some' (http://www.conline.com/dad/phil_wif.html).

Other Internet sites provide information on prostitution including child prostitution in the Philippines and in other countries. Several sources provide detailed information on the age of consent and the legislation governing paedophilia, and some provide guidance concerning how to access Internet services which might be barred by net administrators. Other advice available includes information on how to subscribe to paedophilia related email listings anonymously. Much of this material has a focus on Asian countries, and particularly on the Philippines.

Shopping for Women in Cyberspace

Another striking feature of the 'introduction' industry is the shopping catalogue form that it takes. The Internet is able to provide a marketplace for the buying and selling of women. The Internet site '*A Foreign Affair*' is an example. Clark, a promoter of introductions on the Internet, rejects the label 'mail order bride' because 'it is more complicated than simply buying from a retail catalogue', but he goes on to provide an analysis of the most cost effective means of finding a wife in a manner that is remarkably similar to a 'shopping guide'.

The penpal bride process is one which allows a man to search for a prospective wife at a relatively low front-end cost. If you limit yourself to only one service company to provide your sources of catalogues and addresses of interested women, you should be

able to get all the names and addresses you'll need for \$300.00 or less. If you decide to cast a wider net, and use more than one such company at the same time, your costs may be higher, depending on what level of services you decide to buy into. In any case, it should not be necessary to spend more than \$500.00 to find one or more suitable women (Clark 1995a).

Many of these guides explicitly commodify women including instructions such as 'click here to add this woman to your order', 'search by age, weight and height' and cite their charges 'per girl' (typically US\$5.00 or US\$10.00) offering discounts for 'bulk buying'. Some sites offer complimentary gifts to subscribers such as wallets, calendars and playing cards. Most offer a range of payment and shipping options and will supply names and addresses by your choice of email, fax or various forms of postal service including international express mail. Some services provide videos, or your own disk copy of '100 girls for \$39.95'. Several services listed on the Internet organise tours to the Philippines which, in addition to airfare and accommodation, include parties, local guidance, immigration assistance, a tour guide and '20+ personal introductions'.

Whilst these guides are explicitly directed towards American men, several of them include details, and costings in a range of European and Australasian currencies.

Although written for American men, "Your bride is in the mail!" is an excellent guide and reference for a man in any country interested... Men in all countries where women are heavily influenced by feminism will find themselves mentally substituting the name of their own country when they read the words 'America' and 'American' (Gary Clark 1995b).

Many of the Internet sites provide physical addresses for companies, organisations or sole operated businesses and these are predominantly in the United States. However, the 'national' identity of the marketeers of women is not entirely relevant. The Internet with myriad sites is truly international, operating in the borderless world of cyberspace. However, while the world of cyberspace is borderless, the marketplace is structured within the parameters of an international capitalist order. The target of the marketing of third world women is clearly first world men, whatever country they might inhabit.

The Essence of Femininity

The advertising of Asian women on the Internet is concerned with constructing and satisfying male fantasy. It is concerned with inscribing the body of a group of women ('Asian' women) with a set of particular characteristics. As we have indicated these characteristics are representative of an 'emphasised femininity' that is also racialised. This also implies a narrow and singular construction of masculine desire – a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) which idealises certain values in women and men.

Most men agree that Asian women are the most beautiful women in the world. The Asian female possesses an inner beauty not tarnished by western traditions. As a result, an Asian lady's outer beauty is matched only by her inner beauty.

One should never stereotype any group of people, but generally men find Asian ladies to be loyal, honest, fun to be with, hard-working, and respectful. Add to these qualities the fact that Asian ladies are the essence of femininity, and you will see why Asian women are known to be ideal marriage partners ('Asian Eyes').

Part of this idealised fantasy is the perfect wife: loving, caring, compliant. Such a fantasy is explicitly constructed in the advertising material. 'Asian women are renowned for their

beauty, femininity, traditional values and loving dispositions. They are sincere, faithful, devoted and believe in a lasting marriage and a happy home' (*'Sunshine International'*).

The other side to this fantasy constructs a woman for perfect sex: compliant and completely accommodating. Sexual compliance is either explicit in the advertising or obvious in the subtext. The fantasy positions women as subservient subjects for male power/desire.

They [Filipino women] were always asking if I had friends back in the U.S. who were interested in them. I wished I could help them. I knew there were thousands of lonely guys back in the U.S. who'd love them... women who know how to take care of a man, who're playful, passionate, sincere and dedicated (*'Fantasy Islands'*).

Age is also an important component in this male sexual fantasy. While the primary focus of much of the Internet material is on 'finding a wife' who is 'foreign', 'exotic' or 'Asian', much attention is also given to youthfulness. Several Internet sources explicitly offer services for older men looking for young, even teenage, wives and a number of services present the women in 'catalogues' organised by age and country of origin. It is commonplace for these services to offer the advice that it does not matter what the age, appearance, or income of men using the service might be.

Indeed, the advertising continually suggests that age difference is not significant and explicitly focus on older men looking for young women. The *'Philippines: Girls -Travel-Business-Penpals'* site notes the following:

Send me your age, if you are single, divorced, etc; Include what you are seeking in your girl. A 15 to 20 year difference in age is not a big factor. Remember that beauty is in the eye of the beholder...

New Sweet Sixteen List! \$10.00 for 16 names of teenage girls from 15 to 18 years old!

New Hot List #1 - \$15.00 for 38 names of YOUNG girls 18 to 23 who are seeking older men!

New Hot List #2 - Girls who are 24 to 26 years old. Want older men. Send \$12.00!

New Hot List #3 - Girls who are 28 to 39 years of age... All seeking older men!

Youthfulness and sexuality are presented together. The same site also has direct 'adult' links to 'hot Asian girls'. It is apparent from the Internet sites that Asian women, and Filipino women in particular, are constructed as perfectly fulfilling these fantastic needs of youth, compliance, love and sex. The essence of masculine desire is constructed as heterosexual and constrained within particular cultural values associated with youth, compliance, and so forth. These values are also racialised through the association of particular values with *Asian* women. In other words a particular form of hegemonic masculinity has been constructed.

'Western' women and feminism

Asian women are presented as fulfilling these fantasised needs in the context of, and in contrast to, western women's independence. Western women are inscribed with a set of characteristics the opposite of Asian women (see also Cho 1997). The literature selling Filipino women strongly argues that the reason western men cannot find suitable partners at home is because of feminism. This aspect of the male fantasy appeals to an image of a 'traditional' woman whose goal in life is to serve her husband.

One advocate of marriage to 'foreign women' has produced a number of documents on the Internet to assist men in searching for a prospective wife including an attack on 'feminist

inspired myths about mail order brides'; a guide to international introduction agencies, and *'The Costs Involved in Finding and Bringing Home a Foreign Wife'* (Gary Clark, 1995a). Clark promotes 'international marriages' as being in men's interests because

[t]oday, many American men are very unhappy with American women. It's not that they want some meek submissive thing they can lead around by the nose. What they want is a woman who will be a more 'traditional' kind of wife, who is probably more oriented toward being a wife than being a career woman. Often these are middle aged men who want a woman significantly younger than themselves... They are men who have decided, as I did, that they are unlikely to find what they want in the U.S. ... More and more American men are getting fed up with the feminist inspired bullshit they keep getting from American women (Clark 1995c).

You will have a much better chance of marrying a much better wife this way, than by hassling with Modern Western women (Clark 1995d).

The author of *'Overseas Ladies'* promotes the service in the following way:

If you are tired of sitting around watching reruns of Star Trek and playing games on this computer, and your social life is almost non-existan [sic] or if you are just tired of the hoops American women make you jump through then read on. These women are looking for a man who will care for them and they will respond to every jesture [sic] and kindness, no matter how small. Take your choice. Each of these ladies are looking to meet men from around the world. They are not concerned about age, appearance or wealth. Just so long as you work (or have a regular income) and do not hit them (which is common in their country) then they will want to meet you (*'Overseas Ladies'*).

Indeed, one of the sites specifically states that only Asian women living in Asia or who grew up in Asia are suitably 'uncontaminated' by 'Western culture' (*'Asian Eyes'*).

These images and references are racist and sexist in their construction of Filipino and other Asian peoples. Western men are constructed as superior to Asian men. Asian women are constructed as preferable to Western women. Yet it is precisely this intersection of 'race' and sex that results in such a powerful fantasised construction of (first world) male desire. One of the profound ironies in the claim the women want men who 'do not hit them' is the evidence of the incidence of homicide and domestic violence against Filipino women in Australia (Cunneen and Stubbs 1997).

The male fantasy about Asian women incorporates exotic sex, the promise of a relationship with complete security and compliance, and a fantasy about love which transcends age difference. The final aspect of this fantasy is that the relationship can be bought cheaply through an agency or arranged simply through the use of informal networks. In other words, it is a completely commodified fantasy that requires nothing more than access to the Internet and a credit card number.

There is little opportunity for the gendered and cultural identities of Filipino women that are presented on the Internet to be challenged and negotiated.⁷ It is not a site or medium where

⁷ While it is evident from the Internet that other meanings for Filipino women are reflected there, albeit in relatively few sites including listings for women's groups, political organisations etc., the sites promoting the sex trade and international marriages not surprisingly reflect a narrow representation of a particular western, male ideal of femininity. Neither are the marriage and sex trade sites typically linked with sites promoting depictions of Filipino women's political activism.

Filipino women can easily challenge the stereotypes or explore alternative identities. The view of cyberspace as the ultimate democratic medium regulated by its 'netizens' is in fact a political ideology that ignores the disenfranchisement of much of the world's population along lines of class, gender and ethnicity. Not only are women excluded from 'netizenship' along gender lines, so are vast numbers of people around the globe because of poverty.⁸ However, it is clearly not only an issue of *access* to the Internet, what we are considering here is cyberspace as a communicative space: a space divided unequally, structured along gendered lines and privileging certain forms of communication (Mulvaney 1994). In the context of commodifying 'Asian' women, the use of the Internet enables myths and fantasies to be re-created in an environment where they are not easily challenged or subverted.

Masculine fantasy, violent reality

The use of violence against a partner or a person with whom one is in an intimate relationship is an example of what has been termed a 'masculine scenario of violence' (Polk 1994:1). A number of studies have reinforced the view that masculine power and control are central features in spouse homicides and that 'separation, or the threat of separation, and sexual jealousy were the major precipitating factors in wife-killings' (Wallace 1986:108; see also Polk 1994: 56; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994:23; Easta 1996).

The homicides of Filipino women share many of the characteristics of spouse homicides more generally, but they are also distinctive. The difference becomes apparent when we integrate the fantasised images of Filipino women back into the relationships that resulted in the deaths and disappearances of women whose cases we have examined.

What happens when men attempt to live out these fantasised relationships? We noted above that Filipino women are not in a position to contest the representations of themselves on the Internet or other forms of the international marriage market. However, in relationships they are in a position to contest and resist. The killings by their partners are a heightened or extreme instance of domination which has been mediated by representations of 'race' and gender. The violence is contextualised by particular representations of Filipino women as both passive and sexual beings, as the embodiments of male desire. We can understand the resort to violence as a means of 'doing gender', as a means of accomplishing masculinity in situations where women challenge the position in which they find themselves (Messerschmidt 1997). Ultimately the 'material resources' which men rely on to realise or achieve power in these situations is the use of escalating violence.

Two interwoven processes become apparent in some of the homicide case studies. First, violence emerges as a resolution to conflict for the male when he attempts to assert absolute dominance and authority and the women resist. Secondly, the Filipino women become re-invented as manipulative and self-seeking who simply marry western men to leave the Philippines. In other words, the women's actions are reinterpreted through the lens of a stereotype of Filipino women as sexually promiscuous 'gold diggers' seeking foreign nationalities. They are seen at best as complicit in the violence against them, or at worst the cause of the violence. The men are constructed as victims.

Two of the homicide case studies are illustrative of these issues. In one of these cases a 17 year old Filipino teenager was killed by her 41 year old husband ('JS'). She was shot several

⁸ Delacourt (1997) cites 25 million people communicating on-line in 1994, expecting to reach a billion by early next century. However, 'significant regional disparities in the volume of Internet use do exist' (Delacourt 1997:207). The estimation of current use and projection of future use has also been criticised as substantially inflated (Lewis 1995).

times and received head injuries from being beaten with a rifle butt. She was living with a Filipino female friend at the time, after having left her husband because of significant prior incidents of domestic violence. She had been only 15 years of age when she met and married her husband in the Philippines in January 1985. 'JS' had been divorced from his first wife one month previously. The first wife had sought an apprehended domestic violence order against him.

JS pleaded guilty to manslaughter with diminished responsibility (*NSW Crimes Act s23A*) and was sentenced to a minimum term of six years. In general, the sentencing comments accept the depiction of the young Filipino woman as being at fault in her own death. She was presented as a bad mother. 'To a large extent his wife had left the care of their small child to the prisoner' (*R v Sokol* at 3). She was presented as manipulative. 'He is said to have worked at a second job in order to earn enough money to send a monthly sum... to her family in the Philippines. He sometimes took the child with him to cleaning work' (*R v Sokol* at 4). She was presented as self-seeking. The sentencing judge noted that 'a friend of [the defendant]... said the prisoner told him that if he stopped paying the money, which was being sent to his wife's family in the Philippines, she threatened to leave him... [he] told me of how he had to sell a lot of his assets in order to keep [her] happy' (*R v Sokol* at 4).

The victim was presented as unfaithful, unloving and uncaring. The sentencing comments again refer to the statement by the defendant's friend: '[he] told me on numerous occasions of how [she] had left him and was with another man. He told me that [she] had told him he was too old and boring' (*R v Sokol* at 4). A psychiatrist's report reinforced the view of dead woman as demanding and unloving. 'He craved warmth and security but did not get much of that from her' (*R v Sokol* at 5).

The assessment of the victim was derived completely from statements and views of the man who had killed her. Perhaps not surprisingly, she was re-presented as unreasonable and his ongoing violence was absent from the account. By contrast, the defendant was re-presented as a victim. Consider the following sentencing comments.

[He] presented as a slightly built, very vulnerable looking man with thinning hair and intense appearance.

The prisoner was born in Germany of Polish parents. He came to Australia when he was very young. His father was a most hard-working man but was also harsh, demanding and authoritarian. His mother died when he was seven in sad circumstances. There was no-one else to fill her place (Statement by psychiatrist to New South Wales Legal Aid Commission, 7 October 1987, pp2 and 6).

While remanded in prison, JS was diagnosed with a longstanding personality disorder characterised by intense feelings of insecurity and loneliness and a craving for closeness and intimacy. He was described as having immense emotional and maternal needs. The psychiatrist's assessment of JS noted the following:

[t]he relationship with RS was doomed from the start. I suspect that by choosing a young woman from another culture he felt some security in the relationship because he was in the dominant position... [However] she was not much interested in being a mother and certainly not interested in responding to the immense maternal needs JS had (Statement by psychiatrist to New South Wales Legal Aid Commission, 7 October 1987, p5).

What is of interest here is not the clinical assessment per se, but rather the gendered nature of the response to the illness, both in terms of the desire for a Filipino bride and all that such a

relationship promised, as well as the resort to violence in an attempt to maintain the relationship when it began to fail. There is little in the sentencing comments which reflect the escalation of violence by JS against the young woman despite independent evidence of that violence, or the fact that one week before the killing the victim had sought an apprehended domestic violence order from the court. She also attended the local police station for assistance. Police had escorted her to the house so she could retrieve some belongings.

According to the psychiatric assessments, the violence itself arose in an attempt to maintain the 'security' offered by the relationship. Yet that promise of security was one which was constructed within the parameters of what introduction agencies offer, specifically, fantasised versions of Filipino women as 'ideal marriage partners'. It is clear that JS accepted the constructed image of Filipino women. Police noted in their statement that the perpetrator had remarked, 'So much for Filipino women being faithful and looking after you'. Indeed, the day before the murder of the young woman, JS was already making arrangements through an introduction agency for another 'Filipino bride'.

On the one hand we can categorise JS as suffering from a mental illness. Yet the satisfaction of the 'immense emotional needs' of JS is precisely the promise which the introduction agencies make to all men. There is a promise of security, love and intimacy with a younger woman who will not be too particular about the age, appearance or faults of the prospective man.⁹

The second case involved a 34 year old Filipino woman who was strangled to death by her 40 year old ex-husband. The perpetrator ('CS') pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to a minimum sentence of 5.5 years. CS had gone to the Philippines following a television program which implied that there were young attractive Filipino women ready to marry Australian men. CS met his future wife within 3 days of arrival and was married within a matter of weeks. The couple had a child and then were separated and later divorced. The husband had custody of the child after the divorce.

What is of particular interest is the way in which the search for the 'Filipino wife' became a mitigating factor in the sentencing process. The Filipino woman was presented as 'corrupt' and only interested in securing money for her family and a 'passport' to Australia. On the other hand, the perpetrator was presented as being 'unsophisticated and naive' to believe that he could find a suitable marriage partner in the way that he attempted. CS is recast as the victim in several respects. He is seen as a victim of the earlier circumstances of his life as a child in a large immigrant family, as a victim of the fairly 'stereotypical' view of marriage which he held, and, finally, as a victim of the manipulations of the Filipino woman he had married. Vincent J commented, '[y]our wife, you claim, had been more interested in securing money for her apparently impoverished family and a passport to this country than she was in the development and maintenance of a marital relationship with you. This may well be the case' (*R v Schembri* at 50).

Importantly, CS also recasts himself as victim. In a police record of interview he stated:

[the] first five months, couldn't ask for a better woman in the whole world. And I thought my dreams came true. I had found the ideal woman. After the five months were up, you know, she was demanding things. Well, she never had nothing over there in the way of electrical goods or cars or nothing. She just changed. She wanted things that I couldn't give her... I was living in a caravan park first of all and I tried to explain to her over there what a caravan looks like. When she came over and saw the

⁹ The other administrative and legal aspect to this case is the issue of how JS could so easily marry a 15 year old girl and bring her back to Australia, given his previous psychiatric history, his earlier failed marriage, an outstanding domestic violence order by his previous wife, and the removal of his two children by the authorities.

caravan, it was a twenty eight foot van, very big... she just took one look and didn't want to live in there...

The Court accepted and reinforced the same interpretation of motives. Vincent J stated

I have no reason to doubt that you tried your best to make this unlikely alliance work, but viewed objectively, and with the clarity of hindsight, the barriers between you appear to have been insurmountable. You wanted to establish for yourself what might be regarded as a stereotypical relationship with your wife and family. She, it would appear, grasped at the opportunity of securing freedom in a new country (*R v Schembri* at 51).

In both the *Sokol* and *Schembri* cases, violence against women becomes a way of enforcing compliance with what is, in the end, a masculine construction about appropriate female behaviour. In these cases the image of women is overladen with racialised and sexualised fantasies about Filipino women as perfect partners. The women who are murdered are recast as being complicit in their own demise when they fail to fulfil the requirements of male fantasy. A new racialised and sexualised image then emerges: Filipino women are seen as permissive and grasping 'gold diggers'. The men are re-invented as doubly victimised because they are naive or unstable enough to believe in the possibility of fulfilling their desires through these marriages, and because they are the victims of women who are able to manipulate their desire.

Wallace (1994:106-109) in her study of homicide discusses some of the reasons men kill women with whom they have been in a relationship. These include the construction of 'appropriate' relationships between men and women; men's expectations of exclusivity and control over their partners, and a failure to cope with separation. Ultimately, all of these 'reasons' rest on assumptions of male power. The results of our research show that power is also connected with fantasised images of women which are also fundamentally racialised, and that these racialised images are directly connected to increased vulnerability to violence.

Filipino women (and 'Asian' women more generally) are created as the apotheosis of male desire, as 'perfect partners'. The extent and the intensity of the violence perpetrated against them by non-Filipino men needs to be understood within this context. The violence can be understood at one level as male violence against women. However, it is also mediated through our understandings of the relationship between first world men, what some first world men understand to be *Filipino* women and by implication what some first world men understand as their own masculinity.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated in this analysis how racialised femininities and particular understandings of masculine desire are implicated in creating the conditions within which Filipino women in Australia become vulnerable to violence. As illustrated by our focus on the trade for sex and marriage promoted through the Internet and underpinned by a particular political economy, some Filipino women are traded as commodities. The women are also *represented* as, and indeed *seen* as commodities. The relationship in this sense is emblematic of complete power - the power to buy and sell commodities in the marketplace. There is also a sense in which the relationships are represented as being about saving and helping women from 'poor' countries.¹⁰ The corollary to this assistance is that the women should be held

¹⁰ This view was also succinctly captured by a number of young Australian men in Denis Rorty's film *The Good Woman of Bangkok*. They justified their participation in the sex trade by arguing that they were helping the

eternally grateful - how appalling then that these women should 'use' Australian men 'to get a passport'. Such representations hark back to, and in part derive their meaning from, colonial relations and their neo and post colonial equivalents. Such accounts provide no apparent recognition that these men, by an accident of birth, 'occupy a particular location in the contemporary world as male members of a capitalist metropolis, the economically dominant society' (Robinson 1996: 55). In other words, there is no appreciation of the class dynamic which enables first world men to exercise the economic power of 'choosing' a woman from a third world country in the first instance.

Through analysing representations of Asian and Filipino women on the Internet, we have discussed the construction of *desire* in terms of perfect partners for marriage and sex. These images have a powerful position within masculine fantasies about 'exotic' women. Indeed, one Internet site for acquiring women is called '*Fantasy Islands*'. However, the other side in this dichotomy is the *fear* of the exotic 'Other'. The parameters of that fear are made explicit in the stereotypical construction of Filipino women in Australia as manipulative and exploitative of (first world) men's emotions and good natures. How else could we explain the extraordinary construction of women in cases like *Sokol* and *Schembri*, cases which, once deconstructed, defy rationality? A young woman married at 15 years of age, subjected to abuse and killed within two years by a man more than twice her age is presented as the controlling partner in the relationship. Another woman, separated because of abuse, threatened, forced to leave her child behind and then strangled is represented as seeking 'the good life' and using her husband to gain entry to 'West'.

The violence we have analysed is not 'cultural' conflict but rather arises from a construction of the Other, within specific gendered and racialised contexts, which increases the likelihood of violence. Underpinning the symbolic representations of Filipino women are particular material conditions which structure the relationship between third world women and first world men, and the particular patterns and types of migration which emerge. The concept of 'cultural conflict' would indeed be a blunt instrument for understanding the complex interweaving of the symbolic and material worlds surrounding the issue of violence against specific groups of immigrant women. In summary, the high homicide victimisation rates for Filipino women in Australia need to be understood within the broad political economy of first world/third world relations; the gendered nature of those economic relations and migration patterns which emerge; the gendered nature of interpersonal violence; and, finally, the dynamic and changing images of culture which are constructed around gender and 'race'.

women. 'I feel sorry for them because they have to resort to what they do... It helps them, it's not so wrong if it helps them'.

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