

# RESUMING THE “SKILLED WORKER” IDENTITY:

## The Filipinas’ Strategies in Labor Market Participation in Melbourne, Australia

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### Abstract

Through the lens of culture intersecting with gender, race and class, this monograph looks at the reconfiguration of skilled worker identity of 20 Philippines-born women who have immigrated to Australia. Through interviews and analyses of their lived experiences, it attempts to comprehend the complexity of their unemployment, from their encounter with the labor market, to their attempts in breaking into the workforce. It contextualizes the institutional disadvantages and discrimination befalling migrant women of non-English speaking background, as well as housework and mothering responsibilities they continue to resist at home. The complex interaction of the women’s higher education, English language proficiency, their sense of purpose and other personal resources—all assisted in reframing their subordinated identity, and recapturing their careers. The women risked taking jobs lower than their qualifications, took further studies, went through rigorous accreditation, and acquired local experience, as stepping stones to regain their professions and subsequently their middle-class status. Their journey, however, is not without severe difficulties. By using agency and privilege, this monograph argues that the women epitomized the classical modernist ideology of the self within a capitalist system. They were aware of structural disadvantages and discriminatory practices, but they found ways of working within these limitations, which results to masking the hardships they endured. The study debunks the effectiveness of the notion that individual’s capacity over the state “to enterprise themselves” is a success strategy.

### Keywords

career reconstitution, citizenship rights, Filipina immigrants, intersectionality, occupational mobility, skilled migration

### About the Author

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My first rotation was in the hospital then the next was in a geriatric unit in [name of suburb]. I didn't have a car then, we [family] had only one car. Which means I had to take several buses to get to my job, then take a train and walk. So the travel time was difficult. It was made more difficult because my child was sickly. By that time he was in childcare, he was picking up all the viruses. And then common among babies and toddlers especially male toddlers, he'd get an infection. So I'd be up all night. I'd take a sick leave, otherwise Bruce [my husband] would. But usually when I go to work, I was awake all night. Sometimes I would throw up at work. It's too much caffeine. I didn't know how I survived that period but I did.

- Interview with Susan

## I. INTRODUCTION

Skilled migration is deeply gendered, although skilled migrants tend to be discussed as 'non-gendered beings who do not form part of a household' (Yeoh and Willis). The discourse is slanted towards men and is almost always associated with work and career paths (Kofman and Raghuram, "Gender and Skilled Migrants") which, according to Kofman, renders skilled women invisible ("The Invisibility of Skilled Female Migrants"). She argues that the literature that dominates the field insufficiently attends to the diversity of gendered circuits and fails to explore class. By panning the lens to skilled migrant women and their shifting positions and identities, Kofman contends that new understandings of class and its intersection with race and gender can be achieved ("Gendered Global Migrations").

This monograph is part of a qualitative study, undertaken for my PhD. It aims to demonstrate the identity reconfigurations of skilled migrant women. It also offers a modest response to Kofman's challenge to make women visible in the skilled migration discourse. In doing so, I have chosen Filipina immigrants as the focus of this study for two reasons.

First, the Philippines epitomizes large-scale labor movements over the past 30 years. As a migrant labor supplier, it is the largest in Asia (International Labour Organization; Wickramasekera; Waddington) and the second largest in the world next to Mexico (Philip, Abela and Kuptsch; Carlos). It is also the largest exporter of government-sponsored labor within the Asian region (Tyner, "Asian Labor Recruitment" 333). Its government administrations, starting from then-dictator Ferdinand Marcos, have been deploying workers abroad as a major strategy to resuscitate its plummeting economy and keep it afloat. The feminization of Philippine migration in the last 30 years sealed its success, although it also raised the red flag on a myriad of complex issues from human rights and security at the global level to the disintegration of families at the domestic level. But what is

certain is that Filipino migration and remittances are interconnected in liquefying the country’s economy. In 2010, the Philippines ranked fourth in the world’s top 10 remittance recipients with \$21.3 billion cash transmission, representing 12% of its GDP (The World Bank).

Second, despite the extraordinary global reach of Filipino migration, there has been a lack of scholarship on Filipino skilled or professional migrant women published from the homeland or beyond. It could be because the majority of Filipinas working overseas are low-waged laborers, particularly domestic workers; and second, because they leave as ‘marriage migrants,’ or, as they are more commonly known and thought of in Australia, ‘mail order brides.’ Most studies reveal that despite the high educational qualifications of these low-waged workers, they experience meagre occupational mobility after migration. The exceptions here are the nurses. For instance, they enter Canada as caregivers as a stepping-stone to gain residency and then practice their nursing profession once their qualifications have been affirmed (see for instance, Pratt, “From Registered Nurse to Registered Nanny”). Roces notes that those who move as either spouse or fiancé quickly become mothers, workers and citizens in the new context, yet these identity dimensions are rarely surveyed. Instead, they are pigeonholed as brides in studies, even after many years of settlement in the destination country and despite their high levels of education and skills prior to migration. What’s more, these main narratives often obscure the movements of the “other” skilled Filipina migrants. By “skilled migrant,” I refer to those who are either university degree holders prior to immigration or international tertiary-level students who, upon completion of their degrees, chose not to return to the Philippines. Both would land white-collar jobs in Australia. Their entry may not necessarily be assisted by a skilled visa, but could be through family reunification, studies, marriage or a combination of any two or more of these.

Migration expert James Jupp observes that from the mid-1980s, the Australian Federal Government’s skilled migration agenda marked a new wave of entry by highly skilled Asian migrants (214). Following this, from 2004 the majority of Filipino entrants had migrated under the skilled migration stream. The Philippines was the ninth main source of skilled immigrants to Australia in 2007–08 and seventh in 2008–09, and is one of the top three suppliers of nurses (Australian Government 43). Skilled visa holders represent 70% of the 171,233 Philippine-born settlers according to the latest 2011 Census (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). Of the total number, 62.3% are women and 37.7% are men. By mid-2014, there were 225,100 Australians born in the Philippines representing the fifth highest country of birth (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). This women-led trend replicates not just the bride period but also the skilled migration era encompassing the 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 censuses. Their

unemployment rate was 3.7% in 2006, which is significantly lower than the national rate of 5%. What seems disturbing is the proportion of 'not in labor force'<sup>1</sup> of 26% cohorts of which 21% were women.<sup>2</sup>

These global and Australia-specific trends astounded me since I started my PhD in 2005, and continued to be abreast with the phenomena years after. I was interested in the skilled migrant Filipinas, as they are underrepresented in studies during both the bride and skilled migration eras. Initially, I was drawn to examine the forms of discrimination these women might encounter in the workplace. Studies such as those by Hawthorne ("The Globalisation of the Nursing Workforce"); Alcorso ("Non-English Speaking Background"); and Ho and Alcorso ("Migrants and Employment") reveal that Asian women continue to endure prejudices in Australian workplaces on the basis of race and gender even in the face of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity policies and extensive campaigns for multicultural tolerance.

Given the popular and academic recognition of the stigma attached to mail-order brides, (see for instance the works of Rocés; Saroca; and Robinson). I was curious about the relationship between this stigma and discrimination and wondered to what extent experiences of discrimination might have been caused by or exacerbated by the already maligned identity of these women. With the onset of fieldwork however, it became immediately apparent that women's post-migration experiences involved far more complex adjustments to their changed domestic circumstances, in addition to the problems of finding work and managing forms of discrimination. I realized that their multi-faceted identity would be disturbed and reconfigured by interlocking tensions.

While studies on Filipino immigration to Australia have focused predominantly on Filipino women in mixed marriages and aspects of the mail-order bride phenomena over the past two decades, this study focuses on the lived experiences of professional middle-class Filipino women immigrants. Women who were in white-collar jobs were recruited. There was no intention to exclude those who migrated as 'mail-order brides' but it turned out that none of the informants migrated to marry a resident in Australia through the catalogue-based penpal system. They had migrated in accordance with different immigration criteria. The subject of mail-order brides has been dealt with in excellent studies by Rocés ("Sisterhood is Local"; "Kapit sa Patalim"; "Filipino Brides in Central Queensland"), Saroca ("Filipino Women, Migration, and Violence in Australia"; "Representing Rosalina and Annabel"), Cahill (*Intermarriages in International Contexts*), Cunneen and Stubbs ("Gender, Race and International Relations"), and Jackson and Flores (*No Filipinos in Manila*). It is clear from their research that the women who migrate in order to marry are often motivated by similar aspirations (Rocés) to those

in my study. They are also frequently highly qualified (Cahill, *Intermarriages in International Contexts* 81; Cunneen and Stubbs, "Gender, Race and International Relations" 16–17) and come with skills that are identified as needed by the Department of Immigration. They, too, experience many of the same problems at a personal level and in gaining employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience. But precisely because this image of the Filipina migrant as a 'mail-order bride' and the stigmatized caricatures that accompany it, I considered it important to emphasize that not only were these images reductionist and distorted, but they obscured the fact that the majority of Filipinas migrate under different regimes of entry.

The focus of this monograph is not the structural changes per se following reflexive modernization and its promise of inclusiveness. Rather, it emphasizes the informants' identity ruptures and rebuilding through their embodied interaction with an imagined 'egalitarian' Australia. Within the Foucauldian tradition, scholars Rose and Miller ("Political Power Beyond the State") maintain that the state should not be perceived as the most dominant power player capable of mandating its members' futures, but that individuals can fulfil their personal goals through their active exercise of citizenship rights, informed choices and personal motivations. To what extent shall well-informed and motivated careered immigrant women 'enterprise themselves' (to borrow Rose and Miller's term) given the existing opportunities and equality rights, however flawed these may be in a given milieu?

A problem with too much emphasis on agency within the framework of modernism is that it privileges the *internal* identity (choices, values, knowledge, expertise) over the embodied identity. Feminism argues that too often it is the identity's corporal component that is represented and objectified in terms of gender, sex, race and class (Budgeon, "Identity as an Embodied Event"). The informants' brown-ness, small-ness, and other overt qualities of their Asian-ness as well as specific signifiers of Filipino femininity and stereotypes (mail-order bride, particularly) that embed sexism are therefore taken into consideration in the analysis of identity and agency.

All informants in this monograph were highly qualified women who held jobs directly relevant to their academic backgrounds, professional training, and career aspirations prior to coming to Australia. During the course of their immigration, some changed their career trajectories and priorities to suit their shifting familial responsibilities or to adjust to requirements imposed by the Australian labor market. Many were faced with underemployment. Most encountered unexpected difficulties in having their qualifications accredited or recognized. Difficulties in entering the labor market meant that many of the informants experienced



'invisible underemployment' (Flatau, Petridis and Wood). It is 'invisible' because, immigrants suffer from *mismatch underemployment* holding jobs that are lower than their educational qualifications and training, which can lead to *relative pay deprivation* (Flatau, Petridis and Wood x-xii). It also applies to *low employment income* in which immigrants do not receive enough income to sustain their family's needs, a condition that is distinct from the first two definitions. This monograph explores the experience of mismatched underemployment over the short and long-term.

My PhD project shows how the informants reconfigured their domestic relationships, responsibilities and identities within the realm of childcare and housework division. The continuing negotiation in revising domestic roles was necessary for them to develop their careers. Due to space limits, this monograph focuses mainly on the informants' encounter with the labor market and their identity reconfiguration as skilled migrant workers. The ways in which they were able to gain access to and progress in their careers, and how they were able to negotiate institutional and social barriers are examined here. Much of these take place at the policy level, employment hiring and promotion processes, and day-to-day interaction with co-workers.

The focus here therefore is the skilled Filipina migrants who, prior to migration were middle-class and have aspired to re-establish this class identity in Australia. My study revealed that their migration were associated with searching for or actualizing an envisaged alternative lifestyle, and with improving the quality of their lives away from their homeland which they thought of as suffering perennial economic turmoil because of massive corruption in government, foreign debt, and subsequent social unrest. For those who find some cultural practices in the Philippines repressive, for instance in the aspect of getting married in their 20's, migration was their approach to both resisting financial insecurity and exploring greater autonomy. Their migration was facilitated by marriage and reuniting with family members who came prior, but these were not the only reasons for their movement. They would like to try living their professional identity in a new context, and combine this with the improved quality of life. They capitalized on their social assets, individual agency and power in re-establishing their middleclass identity (Limpangog, "Migration as a Strategy").

The literature on feminization of migration has inquired on the unprecedented movements of female migrants. Part of this phenomenon that is well studied is the exceptional movements of Filipino women. Yet, I observe that, with the exception of nurses, the scholarship on Filipino skilled or professional migrant women has been neglected. It could be because the majority of Filipinas working in foreign destinations are low-waged laborers, especially deployed in the domestic and care

work. The other important stream of Filipina departures are those who would be marriage migrants, or colloquially known as ‘mail-order-bride’ in Australia. I concur with Roces that even when they have originally moved as brides, these Filipino women would quickly become citizens and active participants in their respective communities, professions and the larger society. They would put to use their high levels of education, good English language abilities, and paid work experience prior to migration. Still, they would experience, as this monograph confers, meager occupational mobility. Because Filipino migrant women are always pigeonholed in these identities, the narratives of low-waged workers and brides often obscure the movements of the *other* skilled Filipina migrants. By ‘skilled migrant,’ I refer to those who are either university degree holders prior to immigration or international tertiary-level students who, upon completion of their degrees, chose not to return to the Philippines. Both would land white-collar jobs in Australia. Their entry may not necessarily be assisted by a skilled visa, but could be through family reunification, studies, marriage or a combination of any two or more of these.

While the focus is on professional and middle-class female migrants, the findings resonate with existing studies that emphasize the importance of women’s highly feminized roles embedded in household, family and kin relations, which are shared across class positions. Kofman and Raghuram are critical of the exclusion of the ‘familial relations and wider social networks’ (“Gender and Skilled Migrants” 151) in studies of male-oriented skilled migration. These categories are traditionally confined to studies of the working class. The preponderance of studies on the lesser-skilled migrant women have amplified the transportation of social reproduction via their feminized roles as mothers, wives, caregivers and homemakers (Ehrenreich; Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*; Sassen, “The Feminization of Survival”; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila). By incorporating women into skilled migration, they suggest that analysis should consider the multiple sites and realms of reproductive labor (Kofman and Raghuram, “Gender and Global Labour Migrations”). This study moves beyond locating the identity discourse solely in the space of domesticity, giving weight also to the realms of paid work and career. The linkage between ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres is recognized in this study as crucial in shaping not just decisions to migrate, but in re-negotiating gendered relationships in the new country (Kofman et al.).

On the whole, the informants depended more on their individual-level capacities and goals rather than the state or any other macro structural forces in order to reacquire the skilled professional middle-class status they had prior to migration. Within the notion of neoliberalism, Rose explains that the power of the subject to make choices over the state is enhanced (“Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies”). They are “active individuals seeking to ‘enterprise themselves,’ to



maximize their quality of life through acts of choice, according their life a meaning and value to the extent that it can be rationalized as the outcome of choices made or choices to be made" (158). This is not to say that the informants were oblivious to the institutional-level race and gender discriminations that hampered their career goals, but that they dealt with these barriers, in the words of Rose, in a more deliberate "modernist" approach as "creatures of freedom, liberty and autonomy" (158).

The slim but growing studies on skilled and middle-class female immigrants in Australia (Lee; Ho, "Migration as Feminisation?"; Chiang) reveal the women's domestic responsibilities and thus gender inequality as mainly the reason for their not joining the labor market or reconstituting their careers. Yet, a similar strand of argument found in some studies show race and gender discrimination in the labor market as equally important culprits (Alcorso, "Non-English Speaking Background"; Vasta). This study argues that understanding the complexity of career disadvantages to these women require due attention to the cultural values and practices entrenched in women's identity and the institution, as well as the junctions of gender and race in these areas. Large-scale studies on Australian families (Bittman; Baxter) confirm that while men's participation in housework is increasing, women's housework has not really decreased, suffice it to say that the struggle for career reconstitution is felt by a great majority of Australian women. But by studying a particular cohort, in this case, Filipina immigrants, and by analyzing the various aspects of their domestic and private lives through in-depth interviews, I demonstrate the importance of culture as an important factor for consideration. I thus concur with Ho regarding the importance of situating the analysis on the reconfiguration of identities and values of these women, and from their lived experience, that we are able to comprehend the complexity of their underemployment. By culture, I refer to the socially constructed beliefs, customs and practices that are embraced and promoted in order to attain unity within a milieu. While the goal of culture is the maintenance of unity and identity, and while it is often understood as constructed consensually by its members, this is not always the case. Culture is an ideal that is also used to police its members, and subsequently reward or punish them.

## THE RESEARCH AIMS, INFORMANTS AND METHODS

It is crucial to examine the intersectional challenges confronting women in both the private and public domains as they re-establish and advance their careers. This paper contributes to the theoretical project of unpacking the nuances of gendered, racialized and classed dis/advantages that position professional immigrant women in a complex hierarchy of power in private and public domains. This aspect of women and migration is eclipsed in mainstream discourses on gender and

migration. The women’s lives, as presented here, point to the political challenges that remain in the areas of social inclusion and workplace equality in Australia. I argue that complex social and structural barriers distress even those women who have sufficient human capital, ample personal resources, and a privileged social status prior to migration, and as such unveils some of the deceptions in both the state’s liberalism as well as in migrants’ so called “success stories.”

This monograph draws on and contributes to the extensive work on how gender identities are reconfigured within the milieu of migration. The focus here on skilled female Filipino immigrants affirms research that demonstrates the destabilizing impacts of migration combined with opportunities to question oppressive traditions, racist stereotypes and gendered relations. These processes both enable and compel processes of identity reconfiguration. ‘Identity’ here is deployed in association with self-definition that conflates with being a woman, Filipino, skilled worker, mother and wife. I view the women’s diverse identities in terms of their unique individual contexts and positions, their cultural templates, and how these are dislocated, asserted and reconfigured in the migration context.

To pursue these aims, I interviewed 20 Filipina immigrants between 2006 and 2007 in Melbourne, Australia. I recruited them through personal invites during Filipino associations’ meetings. Using a snowballing approach, the participants introduced me to their friends and family as a means to recruiting subsequent participants. Thus it is not surprising that some informants are each other’s kin, and yet no two stories are the same owing to their unique migration contexts. I used a semi-structured questionnaire during the tape-recorded interviews that altogether produced about 300 pages of verbatim narratives. To preserve the informants’ privacy, I use pseudonyms.

I use the women’s narratives as the primary source for analyzing individual as well as collective identities. Narratives are, in the words of Yuval-Davis, “stories people tell themselves and others about who they are and who they are not, as well as who and how they would like to/should be” (266). She argues that narratives can be verbal and non-verbal (through practices). In analyzing the women’s stories, I used the following feminist theories of identity and intersectionality.

### **IDENTITY, CULTURAL BOUNDED-NESS AND DISRUPTIONS**

Identity has been a major concern within the social sciences for several decades but remains problematic in many respects. Feminist contributions to migration scholarship have historically concentrated on patterns of migrants’ behavior rather than on their identities (Silvey). Recent feminist thinkers have suggested that identity and its transformations reveal much about the intersection of the

subject with the social, producing important knowledge about changes to both. For example, Silvey argues that the ‘constructed nature of identities, and the ongoing nature of this process’ is critical to gender and migration studies (9). In this monograph, I examine the migrants’ identity (re)configuration, through and in the context of family, household and work. It seeks to illuminate how cultural, social and political forces mediate skilled Filipina immigrants’ experiences and identities in recapturing and reconfiguring their skilled or professional work identities. This is thus the focus of intersectionality analysis.

Identity as strategic and positional is at the heart of cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s posting in his seminal article “Who Needs Identity?” He claims that identities “are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation” (17). In a similar vein, the sociologist Avtar Brah suggests that identity is constituted through the interaction of one’s experience, social relation and subjectivity. “Identities are inscribed through experiences culturally constructed in social relations. Subjectivity—the site of processes of making sense of our relation to the world—is the modality in which the precarious and contradictory nature of the subject-in-process is signified or *experienced* as identity” (123).

Therefore, identities are context-specific, produced through the interaction of freely chosen, adapted, as well as externally imposed aspects of the self. I make use of this definition in reflecting upon Filipinas’ lived experiences and subjectivities, and how these in return have influenced the reconfiguration of their identities as immigrants to Australia.

Although people’s multiple identities altogether comprise a group identity, the latter’s meaning is irreducible to all its parts. In the same way, the precise locality of personal identities as these are experienced and performed cannot be entirely encapsulated into the group’s social processes according to Brah. This implies that there is always a “remainder” to the individual known only to herself (Knowles). I thus endeavor to understand the women’s individual and collective identities primarily through their own articulations of their lived experiences, as they make sense of their worlds and themselves within those predicaments. Moreover, I maintain that these experiences and perceptions are constituted by representations of these women in the external world. Social structures govern and recognize them in particular ways and in turn they internalize even as they resist the gaze that produces and stereotypes them.

Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler emphasize that women’s “images” and “imaginings” are just as important as their “situated” knowledge (589). Such imaginings are significant in surmounting subordinated subjectivities such as those for instance of black women’s bodies in a white society (Davies), and those who struggle from a colonial past (Dunn). The process of becoming through an imaginative construction of identity facilitates the integration of the self—from one that is presumably oppressed, demeaned or excluded to one that is self-directed and actively engaging as equal with others. Self-determination fosters hope, inspiration and optimism in the face of complicated deterrents, including those that are clearly beyond one’s capacity to change (Renegar and Sowards). As a mode of contradiction, it is through individual agency that projective imaginings disrupt traditional identities and stereotypes so that the self can engage with itself in new and diverse ways (Renegar and Sowards 9). Skilled Filipino migrants transcend barriers inherent to both paid work and family roles through revised self-images, and imaginings of themselves and their social situations. The ascription of identity transformation to a re-imagined future is valuable for migrants who occupy a middle-class status in their originating country and aspire to reconstitute this status in Australia. Yet, despite their career reestablishment and ensuing bargaining power, domestic and carework largely remain the informants’ charge. The ideology of Filipino femininity can be repressive when it extols the domesticated, dutiful and sacrificial ideal woman who acts primarily *for the sake of the family*. (See for instance Barber; Pratt, “From Registered Nurse to Registered Nanny”; Parreñas, “The Gender Paradox in Transnational Families”; Tacoli; Lauby and Stark). Such ideologies and their ensuing practices encounter new forms of contestation as skilled migrant women exert efforts to advance their careers without the help of the nannies and maids they enjoyed in the homeland. An equally important site of identity transformation is the workplace. Dealing with institutional barriers to access the labor market and discrimination within the workplace, while also aspiring to regain their previous middle-class status, is a significant focus of this study.

I aim to demonstrate the dynamism of the women’s identities by exploring their narratives and analyzing their accounts of their experiences of the institutions, structures and networks through which they are represented and their lives negotiated. The conjunctures of race, gender and class frame their positionalities in a new social context as do their identities and performances as mothers, wives, kin and professionals. I pay particular attention to the women’s identity and experience as a professional, and how this is influenced by the vectors of being a mother, as well as the structural situation of labor market in Australia. Although these are distinct categories, they are not disconnected from each other. Silvey maintains that by emphasizing identity and subjectivity, feminist researches are able to explore “the migrants’ views of themselves, their possibilities, and their proper places operate in conjunction with labor markets, regional wage differentials and legal and juridical

regulations to produce particular migration patterns, meanings and experiences” (10). For while the construction of identity takes place within the individual, external structures collaborate in distorting, suppressing and dislocating it, but might simultaneously assist in empowering it. The intersectionality of gender, race and class, therefore provides a complex but highly fruitful approach to understanding migrants’ identity disruption, reconfiguration and re-assertion.

### **INTERSECTIONALITY APPROACHES IN LOCATING WOMEN’S IDENTITIES**

Since the 1980s, Western feminist theorizing has disrupted those tendencies that solidify notions of identity and social location around one or two social traits, such as gender and ethnicity. Calling attention to multiple identity categories and multiple subject positions, feminism has suggested that it is crucial to analyze the intersecting forces of gender, race, ethnicity and class. That is, to explore how such dimensions of inequality operate in and through each other to constitute the lived experiences and structural locations of women and others. Feminist theorists and social researchers have adopted “intersectionality” as a concept that more precisely conveys the constellation of forces regulating the social lives of the marginal and oppressed, than those that reduce the complexity of everyday life to a single analytic category (P. H. Collins). “Intersectionality” thus refers to “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis 68). Following early critiques of the universal category “woman” to adequately capture the diversity of locations and experiences of women, and expanding upon the Combahee River Collective’s call for feminism to adopt analysis and practice based on the concept of “simultaneously interlocking oppressions,” it is now unusual to encounter any feminist work that does not acknowledge “the effects of race, class, and gender on women’s identities, experiences, and struggles for empowerment” (Davis 71–73).

*Intersectionality* is adopted in this monograph to interpret the ways in which the constellation of gender, race/ethnicity and class constitute and govern migrant women’s lived experiences, social relations and identities as professionals and skilled workers. Within the Australian multicultural terrain, feminist scholars in the 1990s (see for instance the collection of essays in Bottomley, de Lepervanche and Martin; Kalantzis) suggest that notwithstanding the complexity involved in deploying it empirically, intersectionality is indispensable if research is to encapsulate the overlapping encounters of gender, race and class and how they shape (marginalized) women’s multiple subjectivities and identities. Two decades later, the same complexity continues to trouble attempts to apprehend the multiple discriminations and violence experienced by women in the margins especially indigenous women (Marchetti), those categorized as ethnic minorities (Syed) and



refugees (Rees). This complexity remains even as the notion of intersectionality has moved from the triple burden approach (emphasizing that the addition of each category intensifies the vulnerability, subordination and marginalization of women), to analyses of how race, class and gender interact in women’s lives to produce and transform power relations (Davis 71).

Even though I focus here on women who are not explicitly classified as oppressed or marginalized, and who could not be summed up as such, intersectionality still speaks cogently to the production and transformation of power relations experienced in their everyday lives. The skilled Filipino immigrant women are neither in the center nor in the fringes of society. They are variously privileged in relation to class but marginalized in terms of their gender, race, ethnicity and their immigrant status. Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue that the complexity of migrants’ gender processes cannot be fully understood independent of its intermingling with class and ethnicity. Intersectionality enables analysis of how gender is racialized, how race and ethnicity are gendered, and how these are linked to class. I also use human capital theory as a way of situating the women within the structural landscape of labor market, and in understanding their ways in recapturing their careers.

While intersectionality has been one of the most interesting and enduring concepts of a new feminist theorizing and practice, its expanse and its limitations are currently the focus of broad and intense discussion among feminists globally. In almost every academic journal or course of study that deals with women, gender and/or feminism, intersectionality, its promise, its application, new interpretations and newfound limitations with it will be found. As Davis suggests, some of the contests are concerned with its breadth. “It is not at all clear whether intersectionality should be limited to understanding individual experiences, to theorizing identity, or whether it should be taken as a property of social structures and cultural discourses” (68). As this work finds intersectionality particularly useful for illuminating the lived experiences of the informants, attention must be directed to the range of approaches to be found.

It is important to acknowledge that women’s slowed access to employment in Australia is affected first and foremost by their gendered care work. This is particularly more pronounced to those with young children, and made more difficult to those who have immigrated. On another level, it is equally important to situate the skilled migrant women in the broader landscape of labor market, which is beyond the individual woman’s power to change. Yet informants’ utilized their personal resources, and communication and negotiation capabilities in order to positively deal with the structural forces. The next two subsections therefore



provide a bird’s eye view of their meso and macro environments and how these conditions influence their status and trajectories as skilled workers.

### THE MESO STORY: HOUSEWORK AND MOTHERING RESPONSIBILITIES

Australia subscribed to *family wage* ideology that rested on the fulltime male breadwinner/fulltime female caregiver model per the 1907 Harvester judgment. It is similar to the gender complementarity in the Philippines, but like in many first world countries where women’s rights were advocated, this would be replaced with a modified breadwinner model where men continue to be the main earner, and women shuttle between part-time employment and fulltime home making. Women got some respite in the 1980s with the introduction of caregiving institutions, but would face new housework battles, when they won equality in labor market, at least in law (Leahy). To ease women’s burden, men have been encouraged to increase their housework and care work participation, especially with the outset of family-life work balance policy. Yet, changes are largely rhetoric only.

For instance, based on large-scale studies, it was found out that women in the US and Australia decrease their participation in the housework when they earn an income as much as their husbands (Bittman et al., “When does gender”). Yet what is more striking is women’s income and subsequent reduction in housework did not result to men’s significant increase in housework participation in both countries. Instead, women purchased services, or work quality is simply reduced if not undone (Bittman et al., “When does gender”).

Baxter’s (“Patterns of Change”) research findings point to the unlinked relationship between women’s reduced time and men’s increased time in housework (particularly meal preparation). These instead showed that technological devices and women’s likelihood to rely on easier and less time-consuming ways to get things done such as using store-bought sauce and take-away meals, do reduce their housework. Another startling finding in Bittman and his colleagues’ study is that Australian women whose incomes exceed their husbands’ were found to even increase their housework, which the authors aptly describe as “gender deviance.” They suggest that norms of gender hierarchy and prestige might have been too strong to be reversed despite women’s increased economic power (209).

In my study (Limpangog “Gender Equality in Housework”), I found that Filipino women were able to slowly, but with a certain degree of difficulty, influence their husbands to increase their housework. Most informants had maids prior to migration, and thus were spared from severe gender-based division of labor at home back then. After immigration, they had to remind, mentor and negotiate *politely*

with their spouses, which means without losing one’s cool or raising one’s voice or avoiding verbal confrontation. I reckon they behaved according to the ethos of *pakikisama* (smooth interpersonal relationship) which they were accustomed to in the Philippines, but also within the gendered identity of the Madonna, which I describe below. Additionally, patriarchy within the household dictates that women will always defer to the man as domestic leader. Several of my informants succeeded in eliciting or increasing their husband’s participation in housework in the long run. But because of men’s various degrees of resistance, reconfiguring gender in housework was a challenge.

The role of being a mother, however, was the bigger challenge in my informants’ gender relations at home. Many delayed applying for work, or chose one that suited their juggling between family and paid work, and were likely to run back home or take a leave when a child becomes unwell. Several informants were willing to turn over their carework to trusted kin, if available. They insisted that mothering was their most important role, and it should be prioritized. Thus, even with men’s willingness to increase their childcare participation, the women simply did not easily give way. Many tried to replicate their own mothers’ super-mom style. One informant admitted that “I am a martyr” with a hint of satire. It means that they knew that it is quite difficult to do it according to their ideal, but they also feel uneasy about reconfiguring their mothering style. In the Philippines, they closely witnessed their mothers’ success in both spheres—raising a family and professional work – and for many, this was their ideal. However, I believe the informants had not factored in the role that household helpers and extended family play in carework back in the Philippines. What is important to them was their performance of the *ilaw ng tahanan* (light of the home) role ascribed to the Filipino mother. As *ilaw ng tahanan* they felt a strong sense of moral obligation to perform their idealized mothering.

While there is actually a shortage of places in institutional care centers for pre-schoolers in Australia, this did not figure in my informants’ responses. When they felt that they were ready to join the labor market, they would usually recruit a Philippines-born carer or get some help from nearest kin in Australia. In a way, this is thus utilizing their cultural capital. At least three of my informants also benefitted from the extended visits of their kin from the Philippines, who provided carework for their young children. My informants believed that regularly communicating care expectations and the situation of children in the Filipino language is important, and also, they could be assured of meticulous caring ways that these co-nationals provide. In contrast, the institutional care centers and non-Filipino nannies were perceived by my informants as not measuring up to their care expectations, although this perception would change the longer they stayed in Australia. Some eventually sought help outside the Filipino family and community

because of lack of options, and because their children have grown older and did not anymore require one-on-one and meticulous care. Thus, it can be understood that women’s resistance to relegate carework to non-Filipinos was more cultural in nature, as they had to first get acquainted, try and eventually trust the available care options in Australia. I surmise that it was also their way of asserting superiority in terms of care standard against institutionalized care. They viewed the latter as less personal and less meticulous, as for example, one carer is assigned to five or six children. Thus, in a way, care quality may be equated with an assertion of middle-class identity. What I found quite disturbing is women’s immediate decision to drop or reduce paid work because of children, but they did not strongly renegotiate for a shared and equitable parenting habits with their spouses. This is where cultural values and gendered habits intersect, and then produces a very difficult situation for the informants to advancing their careers. According to the informants, their spouses, both Philippines-born and Australia-born helped with childcare, especially with the fun aspects like reading a book, taking the kids out to the park, and playing with them. However, the tedious aspect of carework was often left to the women. My informants’ stories also told multi-tasking habits, especially during peak hours when for instance they were preparing dinner, cleaning the children or assisting them with their assignments, while their husband would watch TV, which then resulted to their own increased stress (Limpangog “Gender Equality in Housework”).

Again, following non-confrontational approaches, the women were able to get their husband’s help but it would usually take a long time of prodding for this to happen (Limpangog, “Gender Equality in Housework”).

Of all the informants, only Kris, a school teacher, had a spouse who took time off completely from paid work in order to look after their son so that she could reconstitute her career. In the case of Sharon, an office executive, her spouse reduced his paid work hours in order to accommodate looking after their son, although I believe it was both circumstantial than a deliberate choice on his part, for he was an IT professional who preferred contractual over regular employment. He said that this arrangement suited more his personality and his personal plan in life which was to manage his own business. Sharon clarified that when their son was sick or when there was a school meeting, she was still the one who would rearrange her day. All these tell that women were reluctant to change their mothering modality. I have argued that this is the role that the women found greatest difficulty in recasting, and thus, profoundly affected their reconstitution of skilled career in Australia. It can be appreciated that the intersection of gender and culture as this relates to mothering and carework is not easily reconfigured, as the women found it central to their identities. They cherished their mothering modality—that is hands on,

face-to-face, meticulous, and proxied only by trusted kin or co-national if ever; and yet they also resented being in a difficult situation, career-wise.

### THE MACRO STORY: UNDEREMPLOYMENT OF NESB IMMIGRANTS

Over the years, there have been two leading theories behind the underemployment of (skilled) immigrants from non-English speaking background (NESB) to Australia. These are the human capital theory and the labor market segmentation theory. Although these theories are distinguishable from each other, they also overlap, as some commentators combine both approaches in an attempt to gain more nuanced analyses. The many disadvantages NESB women encounter in the migration process are structured by gender (Morokvasic) therefore reducing it to a mere variable—as most human capital-oriented studies do—and may not sufficiently elucidate the complexities they negotiate. Gender has steadily gained attention in migration research over the last 30 years, although using it as an analytical tool within an intersectional approach to skilled migration is rather a new enterprise.

The NESB designation locates migrants of non-British origin along with indigenous people, in a class position that Pettman terms “living in the margins.” I contend, however, that the informants are neither in the center nor in the margins but they occupy an intersectional position that is highly nuanced. I maintain that gender and ethnic disadvantages in the Australian labor market have persisted over the decades despite equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policies, and these have led to underemployment of the informants, but usually only on a temporary basis. This monograph argues that being a skilled worker of middle-class status was a core identity that the informants wanted to resume after migration. This is characterized by having to face institutional barriers with resilience, resourcefulness, and self-confidence consistent with the cultural ideologies of “rugged individualism” in Australia. However, this depiction is not viewed singularly in terms of assimilation but also in refusing to assimilate.

In their qualitative study of skilled migrants and so-called employment “gatekeepers” (represented by public sector recruiters and skilled migrant placement officers), Wagner and Childs explore symbolic themes that block migrants’ optimum labor market participation. Three themes—“the lucky country,” “buy Australian,” and the laidback attitude expressed in “no worries” and “she’ll be alright, mate” catchphrases all configure the dominant “Anglo” nationalistic gatekeepers’ mindset. As such, skilled migrants are expected to be grateful to have been accepted in a lucky country and should be happy with whatever (non-skilled and un-related) jobs they are offered. “To buy Australian” means they are expected to acquire formal qualifications in Australian soil, as those obtained overseas can

be disregarded as inferior (57). They are expected to undergo further studies to bridge the qualifications or technology gap, if not take an entirely new study/training program. The labor market is assumed to employ people based on merit, thus the “no worries” and “she’ll be alright” attitudes. For these reasons, the problem of joblessness can be attributed to the individual’s “personal failure, incompetence or laziness, or *any* unwillingness to do any kind of job” and not on the social and institutional barriers (58). These themes reflect how “subterranean racisms” as gatekeepers in formal and informal recognition processes resist acknowledging them.

In my study (“Racialised and Gendered Workplace”), I found that all the informants encountered a combination of structural and everyday discrimination and bullying. Structural in nature, informants especially from the medical and education professions found it very hard to have their qualifications recognized in Australia, and they had to retrain and undergo a rigid accreditation process. Two informants said that their medical practice in the Philippines followed the American model, while those of their Australian counterparts are akin to the British model, understandably since Australia is part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. While the informants had a high degree of fluency in the English language, communication modality that is linked to culture mattered more to them. Their stories tell that sensitivity and shame were paramount in dealing with their colleagues. This means not being too confrontational (*pakikibaka*) in their daily dealing in the workplace and instead they preferred diplomatic ways, although they resort to being confrontational when their basic rights were not respected, or ignore the incident if it did not significantly affect them. This shows that the informants’ cultural identity in terms of communicating and negotiating their ways in the workplace remain attuned to their idealized cultural identity, especially since they told me over and over again *e kasi Pilipino tayo* (that’s because we are Filipinos). However, their stories also tell that they adjusted to becoming more vocal and assertive when the situation called for it. Vilma, Lorena and Maggie claimed that they were outspoken human rights activists in the Philippines before moving to Australia. Although they were assertive against their abusive co-workers, they, too, were reticent at the outset of the abuse. It can be surmised that their Australian-born colleagues did not adjust as much or were less aware of their cultural differences.

I also maintain that culture intensely intersected with gender in the workplace. I refer to the prevailing masculinist attitude in many workplaces where swearing is common, as in the case of Carol, a civil engineer working in male-dominated construction industry. Another example is disfavoring those with an accent, as in the case of Sharon, whose male-dominated clientele prefer native-English speakers. What also figured in the analysis of interviews was that the informants’



abusers were typically senior Anglo men. In some occasions, the mail-order bride (MOB) stigma that was attached to Filipina immigrants to Australia in the 70s and 80s was passed on to the informants, an identity that they detested. I have suggested that the informants rejected the MOB identity for it was not compatible with their Madonna-influenced, middle-class identity in which respectability and socially superior femininity are key features (Limpangog, “Racialised and Gendered Workplace”). The friars responsible for spreading Christianity during the three centuries of Spanish occupation helped produce the dominant Filipino femininity through the figure of the Madonna. Despite its adversities, this idealized image of purity and obedience continues to be propagated by the contemporary Catholic Church in the Philippines and through people’s socialization in both public and private spheres. I have observed that respectability among Filipinas in general today would be defined in terms of morality per the Madonna model, and fortified through education and moral upbringing linked to class. Respectability, morality and femininity enmesh to produce women’s class identities. Several of my informants revealed understanding of the social and structural discriminations against and thus stopped distancing themselves from their MOB co-nationals much later. But it cannot be determined to what degree their initial distancing actually endorsed the stereotyping of the MOB.

The rest of this monograph is divided into the following sections: Section two deals with the historical and socio-political background of Filipino immigration to Australia, and section three focuses on the skilled immigrant women’s disadvantages in the Australian labor force. The fourth section is an analysis of the informants’ strategies in negotiating these disadvantages in order to join the workforce and advance their careers. Through case studies, the fifth section demonstrates the interaction of institutional barriers with domestic ones, and how these reshape the informants’ values, priorities and identities. An analysis of the women’s reconfigured middle-class identities highlighting their career reconstitution through the use of agency and inner resources is the focus of the sixth section. The findings are recapped in the concluding section.

## **II. CONTEXTUALIZING THE PHILIPPINE DIASPORA, AND FILIPINOS’ MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA**

What is often elided in discourses of Filipino global dispersion is how centuries of colonization had prompted it. During the pre-republican era, Filipinos escaped the tyranny of Spanish rule as a pilgrimage to self-identity as a people. They fled the country that would yet metamorphose into a nation to seek out peace and freedom. For instance, the first Filipino sailors and pearl divers came to Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to escape Spanish oppression. San Juan accounts that during the US imperial dominion, “space came under the rule of market capital and commodity



exchange,” as subaltern Filipinos would be transported to its agricultural and then later manufacturing regions (123). Their numbers would swell to a critical mass and mobilize the multi-ethnic US proletariat into a massive labor union in the 30s throughout the 60s. They would take their families and stake new lives elsewhere. The 50s and 60s also saw the significant migration of students facilitated by first world countries’ scholarship offers post World War II. They moved to continue their quest for self-identity and expand their own personal growth.

San Juan argues:

In the context of globalized capitalism today, the Filipino diaspora acquires a distinctive physiognomy and temper. We can exercise a thought-experiment of syncretism and cross-fertilization. The Pinoy diaspora is a fusion of exile and migration: the scattering of a people, not yet a fully synthesized nation, to the ends of the earth, across the planet throughout the 1960s and 1970s, continuing up to the present. We are now a quasi-wandering people, pilgrims or prospectors staking our lives and futures all over the world—in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, North and South America, in Australia and all of Asia, in every nook and cranny of this seemingly godforsaken Earth. Explorers and adventurers all. (123).

During the Second World War reconstruction period, the Filipinos were already global itinerants. This would prologue an even more dramatic exodus. Filipino migration, whether temporary or permanent, and their habit of remittances are intertwined. The unprecedented out-migration and overseas work deployments especially in the 1970s and 1980s, was stimulated by political instability on one hand, and as a result of the state’s aggressive action to globalize its labor force on the other (Ball and Piper 1015). The bleak economic scenario at the domestic front was worsened by the long-standing national leadership crises from the Marcos dictatorship era. Many Filipinos were demoralized because of widespread corruption, growing insurgency, and suppression of democracy during the Martial Law period.<sup>3</sup> As mentioned, others left in search of better wages, as under-employment and unemployment in the Philippines loomed. This is especially true for those who were their family’s main breadwinner. However, migration to many middle-class Filipinos is also a means to maintain their standard of living that is endangered by persistent economic predicaments in their homeland (Tacoli 668). While reasons to migrate at the individual level are multifarious, complex and overlapping structural forces control people’s movements. It is undeniable that the timing of structural policy changes in the Philippines and the host countries’ relaxation of their migration policies assisted these movements.

## THE OVERSEAS FILIPINO WOMEN

The opening of labor market opportunities in first world countries and newly industrialized economies in the 70s and 80s propelled the growth of Filipinas’ international mobility (Tyner, *Made in the Philippines*). The oil boom in the Middle East and the rapidly industrialization of Asian countries, signaled the need for migrant labor forces. As the Philippine government found its niche, Filipino male skilled workers in the construction and production sectors were deployed in the Middle East. Once infrastructures were completed, highly feminized jobs to maintain and service the oil industry fell to their female co-nationals. Meanwhile, Asian NICs like Singapore and Taiwan would require docile and cheap labor for their factories. They would also secure migrants’ reproductive services to fill the gap left by their female citizens who would be absorbed in their rapidly industrializing sector. On the other hand, women’s liberation in post-industrialized countries, like Canada, the United States, and in Western Europe would propel their labor market participation. The reproductive services they vacated would then be consigned to low-waged migrant workers.

Moreover, the emergence of what Sassen’s *The Global City* calls “global cities” where multinational corporations would headquarter their financial and strategic operations in the region boosted the burgeoning of professional elites. These global cities’ operation demanded the maintenance of professional elites’ lifestyles by low-waged immigrant service workers.

Tyner avers that the rising levels of education of Filipinas, whose labor could not be absorbed at home, found compatibility with the emerging needs described above. Although a great majority would suffer from downward occupational mobility (as in the case of domestic workers), working overseas guarantees cash flow for households. The gendered and racialized job segmentation in some destination countries creates and sustains a chain of low-waged Filipino female workers. The exception to this trend would be the nursing professionals, who despite sporadic downward occupational mobility in certain workplaces (Hawthorne, “The Globalisation of the Nursing Workforce”; Pratt, “From Registered Nurse to Registered Nanny”; Ball) are highly regarded in the US, the UK, the Middle East, Canada, and most recently, in Japan.

From 2003 to 2009, the top ten land-based destinations of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) were the Middle East and Southeast Asia, Italy and Canada, with a total of 5,762,585 newly hired and rehired OFWs. About half of this number was absorbed by Saudi Arabia (27%), United Arab Emirates (14%) and Hong Kong (10%).<sup>4</sup> During the same period, service workers (mainly domestic and care workers) had the highest posting at 40% of the total 2,092,121 comprising the major

occupational groups, while production workers (32%), and professional, medical, technical and related workers (20%) had the second and third highest postings, respectively (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Table 11). In 2009 alone, a staggering 71,557 household service workers were deployed, which is 22% of all land-based OFWs. But the feminized labor migration did not stop there. The nursing professionals comprise the second highest occupation deployed with a total of 13,465 (4%) (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Table 12) in 2009. There were 39,460 entertainers deployed overseas in 2005, of which 98% were bound solely for Japan (Tyner, *The Philippines* 39).

In all, the strategic deployment of Filipinas overseas would guarantee remittances crucial to servicing their country’s foreign debts and remedying domestic unemployment. The Philippine Government’s exportation of its human capital abroad would set the unprecedented path to the feminization, globalization, and lately, “Asianization” of its labor migration (Tyner, “The Global Context of Gendered Labor Migration”).

#### PERMANENT SETTLERS

Statistics published by the Commission on Filipino Overseas show that 219,659 (12.39%) of permanent immigrants from 1981 to 2009 had white-collar and skilled (professional, technical, managerial, executive and administrative) jobs prior to their departures. However, there are no comprehensive reports on the jobs taken by Filipino immigrants in their new countries. Since the main destination countries—the US, Canada, Japan and Australia—preferred skilled migrants, it is likely that the Filipino entrants landed or aspired to land skilled jobs. My main research discusses the downward occupational mobility the informants experience as they strive to re-establish their careers. What remains certain is that permanent migrants, just like OFWs, send home money.

The Philippines’ unique colonial relationship with the US has facilitated the historic flow of Filipino nurses to America making it their predominant destination in the twentieth century, although shortages in the homeland loom. With the educational system patterned after colonial America, hospital training inevitably prepared Filipino care and medical professionals to work in the US (Choy 25). The Philippines’ nurse export policy coincides with its other labor migration measures and thus installs the country as the leading provider of nurses on a global scale. The Philippine Government is the first in the world to establish machinery, the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), to promote labor migration as an economic strategy. So effective is the POEA and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) that other Asian countries (i.e.,

Indonesia, Sri Lanka) emulated the Philippines’ labor migration apparatus. Filipino arrivals to the United States increased exponentially from 2,477 annually in 1953–1965 to 17,127 in 1966–1970, and nearly three-fourths of them were women. The US Immigration Act of 1965 gave a considerable emphasis on family reunification, and subsequently lifted quotas based on national origins in 1969–1970 (Keely).

In Canada, the 1976 Immigration Act bolstered the passage of skilled Filipinos. Recent censuses show Philippine-born immigrants comprising the third highest arrivals next only to Chinese and Indians, with 18,032 in 2005, 18,315 in 2006 and 19,718 in 2007. Of these, 77% were admitted via the economic class (defined as skilled workers, business immigrants, live-in caregivers and their dependents), and 21% came via the family class (Statistics Canada 67–68). The figure has almost quadrupled from the 5,979 Filipino entrants in 1981 (Statistics Canada, Table A-4.1 72). Canada’s Live-in Caregiving Program (LCP) has been a popular route for many Filipino registered nurses to immigrate initially as nannies or domestic workers as it facilitated workers’ return to their original profession post immigration. Yet, stories tell that many would suffer from long-term downward occupational mobility (Pratt, *From Migrant to Immigrant: Domestic Workers Settle in Vancouver, Canada*; Pratt “From Registered Nurse to Registered Nanny”). LCP is unique in that it allows temporary entrants to apply for citizenship once favorable settlement requirements have been fulfilled.

Unlike the US, Canada and Australia, Japan was historically “seclusionist.” A 1973 bilateral agreement facilitated the movement of business people and their families from both countries. The forged relationship in due time also led to Japan’s opening of its doors to Filipina tourists and entertainers in the 1970s. From 1981 to 1987, OFWs bound for Japan increased from 11,656 to 126,825 of which 93 per cent were female entertainers (Tyner, *The Philippines* 151). In the 1980s, local councils in Japan legalized and actively promoted matching services that would recruit Filipino brides for its male citizens, a phenomenon that would draw complicated identity representations for these women. The highly sexualized and feminized movement of Filipinos to Japan was reinforced by the 2008 Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement, through which state-level agencies assist the deployment of Filipino caregivers and nurses (Ballescas). The interaction of state-level interventions, private and informal relations between the two peoples generated permanent residency (though not citizenship) of Filipinos in Japan totaling to 116,748 from 1981 to 2010 (Hawthorne and Toth).

In the first half of the twentieth century, new world settler societies, Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, had discriminatory immigration policies that excluded Asians in particular. In the ensuing decades, after WWII,

with the notable exception of South Africa (and to a lesser extent New Zealand), these societies gradually removed the more illiberal elements of these policies. The following section discusses the historical context of Filipinos’ entrance to Australia, given this policy development alongside the rise of the mail-order bride phenomenon.

### **THE AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION AND THE PASSAGE OF FILIPINOS**

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

It was also during this last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the history of Filipino immigration to Australia was first recorded. Their passage can be traced back as early as the 1870s (just two decades since the inception of gold rush) primarily in response to the then-booming pearling industry in Broome, Western Australia. The first wave of Philippine-born migrants consisted of sailors, artisans, laborers and divers. They were recorded in the official registry as Manila men and Sulu men.<sup>5</sup> Many of them fled pre-republican Philippines in search of peace away from the tyrannies of the Spanish colonizers (Hennessy 16). They petitioned for their families to emigrate; some married local residents. By the turn of century, there were about 700 Filipinos in Australia, but this would dwindle after the imposition of the White Australia Policy, which coincided with the decline of the pearling industry. Despite this, what was clearly established by the first wave of Filipino settlers was their use of familial and social networks as an immigration strategy consistent with the clannish orientation of Filipino culture. This trend would continue irrespective of the constraints in immigration regimes (Department of Immigration and Citizenship).

The White Australian Policy gradually relaxed from the mid-1960s to accommodate non-European entrants, and was subsequently ended by the Whitlam government in the 1970s when it affirmed anti-discrimination treaties. Yet, a strong anti-immigration sentiment would reverberate at the structural level. For instance, refugees without valid visas were subjected to mandatory detention,<sup>6</sup> and through ideological critiques on multiculturalism as “Asianization of Australia.”<sup>7</sup>



The second reason that historically prevented Filipinas from entering Australia was gendered labor restrictions. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Australia had different labor demands (i.e. mainly trade-related), which were fairly incompatible with female Filipinos’ available skills at that time. While domestic work would be the precursor of the feminization of Filipino immigration in the 1970s, Australia had not had a system for domestic service since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cunneen and Stubbs 13).

Looking at the larger contours of Asian migration, Hugo emphasizes that male-led movements from Asian countries to Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were facilitated by labor migration strategies that restricted the entry of women (“Asian Migration to Australia”). This was however neutralized in the third part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the onset of family and humanitarian visa schemes that also propelled female-led migrations, and then later with the Government’s preference for skilled migrants. Despite these policy developments, Fincher and her cohorts and Iredale demonstrate that Australia’s skilled migration strategy is gender-biased. Fincher sees the skill categories constructed for the male gender, as men are more often trained in the trades and professions required for overseas employment. The recent mining boom in Australia typifies demands traditionally directed towards qualified men. Male managers, administrators, professionals, paraprofessionals and tradespersons embody the skills favored by Australian immigration policy.

Furthermore, Australia’s immigration policy from 1949 until 1993 is prejudicial against women. Despite the Government’s pronouncements of its policies as gender-neutral, these clearly suggest distinct gender attributes and expectations (Fincher, Foster and Wilmot 14–17) in all major components of immigration, namely, family, skill, and humanitarian. Policy guidelines in various eras have placed women as “immigrant wives,” “breeders for Australia” and “unskilled dependants” (Fincher, Foster and Wilmot 9). Iredale observes that it was not until quite recently that Australia’s immigration policies (since 1989), coinciding with those of Canada (since 2002), have taken into account the professional qualifications of the spouse of the main applicant (“Gender, Immigration Policies and Accreditation” 156). Yet, despite the restrictive measures that led to the decline of their number in the earlier eras, Filipino women and men have not stopped entering Australia. They utilized their kin networks irrespective of their official visas.

Trickles of Filipinos came again, mainly as female nursing students through the Colombo Plan<sup>8</sup> in the 1950s. Most were enrolled in universities in Sydney and Melbourne, who after graduation opted to permanently settle (Pinches 289). Simultaneously, changes in Australian immigration policies were introduced to fill shortages of skilled tradesmen in response to post-war requirements. The policy



also enabled entry of other professional migration, particularly nurses in the 1960s, yet the presence of Filipinos was very small in comparison with those who migrated from European countries (Pinches). When the White Australia Policy was finally repealed in the 1970s, the rate of Filipino migration to Australia doubled every five years.

Vilma recalled how important the ethnic network was when she came as a nursing student in 1976 and knew no one: “When I arrived in Melbourne, there were Filipino tradesmen and their families. At that time, tradesmen were in demand, you know, plumbers, technicians in car manufacturing companies. They would foster us, newly arrived single Filipinos, into their home.” They were like the Filipino students’ *kuya* (older brother) and *ate* (older sister). I was surprised when Vilma mentioned names of *kuyas* and *ates* that I became acquainted with within the Filipino students’ community in 2005. They had been actively involved as pseudo-families to newly arrived students for more than 30 years, welcoming them at the airport, providing them with kitchen utensils and second-hand furniture, warm clothes for the chilly season, and sometimes, even financial assistance. Their names and reputation for generosity have become well-known among the students who came, stayed or went back to the Philippines.

Aida, who also came as a student during this period, recalled that after the abolition of the White Australia Policy, “blatant racism could be felt wherever you go. I was walking down the street with another Filipina, when an Anglo-Australian woman approached and told us to go home.” Their external appearances and “Asian” ways readily invoked an “othered” identity, making them vulnerable to discrimination. Still, it did not deter them from migrating and petitioning for some family members to join them.

Filipino migration to Australia has been increasingly female-led. Women came as spouses or brides, either to follow their Philippine-born husbands who had gained employment, or to marry an Australian-born resident. Marrying someone from another country is nothing new to Filipinas (along with other Asian women from Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia), who have also headed for the US, Japan, Switzerland and other first world countries since the early 1970s (Cahill, *Intermarriages in International Contexts*). Cunneen and Stubbs (“Gender, Race and International Relations” 13) note that in 1991 census alone, about 70 per cent of the 47,692 Filipinas residing in Australia came as fiancés or spouses of Australian residents, giving rise to the popular designation of “bride” or “mail-order bride” to Filipinas. Such a trend may be partly explained by the gendered categories of skills in Australian immigration policy.

The Filipina bride phenomenon was triggered by the cultural and economic conditions of the women in their home country. Armed with some degree of high education and social capital, they envisaged life abroad as a solution to economic stagnation and a bridge to a better life (Cahill, *Intermarriages in International Contexts* 81–136; Roces 83–85; Wilks; Woelz-Stirling et al.). Cahill’s “Intermarriage: The Filipina Bride Phenomenon as a Significant Learning Experience for the International Community” suggests that Filipino brides and their families developed the “migration mentality.” The media sensationalization of mail-order-bride in 1980s in reference to violence in intimate relationships (Dempsey, “Filipino Brides; Saroca, “Filipino Women, Migration, and Violence in Australia”, “Representing Rosalina and Annabel”) triggered campaigns in both countries to defend the concerned women and to eventually halt the operation of matchmaking agencies. In 1990, the Philippine legislature enacted Republic Act No. 6955 making unlawful the practice of matching Filipino Women for marriage to foreign nationals through mail-order and similar practices. Although their operations have been visibly curbed since then, it remains unclear how much formal (via organized agencies) and informal (through kin) matchmaking has been eliminated. What is certain however is the lingering inscription of the victimized, sexualized and racialized identity of the immigrant Filipinas in the Australian media (Saroca, “Filipino Women, Migration, and Violence in Australia”). This would reflect and have repercussions on the Filipinas’ image in the greater Australian public, subsequently attracting academic writings that again largely represented this stigmatized identity. These writings, with the exception of a very few, would also ignore the other equally important dimensions of the women’s identity, especially their skills and paid work agendas. This is not unexpected because, as shall be discussed shortly, the political projects including the immigration policies in Australia have fixed on the (non-English speaking) immigrant women their traditional gender roles in the family and in the workplace for several decades. To make matters worse, the intersection of the mail-order bride with that of immigrant women category has obscured the growing mobility of skilled and professional Filipinas in Australia under the family (not necessarily as brides) and skilled migration schemes.

Given the complex realities in both the emigrating and immigrating countries, the Philippine-born permanent entrants to Australia as a whole may be broadly categorized as falling under the categories of family reunification (including spouse and fiancé sub-stream), skilled visa (including studentship) or a combination of both. These entry categorizations as mediated by the state, result in “*strategically or politically constructed* identities,” that ignore the multiplicity and complexity of migrants’ identities (Fincher 80–81). This reinstates what Cunneen and Stubbs observe as a neat and predominant fixation of mail-order bride identity among Filipina entrants. Their identities as family members and their roles as workers receive minimal attention. The exceptions here are the works of Roces and

Tibe-Bonifacio that consider these women's various identities, rights and agency beyond the usual rhetoric of mail-order bride and victimhood.

In a rare treatment of the Filipino mail-order bride multiple identities, Roces ("Sisterhood is Local") explores how they negotiate emerging relationships in Mount Isa, a remote mining town in Queensland. She surveyed their paid work engagements, and their civic and political work that "do not necessarily translate to paid work" (76) but are considered important aspects of their new identities as citizens and workers. Though marginalized by their status as wives of miners and as mail-order brides, and often subjected to overt racial discrimination, these Filipinas assert their identities outside of victimhood. Their pride is palpable as they sketch their accomplishments in terms of happy marriages and financial remittances to their kin in the Philippines. As an ethnic group in Mount Isa, they forged a women-only fictive kinship network among themselves through which they contribute to the wider community of Mount Isa. Their collective engagements translate to "visible social impact" and a process of empowerment through sisterhood. These women refused to be shamed by forms of stigmatization and did not want pseudonyms to be used, as they wanted their actual names and accounts told in the book (80–81).

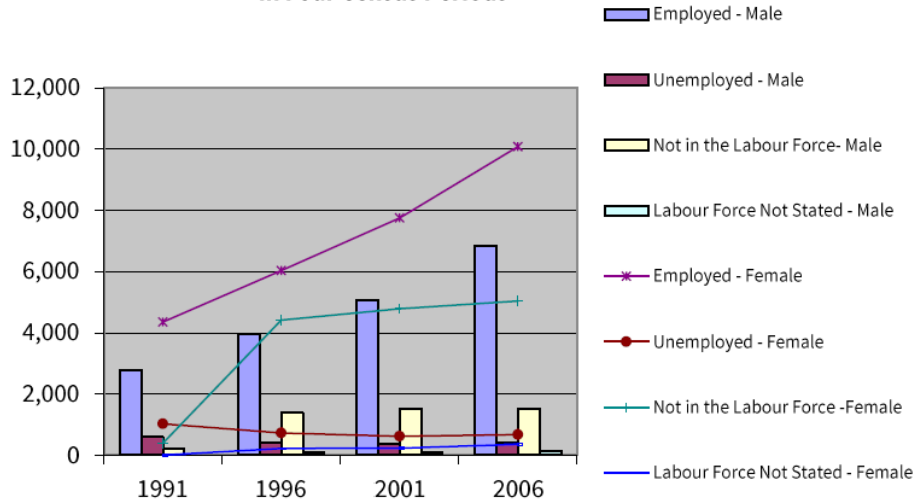
Tibe-Bonifacio's research on Filipino immigrant women's exercise of citizenship at work is derived from her PhD project. Three prominent work-related issues arose in her investigation: recognition of overseas qualifications, under-employment and deskilling, and racial discrimination. She argues that although citizenship legitimizes these women's equal participation in the labor market, enacting it depended on a range of factors, notably, gender, ethnicity, education, English language proficiency and age. However, by invoking their citizenship rights such as freedom of expression and redress of grievances these women were able "to construct their political space to negotiate their marginal and racialized status" ("Filipino Women in Australia" 318).

The predominance of the 'mail-order bride' stereotype of Filipino entrants to Australia in both academic and popular ideas inevitably emerged during my fieldwork. As a fellow Filipino studying about Filipinos in Australia, I experienced dilemma as both insider and outsider. For instance, as a researcher who was pregnant and married to an Anglo-Australian during this time, I felt that MOB was one of the lenses through which my identity was appraised by my informants, in the same way that they sketched their negotiation of migration to Australia subtly but distinctly outside of the mail-order bride phenomenon. Elsewhere I have argued for ways in which these women clearly asserted their identity as skilled migrants and distinct from their mail-order bride co-nationals ("Racialised and Gendered Workplace").

The high recruitment of Filipino nurses since the 1960s also contributed to the greater ratio of migrant women (Jackson). The trend continued until the late 1980s when Filipino movements through family reunification were at their peak (Department of Immigration and Citizenship). Most of the informants came during this period, capitalizing on their family networks. Between 1901 and 2001, the Filipinos were the third largest group of Asian immigrants, behind Vietnamese and Indians. From 2,550 in 1971, the Philippine-born population doubled in 1976 (at 5,961) and nearly tripled in 1981 (at 15,432) (Jackson and Flores 3 citing the Australian Census) and from then more than doubled in succeeding censuses, slowing down only in the 1990s and the succeeding censuses, possibly due to a stricter family migration scheme (Hugo 252–253).

The 2001 and 2006 censuses show a downward trend in the rate of entry, with a 15 per cent decrease at each census. At the 2001 Census there were 103,990 Philippine-born persons in Australia, of which 22,500 (21.6%) had settled in the State of Victoria (Department of Immigration and Citizenship). Almost two-thirds of these were women. Of the total number, 57% (12,821) were employed, with a 1:1.5 men to women ratio.

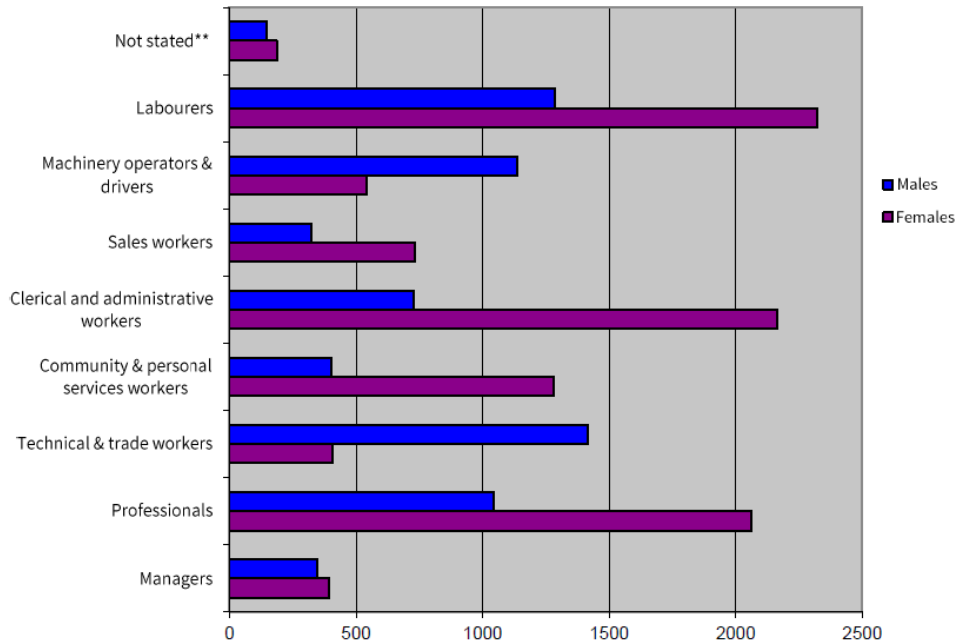
**TABLE 1. Employment Status of Philippine-Born Persons in Four Census Periods**



Note: The table includes individuals who are 15 years of age and above. The customised data are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au), 2011.

There were 120,540 Philippines-born individuals in 2006, of which 27,340 (22.7%) were based in Victoria. Of these, 27,049 were 15 years or older with an employment rate of 62% (16,916). Unemployment rates for male (5.9%) and female (6.6%) Philippines-born individuals were slightly higher than that of the Victorian population at 5.4%. What seem alarming were the significant “not employed” (the term I use to combine unemployment and “not in the labour force”<sup>9</sup>) numbers) counts of female over male in the last three censuses as shown in Table 1. Although declining, not employed female counts were significant in the all four censuses: 1,421 (25%) in 1991; 5,132 (45%) in 1996; 5,394 (40%) in 2001; and 5,703 (35%) in 2006. For 2006, the not employed Philippine-born males were 1,934 (22%). In the same census period the not employed proportion of the general population in Victoria was 43% for females and 30% for males, which were considerably higher than the Philippine-born cohorts. This is not surprising since the latter had higher educational qualifications (53% with diploma or better of which 34% had bachelor’s degree) compared with the general population (38% and 13%, respectively).<sup>10</sup>

**TABLE 2. Occupation\* by Gender, Philippines-Born Population in Victoria, 2006**



Source: The data used here are taken from the Victorian Community Profiles: 2006 Census, Philippines-Born, page 23. Published by the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

Yet their high level of education did not readily translate to white-collar jobs. Table 2 suggests that Philippine-born cohorts dominantly occupied blue-collar jobs. A significant proportion of males were technical and trade workers (20.8%), laborers, (18.8%), machinery operators and drivers (16.6%), and professionals (15.2%). Of the females, a majority were laborers (23%), clerical and administrative workers (21.4%), professionals (20.5%), and community and personal services workers (12.7%). The informants of this study belong to the small but significant proportion of professionals, but as their stories suggest, many had, at one time or another, been a laborer or a clerical and administrative worker. There are no in-depth studies that specifically investigate gendered unemployment among Filipino immigrants, although some research (for instance, Cunneen and Stubbs) indicate non-recognition of skills and qualifications and family responsibilities that are similarly faced by other Asian women immigrants as their major challenges. This study continues to explore this concern.



The Filipinos who arrived in the last 50 years are well educated. This aspect of female migration is often neglected in the predominant mail-order bride discourse (but see for instance, Cooke and Western, "Filipinas and Work"; Roces, "Sisterhood is Local"). They possess higher educational qualifications than the general Australian-born population (Cunneen and Stubbs, "Gender, Race and International Relations" 13; Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera* 35), although these were not easily recognized or accredited. Given the paramount influence of American culture on the Philippines' education system and in the mass media, Filipino migrants have higher rates of English language proficiency than their other Southeast Asian counterparts. Ninety-four per cent of Filipina immigrants "can speak English well" (Women's Legal Resource Centre as cited in Cunneen and Stubbs 13).

In summary, the Filipinos' entry to Australia has been mediated by the latter's racialized and gendered immigration policy. Their identities as skilled workers would be undermined. Since the focus of my PhD thesis, from which this monograph is based from, is on skilled immigrants, informants were deliberately chosen on the basis of their qualifications and employment prior to their migration and during the time of the interview.

### III. INSTITUTIONAL DISADVANTAGES AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SKILLED IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Like long-time immigration countries Canada and the United States, Australia's intakes are primarily through skilled, humanitarian and family links. The emphasis on skilled immigration to suit the labor requirements in Australia obliges immigrants to pass the so-called "minimum standard threshold" in terms of skill (educational qualifications and training), age and English language proficiency set by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. As such, skilled immigrants are admitted through the skill-categories of independent and concessional family/skilled-Australian link (which necessitate a sponsor). Moreover, they also enter the country as dependents of principal applicants, international students, and refugees.

Boucher stresses that NESB women are "*substantively* if not *formally*" disadvantaged by Australia's skilled migration scheme ("Skill, Migration and Gender in Australia and Canada" 397). Boucher ("Skill, Migration and Gender in Australia and Canada"), Iredale ("Gender, Immigration Policies and Accreditation"), and Fincher ("Women, Immigration and the State") point to distinctions imposed between primary and secondary applicants as disadvantaging women, as the primary applicant is usually male and his capacities are used to calculate the "point

system” in immigrant application.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, women’s qualifications are undervalued; men have an initial advantage in employment and establish women’s financial dependence on them in the early phases of migration.

Iredale (“Gender, Immigration Policies and Accreditation”) emphasizes the ways gender permeates each stage of a skilled migrant woman’s entry into the destination country’s labor market. Among others, these are access to training and education, and policies enabling emigration from the originating country, as well as policies responsive to women and accreditation of their skill qualifications in the host country. She also stresses that women’s familial responsibilities and enduring patriarchal values (from home and host cultures) often stifle their attempts to join the labor market (Iredale, “Gender, Immigration Policies and Accreditation” 165). “Migrant women’ (a catch-all category concealing multiple differences),” writes Bottomley, “were for some time subsumed as the families of migrants’ tasked to preserve ethnic tradition and to stabilize the private sphere of life” (148). In other words, the migrant women category was constructed within the rigid demarcation of family/community life irrespective of their skills and educational qualifications.

In economic-centered migration schemes such as in Australia, Dauvergne maintains that gender bias and women’s disadvantage in accumulating human capital endowments in their originating country is perpetuated through skill-based policies in the destination country. Her analysis echoes Fincher’s description of the situation in the 1950s to the early 1970s, which saw immigrant NESB women framed as ‘dependent helpmates’ even if they did assume the composite role of reproductive and productive workers upon arrival (Fincher 211). She defined ‘skills’ (in terms of occupations such as managers, administrators, professionals, paraprofessionals and tradespersons) as being masculinist in their countries of origin as well as in Australia (Fincher 212). The labor market, unfortunately, does not valorize skills related to unpaid domestic and care work, thus a greater part of women’s endowments are not classified as human capital (Boucher, “Picking the Best and the Brightest”). Needless to say, the racialization of gender helps perpetuate the marginality and invisibility of NESB immigrant women in skilled and professional job places. NESB is not just about English language deficiency; it is also a category that coexists with other race attributes that women embody, from their skin tones to cultural habits that inevitably mark them as “others.”

The rate of skilled women arriving as principal immigrants in recent years has increased, most notably in the medical and dental professions (Hawthorne cited in Iredale “Gender, Immigration Policies and Accreditation”). Even so, their role in reproductive work remains dominant to the point that they are re-oriented towards domestic roles and in effect suffer underemployment (including unemployment) after migration (Ho, “Migration as Feminisation?”). Such findings reaffirm those

other emerging qualitative studies in Canada (Salaff and Greve), the United States (Purkayastha), and some parts of Asia (Yeoh and Khoo; Li and Findlay; Yeoh and Willis), that look at the individual and the family as foci of analysis.

It is necessary to recapitulate the viewpoints advanced by theorists both from the human and cultural capitals and labor market segmentation camps in understanding the (skilled) NESB women experiences of their paid work, as a starting point in these analyses.

### *Human capital and cultural capital*

Research reports (Green, Kler and Leeves; Flatau, Petridis and Wood; Cobb-Clark “Public Policy and the Labor Market”) using the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) show that under-employment among people from NESBs is not a new phenomenon in Australia. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) administers LSIA. It compares two sets of immigration samples: arrivals in 1993–1995 versus arrivals in 1999–2000 to gauge the employment success of these two cohorts consistent with the human capital theory. Reports show an increasing trend of women entering the country as principal applicants, to fill in both traditionally male and female-dominated jobs (Hawthorne, “The International Transfer of Skills to Australia”). Yet, it must be noted that LSIA-oriented studies capture only the experiences of principal applicants (who are usually men) and not their spouses (who are usually women), so do not properly reflect all skilled women’s situations in their analyses (Ho and Alcorso).

Economists (Mincer; Schultz; Becker) define “human capital” as non-transferable investments in individuals such as their education, medical care, training, and developed abilities. They posit that human capital infused early on in life influences the degree of monetary incomes later in life, along with other derived non-monetary incomes such as good health, psychic rewards, and social gains. It presupposes the labor market environment as discrimination-free, such that workers, irrespective of origin, would have equitable chances to advance (Forrest and Johnston). In the Australian context, English language ability, length of residence and educational qualifications are the requirements imposed upon new entrants, for them to compete in the labor market. Yet, despite fulfilling these requirements, they remain disadvantaged. Employers and job hiring agencies that are the ultimate facilitators of employment decisions have remained prejudicial of the immigrants (especially refugees) despite the extensive anti-discrimination laws since the 1970s, which are all meant to expunge the monoculture promoted under the White Australia Policy (Tilbury and Colic-Peisker).

NESB immigrants in general are overeducated for the jobs they take (Iredale, *Skills Transfer*; Forrest and Johnston; Green, Kler and Leeves). They suffer from lower returns on education as they seldom occupy managerial and professional positions (Green, Kler and Leeves), and have a high rate of unemployment (Miller and Neo; Teicher, Shah and Griffin). They also do not occupy "good jobs" defined in terms of job satisfaction and appropriate application of their human capital (Junankar and Mahuteau). Promotion on the job is another challenge. In the case of NESB women nursing professionals who had successfully gained entry through rigid skills assessment at pre-departure, their rate of full-time employment was high at 47% compared to ESB counterparts at 40% in 1997. Yet, 67% of these NESB nurses were ordinary registered nurses and had more difficulty progressing, compared to NESB men and ESB men and women nurses (Hawthorne, "The Globalisation of the Nursing Workforce" 223).

Immigrants' employment track record and work experience from their previous country do not necessarily translate to higher earnings when compared to ESB immigrants despite stringent skilled visa assessment (Green, Kler and Leeves; Chapman and Iredale). The so-called "transferability gap" rationalizes the failure of NESB immigrants to have their credentials accepted in the Australian system, compelling many to take jobs below their qualifications. English language proficiency is another commonly cited reason for their downward occupational mobility, although some commentators suggest the possibility of employers' discrimination against Asian and Hispanic immigrants (Junankar, Paul and Yasmeen). Clark found that English language ability and country of origin determine immigrants' labor market participation more than the class of visa as clear determinants of discrimination ("Do Selection Criteria"). Those who came through humanitarian visas are the most disadvantaged of all (Forrest and Johnston). When segregated by sex, women on family and humanitarian visas have lower labor market participation compared with those who entered the country on a skilled visa. Cobb-Clark's findings concur with those of Richardson et al. who report that immigrants possessing skilled visas are likely to find jobs within a shorter duration compared to those who came on family visa. Although Cobb-Clark does not explicitly compare ESB and NESB immigrants, she maintains that higher English language proficiency and more educational qualifications imposed under the 1999 Australian skilled immigration policy resulted in better employment participation rates (Cobb-Clark, "Do Selection Criteria Make a Difference?"; Cobb-Clark, "Public Policy and the Labor Market").

Commentators subscribing to human capital theory readily acknowledge the labor market disadvantage of those with NESB, but its rate diffuses after a period of resettlement as they (re)gain human capital in line with Australian standards (Inglist and Thorsten; Miller and M.; Lee and Miller; Cobb-Clark, "Do Selection Criteria

Make a Difference?”; Cobb-Clark, “Public Policy and the Labor Market”). However, as recent studies show, the underemployment of NESB skilled immigrants cannot be thoroughly explained through human capital theory alone.

The informants’ high levels of educational attainment and English language proficiency while considered kinds of human capital are also cultural capital for these directly enhance their non-economic positions. For the purpose of distinguishing these two capitals, I also observe that having family ties in Australia and other major emigration countries, and travel experiences were important elements of the informants’ cultural capital. Following Bourdieu’s theory (1986), cultural capital, though non-economic, enables people to acquire a distinctive and privileged social status, and may lead to economic capital. Thus, *institutionalized* capitals such as education and specialized knowledge; *embodied* capitals such as social skills and habits, for example in interacting within a cosmopolitan society; and *objectified* capitals shown in terms of polished dressing, travel photographs and memorabilia, contribute to the overall cultural capitals of the informants. The opportunity to study, work or travel overseas prior to coming to Australia as in the cases of Ligaya, Bing, Alma, Susan and Lorna, stirred them to envisage a better life outside the Philippines. As I emphasized elsewhere an alternative lifestyle, one that focuses on a person’s personal desires and not necessarily on the family as frequently observed in studies of Filipino mobility, and the ability to exercise one’s agency and social capital in achieving overall success was central in many of my informants’ trajectory (“Migration as a Strategy”). Being political left-wingers during the Martial Law set the tone to the migration of Maggie and Lorena, although it was marriage that materialized their actual coming to Australia. Being a human rights activist reinforced these women’s cultural capital within the Filipino ethnic communities in Victoria as they frequently participated or organized forums to instill gender and migrants rights equality. Suffice to say that human capitals and cultural capitals intersect in a number of ways, and most importantly in giving the informants the capacity to (re)capture their life goals that are not necessarily economic in nature.

Like Erel (2010) I resist the usefulness of “rucksack approach” in cultural capitals, for indeed, my informants lost, created and regained various forms of cultural capital, and not merely carried over what they had back in the Philippines. Also, as Erel stresses, the ethnic-specific capital does not simply mirror the relationship of powers in cultural capitals within and without cultural identities within a given multicultural society. In her research of Turkish immigrants in Germany and Britain, Erel cites that cultural capitals can be used, increased, and transformed by their owners as well as the labor migration playing field into new forms of capital.



On the whole, however, while the informants' cultural capitals did enhance their sense of self and prestige within the Filipino communities, these did not result to economic assets immediately, for as shown in Table 3, a majority suffered from downward occupational mobility upon arrival. What is important to stress here, nonetheless, is that these were all important markers of the informants' class identities, as they actively participated in Filipino community associations, and in their own profession-specific associations. At least two informants, Vilma and Maggie were visible in inter-ethnic women's groups' activities, and all nursing professional informants Vilma, Aida and Vicky said that they frequently participated in the labor union activities, and confidently spoke up on issues affecting the nursing profession. They felt that their English language proficiency made them confident in interacting with fellow nurses from non-English speaking backgrounds, and since they too are immigrants from culturally diverse backgrounds, they easily gained acceptance from their NESB peers. They were viewed by peers as 'savvy' in terms of social networking, Aida said. As I show later in this monograph, all these cultural capitals, along with human capitals and inner resources, assisted the informants in resettling in Australia, and in recapturing their careers. But all these resources seem inadequate in battling their ways against labor market segmentation.

#### *Labor market segmentation*

O'Loughlin and Watson distinguish the labor market segmentation from the human capital approach by underscoring its 'sensitivity to the social and economic contexts of labor market processes,' which is not easily captured in purely econometric terms ("Loyalty Is a One Way Street"). It explores differences in gender and ethnicity, whereby Australian-born white men are positioned to dominate the labor market, while at the opposite extreme sit the indigenous peoples (especially women) who are most marginalized. Immigrant women, particularly those who are colored and non-English speaking, are but one rung higher than the indigenous women (J. Collins), and are susceptible to institutional discrimination. The labor market segmentation theory was dominantly used in the 70s and 80s in an attempt to break the vestiges of the White Australia Policy, and as a strategy to promote skilled migration. However, the drought in immigration studies with social and cultural perspectives in recent years is due to the Howard administration's abolition of government institutions that facilitated these studies, leaving much of the immigration research in the control of the DIAC (Ho and Alcorso, "Migrants and Employment" 255), which, as noted above, are human-capital orientated.

Ho and Alcorso argue that LSIA-related reports have blatantly ignored gender and ethnicity in their analyses, thus failing to unmask the cultural and ideological factors behind organizational selection of employees. One important point they make is the anomaly behind ESB and NESB distinction. They cited for instance unpublished



LSIA data showing that 48% of NESB immigrants “were able to speak well or very well upon arrival,” especially the Philippine- and Hong Kong-born population who have experienced an English educational system. Hawthorne underscores that “the term ‘NESB’ [may therefore] signify cultural and racial differences in migrant professionals rather than substantial deficits in English, a point which has not been sufficiently stressed in Australian literature but is essential to acknowledge when examining employment outcomes” (“The Question of Discrimination” 397). Using the case of overseas-trained engineers, she emphasizes that the sole independent predictor of their employability is ethnic origin such that “possession of advanced level English was only advantageous if the engineers possessing it were European” (“The Question of Discrimination” 409).

As mentioned, there is paucity in studies of skilled middle-class immigrant women in Australia. The analysis of the Chinese immigrants’ interaction with the labor market is one of the very few recently published qualitative works on women of specific ethnic origins (Ho and Alcorso). The authors challenge Australia’s “success story” of skilled migrants, for despite the claimed egalitarianism in the workplace, Chinese women and men encounter the labor market differently (see also Ho “Women Crossing Borders”). Skilled Chinese women were accustomed to balancing paid work and family responsibilities prior to migration with carework being relinquished to maids and relatives. This household arrangement would be discontinued once settled in Australia, and would “expose the *underlying gender inequalities* in Chinese households” (Ho and Alcorso 504). Women’s drastic adjustment from having a full-time career in Hong Kong or China to facing under/unemployment in Australia was due to their entrenchment in traditional gender roles. Their careers deteriorated mainly due to family commitments and domestic work, and their perceived gender-bias in the Australian labor market (“Migration as Feminisation?” 508–510). On a more positive side, these women found new opportunities in redefining their identities outside of work and careers. They value more the time spent with loved ones and in pursuing personal interests in Australia that their once stressful work-oriented lifestyles in Hong Kong occupied.

The study of Chiang on middle-class Taiwanese immigrants also shows women’s downward social mobility after relocation to Australia. As mothers and wives in “astronaut families” their priorities center more on domestic affairs to the detriment of their careers. The role of single-handedly raising the children consumes them as their spouses spend more time in Taiwan than in Australia. Poor English language and non-recognition of overseas qualifications render many jobless or inept in recapturing their original careers. Subsequently, many Taiwanese women redirected their professional skills toward volunteer work in religious associations within the Australian-Taiwanese community and found fulfillment in them. Although unstated, it can be surmised that despite under/unemployment, they

remained financially secure as their spouses were engaged in businesses in Taiwan. Despite career displacement, the migration process frees them from caregiving responsibilities for extended family in Taiwan, and instead unlocked benefits in newly-forged friendships with other co-nationals through volunteer associations. I view this as an important cultural capital that is otherwise cloaked in the mother and wife identity argument.

The doctoral thesis of Lee illustrates mixed perspectives on Korean middle-class women's social status disruption. While possessing high educational qualifications, many are discouraged or prevented from joining or improving their status in the labor market due to low self-esteem associated with poor English and multiple subordinations in the workplace. Like their Chinese and Taiwanese counterparts, the Korean women's increased domestic responsibilities after migration inhibit them from pursuing their career plans. Yet, there are those who freely choose not to join the labor market not because of institutional barriers but because of gendered and cultural beliefs that they are meant to manage the household. Lee maintains that their acceptance of, and derived fulfillment in, their domestic role exists outside the usual human capital and labor market segmentation discourses. I view Lee's study as eliding the question of modern subjects. This is understandable because the Korean women's ability to exercise a choice and self-pride is a marker of their mother and wife identity. However, precisely because of prevalent gender inequality at home, modernism becomes an elusive subject.

The above complex and intertwining circumstances assist women to "drift to domesticity," a term that Stone uses to refer to qualified and career women in the United States who left the labor market to fully embrace their domestic duties. It is not a march to traditionalism but a silent protest against unrealistic expectations of women languishing in the double day. In my view, opting out for colored and NESB immigrants is assisted by their racialized and gendered subjectivity in the Australian labor market that intersects with the enduring patriarchy in their households. Thus while the Australian state promises neoliberalism where skilled immigrants can practice their capacities and use their agencies to do so, the women's domestic work and the entrenched gender inequality at home rather leaves the possibility of modernist identity a mere illusion.

Earlier studies (Vasta; Alcorso, *Non-English Speaking Background*) describe NESB women's frustrations over multiple dislocations. Vasta maintains that the prevailing gender and racial discriminations in the manufacturing industries in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in Italian women's deskilling, retrenchment from paid work, and re-domestication. Alcorso's study on newly arrived women immigrants from Indochina, South America and the Middle East confirms the continuity of work-related problems encountered by earlier immigrants. The marked difference

is that newly arrived immigrants are faced with higher degrees of difficulty despite their better educational qualifications and formal workforce experience (*Non-English Speaking Background* 102). Lacking English language proficiency, they are not easily hired for white collar and professional jobs. Their present occupations sometimes depart from the career path they started before entering Australia and from their envisaged life plans as migrants (*Non-English Speaking Background* 102). Despite their difficulties, the gained financial freedom was a source of power for the Italian women. By helping their families financially and displaying achievements in terms of ‘owning their own homes, decorating these and dressing well,’ they gain affirmation and a sense of self-esteem (Vasta 172). In Bourdieu’s theorization and as cited earlier, this is cultural capital, and it refers to the acquisition of non-financial assets that improve people’s social status.

It can be discerned in all these studies that the migration process, as much as the prevailing ethnic-specific patriarchy, disrupts the skilled NESB immigrant women’s career and household orientations, and places them in a disadvantaged position in both spheres. Yet the migration process also facilitates a reworking of their identities in terms of more rewarding lifestyles, independence, freedom from extended kin obligations, and in the case of Italian women, financial power. What is not adequately emphasized in these studies, however, is that putting aside ethnic differences, gender inequalities also hold true for most Australian households (Bittman). Thus, while the gender-culture nexus is paramount in understanding ethnic-specific identity negotiations within migrant households, the fact that that gendered domestic labor remains a perennial barrier to women’s career advancement in many western countries—immigrant or not, should not be ignored. However, like Ho, I believe that unless the migration process and subsequent reconfiguration of identities and cultural values of individuals are analyzed outside the economic-centered labor market realm and from the perspectives of the women concerned, we are only able to discern a partial, flawed picture of why they are underemployed.

#### IV. WOMEN’S GROUNDWORK IN BREAKING INTO THE WORKFORCE

How did the informants launch themselves into the workforce in the new country? What were the attendant challenges? These inquiries were made in relation to their experiences in job hunting, as well as if and how they had regained their status as professionals in their own fields of expertise, assuming that they experienced temporary work and career displacement upon arrival.

Most of the informants pursued the careers that they originally planned for, although others diverted to ones that they believed were more compatible with labor market needs while balancing their family obligations. But like other migrants, they, too, experienced severe underemployment in the first few years of settlement.

It was not uncommon for informants to face rejection when they first applied for a job. To immediately get employed upon arrival was what most of them aspired. The pressing goal was linked to survival needs as well as to pursue their career ambitions. They felt pressured to become self-supporting even when relatives had offered temporary accommodation. Most informants agreed that being newly arrived and unfamiliar with the local culture and breaking into the workforce were very challenging. They were confronted by unexpected dilemmas.

The following table shows the informants' respective professions or positions prior to migration and the first paid work they took in Australia as a strategy to enter the workforce:

Table 3 Informants' occupational mobility and career change during the migration process

Name of Informant	Job in RP prior to migration	First paid job in Australia after migration	Same industry or equivalent job with previous post prior to migration?	Occupational mobility within 18 months upon arrival	Duration of first job	Job at the time of the interview	Did further studies in Australia	Career change (Career in RP vs. Career in Australia by the time of interview)
<b>A. INFORMANTS ON SKILLED VISA</b>								
1. Ligaya	Economist	Economist	Yes	Equivalent	Ongoing for 16 years	Economist	Yes	Yes
2. Carol	Computer programmer in a government bureau	Phone receptionist in a family-run software company	No	Downward	Less than a year	IT Manager in a multi national banking corporation (permanent)	Yes	No
3. Lorna	Civil engineer	Civil engineer	Yes	Equivalent	4 years	Civil engineer	No	No
<b>B. INFORMANTS ON SKILLED VISA WITH FAMILY SUPPORT</b>								
4. Susan	Medical doctor	Front-desk receptionist in a children's hospital	Yes	Downward	2 weeks	Jobless (most recent job was medical officer)	No	No
5. Leah	Public relations officer in a quasi government agency	Programming engineer	No	Equivalent	On-going for 2 years	Programming Engineer	Yes	Yes
6. Kara	IT specialist	Computer technician	Yes	Equivalent	1 year (contractual)	Computer technician (permanent)	No	No
7. Bing	Teacher	Box sorter at the Australia Post (part-time)	No	Downward	6 months	Nurse (permanent)	Yes	Yes
8. Amy	Teacher	Receptionist in a real estate agency (part-time)	No	Downward	2 weeks	None (about to start as a caregiver)	Yes	No

**C. INFORMANTS ON FAMILY-SPONSORED VISA***C.1. Migration supported by immediate consanguine kin*

9. Kris	University lecturer	casual/relief/sessional teacher	Yes	Downward	6 months	High school teacher (permanent)	Yes	No
10. Gemma	Teacher	Seamstress in a garment factory	No	Downward	4 months	Teacher (relief assignment)	Yes	No
11. Luningning	Public relations specialist, University lecturer (part-time)	Administrative officer (junior level)	No	Downward	Less than a year	University lecturer	Yes	Yes
12. Alma	Industrial psychologist, training officer in a multi-national agency (supervisory)	Case worker in a community welfare center	No	Downward	1 year	Clinical	Yes	Yes
13. Lorena	Administrative manager in a construction firm	Payroll clerk in a manufacturing company	No	Downward	4 months	Financial controller in a contract demolition company (permanent)	No	No
14. Rosanna	Dentist and (part-time) university lecturer	Dental nurse	Yes	Downward	2 years	Dentist (permanent)	No	No
15. Maggie	University lecturer/ journalist/ researcher	Children's services coordinator in a local council	No	Downward	1 year & 6 months (contractual)	Broadcast journalist, radio program producer (permanent)	No	No
16. Sharon	Program administrator in a multi-national construction firm	Admin assistant in a telecom subcontracting agency	No	Downward	2 weeks	Administrative Officer	Yes	No

Note: Excluded from this table are informants who completed their tertiary or postgraduate education in Australia, and as such took on their first jobs commensurate with their qualifications without having to confront institutional barriers.



Table 3 suggests that most of the informants suffered temporary downward occupational mobility upon arrival, irrespective of their visa. The first jobs they took in Australia usually lasted for one year or less. Many accepted other jobs either below or outside of their original qualifications before they recaptured their careers. Their stories are discussed in Part III of this paper.

Only four informants—Ligaya, Lorna, Kara and Leah—did not experience underemployment. Her Filipino friends who came prior to her advised Ligaya not to take just any job outside of her field: “Because you’d be stuck there...and when it’s time for you to look for the job you really want, your past work experience could be a liability. Employers might ask—why did you take that job? Is it because you’re not qualified enough?” Ligaya enrolled in a master’s course on public policy while waiting for the right opportunity and as a coping measure to battle frustration over unemployment. Job-hunting was made more strenuous because it was an era of recession in the early 1990s. Amidst loneliness, fears and monetary constraints, she waited for the right job, which came ten months after her arrival. She was hired as an economist in a government bureau—a post that she held for nearly 16 years by the time of her interview. Had Ligaya been a married woman with children, she would have been forced to take anything, she said.

Lorna also came during a recession. Unshaken by the structural challenges, she capitalized on a university diploma from an accredited university in Manila, and some experience in her engineering field while in the United States. These proved vital attributes when she entered the Australian labor market. Upon arrival, she immediately took and passed the Australian qualifying examination without any constraint, notwithstanding her having to care for two preschool children. Although she had moved to two other jobs since she came in 1993, all of these positions were directly related to her career plans. Of all the informants who earned their university degrees in the Philippines, only Lorna and Ligaya did not report exceptional hardships in having their qualifications recognized. This could be largely because, apart from securing their university degrees from accredited universities, additional qualifications acquired overseas (Ligaya had post graduate studies in Bangkok while Lorna had worked in the U.S.) augmented their chances. The experience they gained overseas also honed their confidence and sense of competitiveness to face the labor market challenges. Being exempted from or relieved of the traditional maternal carework significantly helped. Ligaya was single and childless. Lorna did not have any qualms about enrolling her children in institutional care, at least on a part-time basis.

Kara and Leah were both in the IT industry at the time of this research. Leah had switched to software engineering from a PR career (that is illustrated in greater detail below) after undertaking a course in Melbourne. Meanwhile, Kara was able

to transport her computer technician skills without much difficulty. It seems that the most important factor to be considered in their employability is the IT industry, which was thriving during the time they entered the labor market consistent with Australia’s postmodern digital era. IT qualifications—regardless of where these were earned are noted for their high portability—thanks to the universality of software languages and computer systems.

It is important to stress that Lorna and Ligaya came on skilled visas, and Leah and Kara on skilled visas with family support. Although Ligaya had close friends in Melbourne, like Lorna she had no family to turn to. Both had to rely solely on their own resources in order to navigate the labor market. Both had insisted on the importance of regaining their professional qualifications and working only within their fields of specialization, which seemed to be non-negotiable from the very start. All four women, despite their diverse coping strategies and differences in visas, had one factor uniting them: the advantage of possessing highly sought-after qualifications, with a caveat in Leah’s case. To her, the PR industry context in Australia was quite dissimilar to that of the Philippines, forcing a migrant to start from the bottom of the career ladder. This prompted her to switch careers as a deliberate move to evade underemployment. By sticking to their original career trajectories, Ligaya and Lorna survived the recession era of the 1990s with relative ease, whereas Kara and Leah strategically chose ICT careers because of their high desirability in the labor market. Yet possession of in-demand qualifications alone, as elaborated in individual stories below, was not a guarantee for retaining one’s level of professional occupation.

How did the rest fare? All informants who entered Australia through family visas suffered from downward occupational mobility within 18 months of arrival. The same is true with three out of the four who came through skilled visas with family support, and one out of the three who used skilled visas. While the small number of informants does not permit a representation of the range of experiences of skilled Filipinas in Melbourne, suffice it to show that downward occupational mobility is a highly probable route for them irrespective of modes of entry in the Australian labor market.

Downward occupational mobility, according to their stories, occurred due to intersecting forces of institutional constraints, family responsibilities, difference in ways of life, and one’s own ability to confront these challenges. There was no one singular cause. I maintain that underemployment was inevitable, given these women’s limited choices within the prevailing institutional, cultural and gender positions they occupied. However, they took underemployment as an opportunity to re-equip themselves. Ten informants across the three visa categories enrolled in further studies upon arrival. Half of them did so to have their foreign qualifications

recognized by the Australian professional bodies. The other half undertook further studies as a means to modify their career trajectories, and in effect, adjust to prevailing institutional circumstances and their respective family responsibilities. In both circumstances, studying in Australia enhanced their chances to hold the professional status they had aspired to. Although none of the four informants who came on a spouse/fiancé visa undertook further studies, they were able to recapture their professional status a few years after arrival. In all, what emerges here is the unreliability of modes of entry as a means to understanding informants’ underemployment. While underemployment was a debilitating circumstance that many strongly wanted to evade, to others it was a strategy to reposition them in the labor market that is continually wrought with institutional discrimination and racialized workforces. From a Foucauldian approach, Rose and Miller maintain that the state should not be over-valued as a dominating and all-pervasive power, as the political subjects can use their expertise, knowledge and motivations in the exercise of their citizenship, which hopefully cushions them from systemic disadvantages.

*Underemployment as a way of gaining insider’s knowledge*

Those who chose lower jobs within the industry they originally belonged to did so to acquire an insider’s knowledge and establish friendships with people within the industry. This is a strategic approach to “penetrate the market,” said Rosanna, a dentist who first worked as a dental nurse when she came to Australia. Besides, she said she did not know any other work aside from dentistry. “I wanted to know what the practice in Australia was like, so that when I take the exam, I have already gained familiarity. But since they knew that I was a dentist in the Philippines, they wouldn’t hire me. They’d say, ‘You’re too skilled to be a dental nurse.’ In Australia as in the Philippines, dental nurses would take up a certificate course in order to get a badge. However, in order for one to be admitted to the school of dental nursing, she must first be employed as a dental nurse. It’s catch 22.” So Rosanna could not immediately secure a job. After several attempts, she met a dentist who saw the potential of hiring an overseas-trained dentist as a dental nurse. “Perhaps she felt that in-depth experience was advantageous, so that she could leave the patient under my care without much worries.” Eventually, the work experience as a dental nurse earned her the badge, while on the hand Rosanna sat for the dentistry qualifying exams. It proved to be a worthwhile strategy as, after she obtained the Australian qualifications, she was immediately promoted to the post of dentist. It is of interest that Rosanna did not perceive her employer as feeling constrained by the ‘regulations’ that can be appealed to when excluding immigrants from access to employment, suggesting that often these are conventions invoked in order to discriminate rather than serve as legal requirements.

Entering one’s professional industry through a low-paying position did not always end positively. Susan, a medical doctor, had a rather embarrassing experience. “I applied for a receptionist position... It was at xxx [name of hospital]. I went through an employment agency, and they were looking for a receptionist in a pediatric area.” Her engagement lasted for only two weeks. “Maybe I didn’t pass enough. Somebody told them [other non-medical staff] that I was a doctor, and they were intimidated. Maybe my employer told them that I was a doctor so they knew. I was accountable to those giving orders but at the same time I was floundering because I had to learn the procedures. I had to learn about the telephone keyboard. It’s not my expertise. I knew medical words but I didn’t know how to manage the keyboard. And also in taking messages. You know how Australians spell their names with double E, double F [contrary to simply “EE” or “FF” in the Philippines]... so it took me a long time to take messages.” A multi-tasking job in an unfamiliar territory undermined her self-esteem. At one time, somebody wanted to see a social worker, but Susan forgot to relay the message. She believed the social worker complained to higher authorities, which led to her termination. How she attempted to regain her professional status is discussed in the latter part of this monograph.

*Underemployment in tandem with further studies as a strategy towards a new career path*

The majority of informants enrolled in courses to augment their qualifications or as a means to shift to another industry or specialized field. Alma, who obtained a degree in industrial psychology in the Philippines, realized that organizational contexts in Australia were very different. She felt alienated applying her skills and so shifted to applied psychology and counseling. As mentioned, Leah, who originally intended to resume her career in public relations, found the PR industry in Australia daunting, having no knowledge of its context. Unsure of what to do in her first year in Australia, combined with lack of childcare support from relatives, she opted to look after their very young children full-time. In the second year, still not having decided what to do, she browsed the options available and eventually found an IT course with a study-now-pay-later scheme. While still completing the course, she found a job as a programming engineer.

Kris took a similar approach. Her teaching specialization were physics and chemistry as well as mathematics at the university level in the Philippines. She shifted course by teaching these subjects at the secondary level. A diploma of education focusing on mathematics and physics in an Australian university bridged the qualifications gap. While studying, Kris took the opportunity to do practical and sessional teaching. Although these did not give her the secondary school experience that she needed, they provided some “local” background that was often required of job vacancies.

Bing, who had a long teaching career in the Philippines, realized that there were too many barriers against her returning to this profession. She sustained a “culture shock” and had to “adjust to a new way of life.” Although overwhelmed by the changes, she wanted to work immediately. Bing enrolled in a personal care assistance course that focused on aged care. While studying, she worked part-time at the Australia Post as a box sorter, where bullying traumatized her (Limpangog, “Racialised and Gendered Workplace” 208). Then came the opportunity to work as nurse at a hospice, initially on a part-time basis, then full-time. Her tenure at the Australia Post lasted for only six months as her work at the hospice increased. She proceeded to upgrade her qualifications by completing a further course to become a registered nurse, and subsequently was promoted.

Like Bing, Amy did not want to return to a teaching career although it was her teaching qualifications that gave weight to her visa assessment. She saw her migration to Australia in 2004 as an opportunity to shift careers, and to lead a less stressful life than in Manila. After a couple of years of part-time and casual work in various industries and intermittent minding of her friends’ young children, she took up a certificate course in children’s services. This paved the path to her new career as a service provider in a daycare center in 2009. Childcare work in Australia is associated with low professional status, as professionals receive wages disproportionate with their responsibilities and qualifications, poor working environment, and little opportunities to get promoted (Sumsion). This is a sad reality to many gendered professions, and is increasingly occupied by immigrant women. I asked Amy whether shifting to this new path made her feel professionally devalued, to which she replied “come to think of it, it never occurred to me that the [new] job would lower my status. What I’m really after is the ability to balance work and home without sacrificing my own personal welfare. I would like some time, too, for myself...time to do community service, time for rest and recreation and to be with friends.” To Amy, she was trading professional status for a better quality of life rather than dealing with the constraints experienced by others. The use of personal agency here in defining her professional identity shows that Amy’s gender and race positions were secondary to her sense of personal achievement. The comment above distinguishes her from the majority of participants who were very conscious of changes in status and eager to retain or regain their own sense of achievement in their careers and hence reassert their middle-class status.

Carol maneuvered to regain her career in the IT industry after a string of intermittent un-related part-time and volunteer work. This was timely as IT was an in-demand industry when she was job seeking in 1991. As a former analyst programmer in the Philippines, Carol had substantial work experience with various software and had no qualms about reconstituting her career goals. She gained a place in a fully subsidized IT-for-computer-skilled-workers course offered through



a professional employment service. The six-month course was meant to update job hunters’ skills. Upon course completion Carol was hired in a multinational company. She had progressed in the same company over the next 15 years, from program analyst to IT development team leader manager. Carol explained that unlike other professional qualifications, work credentials in IT are transportable. “They honoured the experience I had in Manila. The good thing about the IT industry is that your work experience from anywhere in the world is recognized by employers. You don’t need certification or anything.”

The informants’ decisions to study were triggered by a desire for financial autonomy, their ambitions to pursue a career, and maintain a middle-class standing. Driven by career ambitions, it was clear that they did not want to succumb to underemployment for a long time. To gain further qualifications was their way of maintaining a professional identity, even if to some (like Amy), that level of professional identity is somehow made secondary.

It appears that the visa difference among the informants did little to explain their career pathways. Those who came with skilled visas and family support and those who came with skilled grounds in their own right all utilized their human capital first and foremost in approaching the labor market. Rather, it was the restrictions imposed on certain professions that had vitally affected their career reconstitution. Yet IT is universally portable and remains relevant regardless of social contexts. Other professionals would have to undergo stringent accreditation, which sometimes requires further studies in Australia to gain recognition.

### *Accreditation*

Another institutional hurdle was incompatibility in educational systems, and as a result, problematic accreditation of qualifications. The educational system in the Philippines is patterned upon that of the United States, whereas Australia’s, being a Commonwealth country, is based on the system in the United Kingdom. This variance also has a significant bearing on professional practices. Already qualified practitioners were required to undergo further education, board exams, and become members of their respective professional associations.

During the time of this study, only five educational institutions in the Philippines have accreditation in Australia. These are The University of the Philippines (Diliman Campus), De La Salle University, Ateneo de Manila University, University of Santo Tomas, and Mapua Institute of Technology. They are all based in Metro Manila. Graduates from regional-based universities, or those who could not afford to enroll in Manila face greater difficulties in having their academic qualifications



recognized. But as the experiences of the informants demonstrate, even those who might have expected immediate accreditation faced barriers.

As a graduate of one of these accredited universities and with a postgraduate diploma from a prestigious university in Australia, Alma, a Philippines-trained psychologist, recounted her experience in the late 1980s.

As far as I knew I met the requirements...But then when I was putting in my application, the registration board and the professional association kept passing me on to each other... 'You get in touch with the association;' 'you get in touch with the registration board.' That was very frustrating. Eventually I got a panel interview with the registration board, and then they started saying the same thing...that's when I became more assertive...rather than [being] a respectful Filipina who doesn't look them straight in the eyes, [and] speaks quietly. I spoke louder and firmer, looked them straight in the eyes, and stated, 'I believe I met the requirements, this, this, this and I've been in touch with the association, and they told me to be in touch with you.'

In three days, she got the accreditation, and, a little later, her associate membership in the psychological association. Alma believed that it was her assertiveness that eventually facilitated her accreditation. Her statement suggested differential treatment from authorities rather than qualifications deficiency that encumbered her accreditation. Alma abandoned her customary feminine behavior inscribed in Filipino tradition to achieve her career ambitions.

Kris, Gemma, Amy and Bing were formerly full-time educators in Manila. Only Kris was able to reconstitute her profession, as she was most determined in acquiring further academic qualifications and submitted herself to assessment. Amy and Bing had to change professions while Gemma was still struggling to resume her teaching career during the time of this research.

Professional licensing bodies have been mandated by the Australian Governments to assess the qualifications of overseas-trained immigrants. Yet, to some degree they are also instrumental in reinstating institutional disadvantages against NESB immigrants. Using the case of immigrant medical doctors, Groutsis and Hawthorne's "The Question of Discrimination" emphasize that these bodies are also responsible for controlling the annual quota. By controlling both the standards and quota, many qualified NESB doctors in the 1990s-2000s were restrained from registration or were only given limited registration (Groutsis 78-80). In effect, they were prevented from practicing their profession, unlike ESB and locally-trained doctors. Alma's assertiveness and her defiance of a culturally acceptable way of self-presentation, she believed was what pushed for her accreditation. In a way, she worked within the limits of institutional requirements expected of every applicant,

but also challenged the system when she felt being tossed between the professional board and the professional association (Rose and Miller). Consonant with the idea of Rose and Miller on citizenship, Alma exercised her rights to gain speedy justice, but primarily tapped her inner resources.

### *Acquiring local experience*

The spadework of acquiring local experience was the hardest part for the informants to enter the labor market. As shown in the table, some took on jobs outside of their fields of specialization, and many had accepted positions below their qualifications and outside of their sectors especially when their prior credentials were not automatically recognized. But they took this route as a means to accumulate local experience. Wagner and Childs observe:

[S]ome employers prefer to 'buy Australian': and this might mean, 'buy an accent that is like Australian,' or 'buy an Australian-looking person,' or 'buy Australian qualifications.' We found that employers when faced with competing applicants with similar qualifications would select applicants with Australian qualifications because of their local experience, their local education and training, and their social and cultural integration. (58)

Wanting to go back to teaching, Kris took a diploma course in education while she worked during the day. But the problem was she had no teaching experience in Australia. She borrowed another teacher's curriculum vitae, so she would have an idea on how to present hers. As a requirement for her diploma course, she undertook practical teaching experience. Armed only with this, a one-off relief teaching assignment and a semester of tutorial work, she presented herself "carefully, as an eligible teacher." "You've got to sell yourself creatively. I had to make 'bola' [good impression]. Here in Australia, they have a different way of writing the CV. The difficulty remains that even if you are qualified in teaching, you don't have local experience. So what is there to write in your CV? It's difficult to be 'creative'." But she was determined to break into the teaching force. After a few months she was offered a one-term appointment; then it was extended for another term, and so on. After a while, she was offered a permanent position elsewhere. "It was hard, because you will be pitted against other applicants who had better experience. So sometimes, it's just a matter of luck! It's both luck and timing combined with patience. I sent out dozens of application letters, which after a while, resulted in a lot of offers. So I took the first ongoing offer."

Acquiring local experience as a requisite to getting employed is like the chicken-and-egg riddle, said Maggie. "How can I have an Australian experience if you don't give me a chance?" Maggie once asked a personnel officer in exasperation. The

lady on the other end of the line hung up the phone. “My work experiences have all been in the Philippines,” said Maggie, who has several years of assignments as a writer, researcher and program manager in a leading university, government and non-government organizations back in her homeland. Like Kris, she also prepared dozens of copies of her CV. After several rejections in the two months following her arrival in Melbourne, Maggie found an opportunity to work for a local council that needed a children’s services coordinator. An internal contact person who once visited the Philippines knew that she was highly skilled, and offered her a prior briefing. “She gave me tips on how the interview was going to be conducted, what sort of questions they would ask.” Maggie was subsequently offered the job. That paved the way to her first employment. If it were not for that local contact, Maggie claimed, she would not have had her break.

In Carol’s case, social connections and prior knowledge of the Australian work environment proved to be advantageous. She first came to Australia on a dependent visa; her husband, the primary visa holder, was an IT consultant. By living and working temporarily in Australia, they had wanted to test the waters, to see if applying for permanent residence would be feasible. But Carol soon found that her husband’s visa was for occupational training, not work, which was equivalent to that of a student. Incidentally, this was in 1989–90 after the Tiananmen Square riot, prompting thousands of students to flee China. The influx of Chinese students in Australia triggered tighter immigration measures. “The immigration office encouraged the students who would want to migrate to leave the country, process their papers [outside Australia] then come back depending on the results of their application. So exactly the same happened to us.” Before leaving Australia, Carol managed to populate her CV with various work experiences. She secured part-time work as receptionist in a small software company. Her husband’s friend owned it, and their relationship facilitated her employment. In her children’s prep school, she volunteered to tutor in Mathematics, and in computing. She also assisted the teacher in a physical education class. She rendered unpaid work in community activities such as the bingo socials of the elderly. “I served them tea, coffee and biscuits while they were playing bingo.” She documented all these as “work experiences,” believing that these would augment her visa application. She collected certifications for all the unpaid work. Being in Australia was an opportunity to be acquainted with the skilled migration requirements. Carol’s family went back to the Philippines upon her husband’s contract expiration. Their visa for permanent residence was granted the following year. Carol’s example demonstrates the importance of inner resources in meeting the experience requirements and in working around its prejudiced and vague nature. She never blamed the labor market for its somewhat exclusionary system.

Tilbury and Colic-Peisker observe that employers vaguely define broad issues such as “local experience” along with “organizational fit,” “communication,” and “cultural knowledge” when it comes to hiring immigrants (“Deflecting Responsibility in Employer Talk”). The lack of clarity of their expectations of candidate employees facilitates the deflection of race discrimination to legitimate job issues. The informants readily conformed to the local experience requirement even if it meant succumbing to underemployment and class demotion. Being new to the labor market, they were forced to conform. They seemed to have taken this challenge without any hesitation, particularizing the various discriminatory procedures as individual acts rather than established structures. A lowered job status resulted in significant downward social mobility that was difficult for some, but most viewed this as a stepping-stone to gaining better employment.

### *English language difference*

English is one of the two official languages in the Philippines. Together with Tagalog, it is the medium of instruction in all levels of education. National dailies are printed in English, as it is used widely in all forms of mass media. Public speaking and written communication, as in the case of office meetings, conferences, court hearings and government assemblies, are mostly held in English. English is also used in official phone conversations in Metro Manila, although people tend to switch to Tagalog, or *Taglish* (a combination of Tagalog and English) to soften their tones. Taglish implies friendliness and informality in the office setting, whereas talking in pure English is popularly viewed as being snobbish. There are also Filipino terminologies that have no equivalent in English therefore Taglish becomes a practical solution. As English language permeates the everyday life of average Filipinos, they have advantages over other non-English speaking migrants. The women in this study were quite outspoken at work, and used their language proficiency to assert their identities and to widen their social networks. According to Luisa who was trained locally, Filipino nurses were never afraid to mention their concerns at work, “in how we are treated by both fellow nurses and staff, and the patients. Because we are used to speaking English in the Philippines and because of our friendly nature, it’s never hard for us to reach out to other overseas-trained nurses...We easily make friends across various ethnic origins.” Yet, the difference in accent and ease of its use counted as a hindrance in some of the informants’ workplace interactions.

Carol’s motive for accepting menial and unpaid jobs aside from gaining local experience was to improve her understanding of Australian culture. To be acculturated and blend easily with the mainstream society is a social asset that she consciously wanted. She was particularly interested to learn Australian English, which sounds “very, very different from our Pinoy-American English. Being then

a desk receptionist, I had to confront the stranger in me. I had to communicate in the Australian way quickly. It doesn't matter if I was sent to the post office. To me, talking with the sales staff at the post office or with the butcher at the bus stop was all helpful in improving my command of English.” She also enlisted her children in playgroups believing that this would offer an invaluable opportunity to interact with Australian-born mothers. At home, she would listen to radio programs to learn Australian phraseologies. All of these efforts seemed to her like a crash course in Australian English. Many years down the line, she mused over this experience and believed that being multilingual and highly competent in a second language, English, was an asset. She spoke two major Filipino languages fluently, Tagalog and Ilokano. Now as an IT team leader in a multinational corporation, she was occasionally requested by the personnel department to take calls from Filipino clients overseas. When one looks at her otherness not as deficiency but as uniqueness then proceeds to harness it, it is as Minh-ha maintains, a move to empowerment.

When Leah joined the workforce for the first time, she admitted that language was her major barrier. “Because in the Philippines, English is the professional [official] language. So you know you're doing this and you're talking [about] this... you're usually speaking in English. Then you can easily change to a more relational... like casual [tone]...you shift to Tagalog. “Hey would you like to come over...”–it's different. So you can compartmentalize your life. You've got this corporate life [when speaking in English]...[But when you switch to Tagalog or Taglish] then your colleague or client understands that you're shifting to a non-business mode. As opposed to here...well for me I felt it was all formal.” Leah was the only woman and Asian immigrant programmer in her office. Because of her ethnic identity, she felt that communicating her ideas in not-so-seamless English made her appear less competent. The language difference made her hesitant in asserting her ideas:

“I really had to think what I had to say. And I think the way you say it, you're slower, you're a little bit more anxious in speaking. I think they see that as being....You know, you're dumber, you're slower to pick-up. But actually, you're not slow...you're translating it in your mind. Because you understand that you're learning it in two languages, right? ...Then they always comment that I sound American. For a while I felt like I was always trying to catch myself to not sound American. I was kind of apologetic about sounding not Australian...They then sort of look at you as if ‘what are you doing here?’”

For a while, her colleagues' belittling attitude made her question her own competence. She avoided approaching a colleague or speaking up during meetings for fear that she might sound unintelligent. But she knew that she had to stop her own negative way of dealing with this insecurity. Gradually, she accepted that the substance of her ideas were more important than the speed and accent of her



speech. She decided to not apologize anymore for her slow American-sounding English, but this took a lot of self-reflection and courage: “I know as much as they do...I know my work very well and that matters more.”

It was not evident at the onset that Leah might once have felt insecure about communicating in English. During the interview, she was one of those very few informants who spoke more English than Taglish. She would easily fit into the category of *Ingleseras* (English-speaking snobs) in the Philippines. Perhaps given her educational background in mass communication, she was gravely conscious about the importance of correct grammar, appropriateness of expressions in Australian English (so as not to sound American) and of technical terminologies in IT. In the long run, it was Leah’s self-knowledge and pride in her professional capabilities that compensated for her differentiated English proficiency. Although she acknowledged that to not sound like Australian Anglophones might lower her status in her colleagues’ eyes, she was also adamant that the quality of ideas she produced were better indicators of overall work competence. By underscoring parity with peers in terms of technical knowledge despite her perception of ethnic and gender discrimination in the workplace, Leah showed internal self-confidence.

Being a lecturer in communication arts, Luningning understood the power of language. She was also aware that her accent might put her in a less powerful position. Yet, to her it was the content of what she wanted to convey and her position as a mentor that gave her authority, not her accent. When she delivered a speech or a lecture, she noticed that students were all quiet:

It’s either because they want to pick up everything that I say because it was an unfamiliar accent or they really wanna listen to what I am saying [laughs]. So I don’t know. But they laugh at my jokes. When I make a joke, they pick it up...so it tells me that they understand it. I think the accent business in the classroom is not really an issue. I think the moment they respect me, you know [your accent becomes nothing]. Of course, it’s a power position that you are the lecturer...but I do ask if ‘am I talking too fast or am I talking too slow?’ But there are no comments. As a communications specialist, I had to be conscious of those things.

However, Luningning was not spared from discomfort about her mode of speech when she interacted with people in ordinary situations. In shops for instance, it was not uncommon for her to be asked to “say that again?” when she believed she did not possess a thick accent:

The nuance of language makes it different. But perhaps there is something I could feel when they ask, “say that again?” “What did you say?” when actually they understand but they just want to make a point of argument. Because you can tell...you can tell with



the non-verbal cues, and I'm with [the] communications profession. You would know by looking at the person if he doesn't really understand you, they are not listening, they have other things on their mind, or they just want to make a point that they don't understand you "Say it again in English," you know [cynical laugh]. But I don't really care much anymore. It's no big deal.

To be understood as much as to understand others in their languages was a constant tension in a multi-cultural environment. Maggie's interaction with a young Anglo-male technician during a live radio program evidences this. He yelled at her and used profanities to enunciate his frustration over missed cues. After the program, Maggie came out of the studio and asked him:

"You know, is there a problem with you? With me? Why do you talk to me that way? Do you want me to call you a racist? Apparently you do not do this to people who are not Asians," I said to him. Then he chattered so so so. He said "oh no no no no no." I couldn't comprehend what he was saying as he was talking so fast. I said, "excuse me, I cannot understand what you're saying." He said, "oh yeah, that's your problem. That's the problem, you don't understand what I am saying." I said, "perhaps if you articulate it better, I can understand you. You were talking like you were eating your words," that's what I said. "You want me to write this down, and bring it up with your manager?"

It was possible that Maggie's colleague was using his power as a native English speaker to render her inferior. However, Maggie had the courage to counteract his seemingly violent disposition and overcome the language difference. Her warning to bring the matter up with higher management also indicated that she took the incident seriously but rationally, and would not cower at her colleague's racist treatment.

Over time, many of the informants came to accept that their accents, phraseology and fluency in the English language would always be an indicator of cultural differences, but most always refused to define it as a liability. For others, like Carol, it would be claimed as an advantage. Her fluency in another language gave her an edge in tackling customer services tasks. Yet as shown, claims about differences in English language proficiency can often be an excuse or cover for workplace bullying. The informants' awareness of their differences and their subsequent susceptibility to harassment provided the circumstances for them to appeal for their workplace rights. Employing these rights require firmness, courage, and self-confidence that these women showed. To some, their multiple identities as woman, immigrant, newcomer and non-English speaker meshed to produce an insecure attitude, but only at the outset. There were those who readily used their equal opportunity rights to counter possible harassment. Their strategies are consistent with a political subject in a neoliberal society (Rose; Rose and Miller). They were

"less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body, than an individual whose citizenship is active." Such citizenship is characterized "not in the receipt of public largesse but in the energetic pursuit of personal fulfilment and the incessant calculations that enable this to be achieved" (Rose and Miller 298).

My informants, overall, tapped their human capital--their technical knowledge and professional status, and once they had overcome the dilemma of speaking English differently, their command of the medium--to assert their rights for equality. There was no evidence that speaking the English language differently posed a burden on job hiring or promotions. But it did pose as a marker for the informants' psychological readiness to participate in the labor force, and once inside, as a source of covert differential treatment. This comment is elaborated in Limpangog ("Racialised and Gendered Workplace") where their various experiences of workplace discrimination are discussed in depth.

#### **V. CAREER-BUILDING AND THE INTERSECTION OF INSTITUTIONAL WITH DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS**

As their stories reveal, temporary under-employment was the predominant experience or factor that constrained the informants' career pursuit. It is associated mainly with non-recognition of credentials and difficulty in gaining local work experience. Except for a few, and mainly due to their desire to acclimatize and gain confidence on the Australian culture, English language ability did not pose any problem in their attempt to access the labor force. However, their differentiated command of the medium, accent and understanding of Australian phraseology did count in their ability to interact with co-workers.

While many of the impediments to the informants' labor market participation were institutional in nature and governed by forces beyond their control, they usually found ways to negotiate these. Yet, they also had to deal with other challenges in line with their domestic responsibilities as well as certain cultural norms that pervade their femininity within family and kinship realms. My study acknowledged the malleability of the informants' cultural identity on mothering and family upon reestablishment in Australia. While their ambitions to recapture their careers were instrumental in challenging traditional gender domestic assignments, ironically it was also their insistence to hold on to their idealized femininity that made the transitions difficult. I have argued elsewhere that the absence of domestic help which the women enjoyed in the Philippines and their husbands' painfully slow take of additional housework and carework, made the women's struggle to recapture their careers very difficult (Limpangog, "Gender Equality in Housework").

While some migrant Filipinas resist the identities of ‘dutiful daughter’ or ‘sacrificial mother’ these ideological constructs persist. These images are ironically reinforced through what feminist activist nun Sr. Mary John Mananzan, O.S.B., describes as Catholic teachings of purity, obedience and loyalty to one’s kin group (Mananzan qtd. in Parrenas, *The Force of Domesticity* 25). In addition to their traditional reproductive role, Filipinas are expected to be the moral guardians of their families (Ramirez, *Understanding Philippine Social* 42) thus, working abroad, as in the case of their overseas Filipino sisters, subverts their feminine identity. The blame for any breakdown of the family is mostly directed at the women. In the case of my informants, this too, holds true, and affects their sense of self (Limpangog, “Moving Identities”).

Intensive transnational mothering is not unique to Filipino migrants. A small but growing body of literature on transnational families demonstrates a heightened division of labor between spouses, with overseas workingwomen performing intensive mothering away from their children even when their husbands are locally present (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila; Zontini; Wong; Arat-Koc). Traditional gender roles are re-embedded. A trend of grandparents caring for the left-behind children is also evident among Filipinos (Kataoka-Yahiro; Barber) as well as those of Turkish origin in Germany (Erel), African Americans in South America (Katzman), and Chinese in Canada (Salaff), all of which reinforce the significance of intergenerational care in the face of women’s work and mobility. In the case of my informants, they relied on the meagre support of transnational and migrant kin, and their spouses who were reluctant to increase their parenting roles. Thus there usually presents a very complex scenario.

On the other hand, racist and gendered prejudices in the workplace, usually every day and covert in nature, activated the informants’ citizenship rights. Several informants were initially hesitant to confront the assailants or seek redress because they prized the Filipino practice of smooth interpersonal relation and because the combination of Anglo-centric and patriarchal power can produce non-egalitarian behaviors that are too overwhelming to resist (Limpangog, “Racialised and Gendered Workplace”). As I show below, there are prejudices that are subterranean in nature, and not easily recognized because these are inscribed in the routinized practices in workplaces or in certain professions.

Thus, the complex intersection of domestic and institutional constraints do slow or weaken the women’s career reconstitution. In this section I argue that cultural values and practices of both the women and the institution, and the intermingling of gender and race inequality in these sites, must be given attention, to understand the complexity of their career disadvantages. The notion of the modernist subjectivity and identity, where professionals can achieve life fulfillment

in a neoliberalist society assuming that they ‘enterprise themselves’ (Rose) must be questioned. The following stories of Carol, Leah, Gemma and Susan illustrate the importance of understanding gendered roles and relationships embedded in their cultural renegotiation as overlaying the migrants’ career trajectory. The last two cases also illustrate long-term underemployment.

*The case of Carol: privileging men’s position as a means to advance her own*

Carol had gone up the management ladder in the IT industry, and at the same time successfully brought up two children. But she had this to say about her “balancing act”:

Difficult at times.... the balancing act. That was probably why I wasn’t that career-oriented, that I didn’t persist in my career because I had children. Of course when children were sick, when they needed a parent to be around, it had to be me. I knew it. That was some kind of a standing, silent agreement.

Carol’s husband is also in the same male-dominated industry, although he chose to be self-employed as a consulting software engineer with large corporations. While he was paid lucratively for his contracts, there were times when jobs were scarce. Carol’s employment with a multi-national company ensured their financial liquidity. Aware that she was earning more than her husband, Carol consciously avoided career-related competition. She was careful not to offend his idealized *haligi ng tahanan* (pillar of the home) image by not taking advantage of job promotions. *Haligi* is the Filipino metaphor for masculinity—firmness, stability and strength. In the early years of her employment, Carol was the only woman manager in her department. Being a woman in a male-dominated field and being an Asian made her feel apprehensive. During staff meetings, she felt that the boss did not take her comments seriously, as “he would look elsewhere while I was talking and rarely acknowledged my contributions.” To prove that that she was worthy of their respect, Carol worked harder. When the first promotion opportunity came, she sought her husband’s counsel, who said, “don’t go for that management role. Leave it to the men.” She let go of the opportunity because of her husband’s attitude, but on the other hand, bided her time, during which she gained her colleagues’ esteem. When the opportunity came again the following year, she confidently applied and successfully secured the position.

The intersection of Carol’s gender role both at home, and her Asian woman immigrant status at work in a male-dominated field undermined her confidence about applying for promotion. Conscious that she might cause trouble in both spheres, she patiently waited. It might seem on the surface that Carol exemplified classic submissive gender subordination. Yet, her initial compliance with male

expectations should not be taken as submission, rather it must be seen as strategic, perhaps inspired by a desire for harmonious relationships. It tempered, but did not quell her determination to succeed in her career. It was her knowledge of her seemingly gendered and racialized position and her capacity to rise above it that propelled her to get promoted without unsettling her husband and her male colleagues’ masculinity.

*The Case of Leah: Debunking the notion of family reliability*

Together with her husband, Kardo, and two children, aged seven months and four years old, Leah came to Melbourne in 2002. She was 26. Leah’s aunt sponsored their migration. Her parents and younger brothers had migrated to Australia less than three years prior. Having graduated with a bachelor’s degree in creative writing, she worked as a PR officer in the Philippines.

Upon arrival, Leah could not immediately look for a job because she had to take care of their children full-time. She recounted the difficulty brought about by this sudden shift from being a professional office worker to that of a housewife. In the Philippines, she had delegated the work to a maid and a nanny. Adjusting to the cold weather was another hurdle. Leah had three aunts and an uncle living nearby but all of them were fully employed and thus busy with their own lives. Her parents hosted them for a month, while Kardo was job hunting. When the house next door became vacant, they arranged to lease it. During this time Kardo was hired as a hotel attendant, and they received their first Centrelink<sup>12</sup> payment. I asked whether her relatives extended help in child minding. This was her response:

I expected really more help from my family. I don’t blame them, they have their reasons, they have their own lives, and I wouldn’t know what to do if I were in their situation. If it were I, will I put myself out for another relative in a sense that I will really take care of her? I also don’t know. But our expectation was for them to help us 100% that ‘we will look after [the kids], let’s make a schedule, like this,’ It didn’t happen. And we’re sort of lost in our own terms of you know...We had a lot of unmet expectations.

Just before they moved next door, she had already heard complaints from her relatives. “[T]hey were pointing fingers at each other: “you’re in charge of fetching them, and who’s taking care of the children?” When asked if she had discussed her expectations with them, she replied

I would say not. I thought it was implicit that’s why it hurts all the more. Because you thought you’re the daughter you don’t have to say it anymore, they have thought of it already. It was very typical Filipino mentality that they should think of helping. You don’t have to [ask]...We are not forward ...to say that...To us it is always [implied]...

Leah was constantly on the “the verge of breaking down.” Her depression was associated with unmet hopes and expectations, and the feeling of not being adequately supported by loved ones. She complained that the exclusive responsibility of looking after two young children for the very first time was also physically draining. Although her husband participated in looking after their children, he mostly acted as a ‘helper,’ rather than a principal carer. The shift from having domestic helpers in the Philippines, to having none in Australia was distressing. During low moments, she and her husband entertained the option of going back to the Philippines. However, they had given up everything they had over there, including a nearly paid-up condominium unit. They would have to start from scratch all over again. So “we put up a brave face and thought of the kids.” The primary motive of their migration was to have a better life, she reminded herself. Although she and Kardo were university graduates with stable white-collar jobs, they were not satisfied with their financial position in the Philippines.

With regards to job seeking, Leah felt anxious about leaving her children in the care of others, especially with the “white people,” whose child minding practices were alien to her. In the Philippines, she would personally know the child carer who would either be a relative or a domestic worker living with them. This attitude, however, would change when Leah was more settled. During the interview, which was four years after migration, the children were entrusted to a family care facility.

Leah’s confidence in her professional capacity plummeted, as she had misjudged her adaptability to the corporate environment of public relations in Australia. She believed that her writing skills were transferable, but the situation was entirely new. Diversion to another field was never planned at the outset, until a year later when a training offer in information technology came. Leah took advantage of its “study now, pay later” scheme and enrolled in the program. Job placement was part of the 18-month course that targeted professionals wanting a career change. Just before Leah finished her last modular project, she found a job as a programming engineer and has since been working full-time. At a subsequent interview she appeared happy and challenged by her newfound career, as it enabled her to fulfill her potential and hone her skills. She was also satisfied with the salary and the growing respect she received from colleagues. At the time of interview, they had just bought and moved into a three-bedroom house in a newly developed suburb.

Leah’s account tells of a convoluted relationship between herself and her extended family. Migration had ruptured the nature of kin support that was once neatly structured in the Philippines. It is possible that the absence of maids and nannies from the household was a major factor as they were unaccustomed to considering this as a need. As I have shown in my study (Limpangog, “Moving Identities”), the Filipina’s idealized mothering role is constructed to be hands-on



and irreplaceable, and to be relieved only by trusted kin if at all relinquished. However, the labor performed by maids in my informants' cases is considerable but not acknowledged as such. This 'blind spot' is made clearer in the migration context. The new conditions after migration altered the realism of expectations, but the expectation itself, while unarticulated, remained. Disenchantment might have scarred Leah's faith in her kin, but lacking in choice, it also compelled her to rework her expectations.

*The case of Gemma: roadblocks in career resumption*

Gemma arrived in 1992, an especially difficult time as Australia was undergoing a recession. Clutching an education diploma and a work record with a top-rate college in Manila, she wanted to teach in Melbourne and thus sought expert assessment of her qualifications. The consultant advised her to study again and take up a four-year course to be able to teach. Not wanting to be idle, Gemma was determined to work immediately. She landed a job at a hosiery manufacturing company. "You know, I don't have sewing skills...my fingers got swollen." The work environment was uninspiring. Her co-workers did not show ambition. She thought, "they were there only for money in order to support their families." Convinced that she had better options ahead of her, she resigned four months later and immediately found a casual job at Australia Post. In 1993 to 1994 she was sorting mails, usually working night shifts. When an office position was advertised at the postal head office, she applied and was appointed in 1995. During this year, she also went back to university to study management. Her office allowed flexi-time although working and studying simultaneously during the day proved to be exhausting. After one semester, Gemma discontinued her course work. The drive to earn and save up for a house inspired her to go back to night shifts sorting mails.

In 1996, Gemma met Charles, an Anglo Australian working as a technician at the post office. They began seeing each other and eventually got married in 1998. She became pregnant in the same year, and after giving birth to their first child at the age of 36, she resigned from Australia Post. Due to unexpected complications in her pregnancy, she needed time to recuperate as well as take care of their newborn. Three years later, Gemma gave birth to their second child, and had been preoccupied with raising their young children. It was only in 2005, five years after her last employment that she thought of re-entering the work force, and this time as a teacher.

During our interview, Gemma was placed as relief teacher once or twice a week through a work agency. Her workloads were occasional and unpredictable, and the school location varied. It was not unusual for her to be called to work at 7 a.m. when her children were having breakfast. Gemma was then expected to report

to school at 9 a.m., get a brief orientation of her task, and immediately proceed to work. The obvious time constraints involved in organizing herself, preparing and taking the children to her mother made her mornings especially stressful. Her mother, who lived a 10 minute-drive away, had agreed to look after the children during these occasional assignments. Gemma enjoyed teaching immensely. It gave her a sense of fulfilment that neither her previous employment in Australia nor her domestic duties did. The pay was good too, she said.

Her main frustration loomed, however. She could not find a permanent part-time job, an arrangement that would enable her to look after her pre-school children as well. Gemma had been scanning the newspaper and approaching school principals about possible job openings, but all of them preferred full-time teachers. Lacking in options, she continued as a relief teacher, while hoping for better job opportunities in the future.

Gemma’s patience and diligence paid off. Eighteen months after our interview, she finally found a permanent part-time appointment in her daughter’s school. Overall, it took her 15 years to practice what she was professionally prepared to do at a level commensurate with her qualifications. Previous to that, she held a full-time job but it lasted only for one school year. Preparatory classroom tasks such as lesson planning frequently spilled over after-hours, which did not sit well with Gemma’s domestic responsibilities. She was engulfed with guilt feelings for not being able to look after her children the way she used to. Her mother was already too old to be entrusted with the day-to-day care work, she said, the reason she had to revert back to relief teaching. It was a painful decision for Gemma, but one that also freed her from gnawing remorse.

Gemma’s protracted under-employment was predicated by her intensive mothering ideology, unequal division of care work between her and her husband, and worsened by institutional constraints. She refused to enroll her children in a childcare facility at the expense of her career plans. It appears that her mothering identity was most important to her so much so that reconfiguring it was not an option. It was never an option for her husband either to reduce his work hours in order to accommodate her career aspirations. To Gemma, it was just ‘natural’ that she looks after the children. So while she gently protested against the gender role of mothering by looking for suitable work options, she still prioritized her mothering role.

Using Stone’s theory, Gemma was “opting out” from career not because of traditionalism although she clearly indicated that she wanted to look after the kids hands-on. Her ‘forced choice’ to stay at home was conceived through “a complex set of numerous and mutually reinforcing and interlocking factors,” with carework

being at the heart of it (114), no kin to entrust childcare duties to, the inflexibility of her husband’s career commitment, and the scarcity of part-time teaching positions and the casualization of part-time work despite the ongoing advocacy for work-family life balance. It goes without saying that her maternal identity was also a source of self-esteem and respectability. Gemma insisted that as a teacher by profession she was duty and morally bound to ensure that her children perform well in school.

*The case of Susan: career or motherhood?*

Susan was schooled and partly trained as a medical practitioner specializing in psychiatry in the Philippines. She held important job assignments with a leading government hospital and a corporate organization where she met her husband Bruce, an IT specialist. They came in 1995 through the sponsorship of Bruce’s sister from Adelaide. Susan passed the national medical board exam before the move. But she did not take the psychiatry exam because during that time she was engulfed with the intricate preparatory process of immigration.

To have her qualifications accredited, Susan had to undergo the Australian Medical Council exam in both written and clinical forms. She had passed the written test, but not the clinical part. On the clinical test, she was made to present a case scenario, interview a patient and the family concerned. There were twenty cases to be covered, each with twelve stations with corresponding scenarios. As a trainee doctor, she was expected to interpret certain pediatric and obstetric conditions. Another requirement was one year of service rounds in all core areas—surgery, medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics. It was a full-time job in four departments as a “lowly medical officer” usually assigned to emergency situations. Susan had completed half of these rounds. This was akin to going back to the internship level, which Susan found very challenging, having not done these in years. “You get paid as a trainee doctor” with limited registration. To be a qualified specialist entails a separate set of hurdles. It would be at least four years of investment, and “a lot of your time... you sacrifice your family to finish the exams.” I asked what the obstructions were for her.

My difficulty was when I was studying for the exam, working full-time, doing overtime, you know, I also wanted to have a baby. We’ve been married since 1994, and I’ve been working...going back 96–97 we have desired to have a baby although I had a miscarriage. And then we migrated and there was this stress of migration was making me [feel] down because I wanted to have a baby. He was able to find work. I was able to find work. We were able to buy a house. I thought something was wrong why I couldn’t get pregnant, and my husband was becoming complacent. ‘If that’s what it’s going to be, let it be. What can you do?’ he’d say. He’s enjoying. On weekends he plays golf, [while] I work overtime.

Sometimes, Bruce would sleep over in the doctors’ house within the hospital premises when Susan was on duty on weekends. Working towards her qualifications accreditation, and at the same time starting a family necessitated a tough balancing act. Being a medical practitioner, she was anxious about her fertility, and so she sought specialist’s advice then submitted herself to tests. Results showed a problem in her endometrial system, which prevented pregnancy. Susan underwent a six-month treatment. Not long after, she conceived. Fearing that her complicated pregnancy might lead to another miscarriage Susan quit work. She was 36 when she gave birth in 1999. In 2001, she re-applied at her former hospital. She was appointed part-time senior medical officer, which suited her. How did she fare with a part-time job, a baby, a household to manage and the qualifying exams ahead of her?

Susan had no personal car back then and had to take the train and bus connections to work. But what was hardest was her son’s frequent sickness courtesy of the viruses he would pick up from the childcare facility. She would be awake all night to attend to him, but would still go to work the following morning. “Sometimes I would throw up at work. It’s too much caffeine. I didn’t know how I survived that period but I did.”

The stress involved with mothering always compounded her stress related to passing the examinations. To speed up her Australian registration, Susan went back to the Philippines in 1998 and 2002 to undertake the psychiatry board exam. She failed on both occasions in the clinical aspect of the examination. On the first attempt, she was undergoing endometriosis treatment and felt ill. On the second one, she took her child on the trip, “which was not really a wise thing to do,” she later on realized. He became sickly again causing her to worry. “*He developed a lump here [pointing to a part in the head], lymph node.*” The pediatrician arranged for his operation during the time she was to take the exam interstate. Susan’s concentration was again distracted.

Susan believed that the hospital management appreciated her satisfactory work record. She claimed to be hardworking, thorough and meticulous in attending to patients and in writing reports. But again, she failed the clinical tests in 2005, which prompted her to resign. Her limited registration as “trainee doctor” had lapsed. It lasted only for six years during which she was expected to pass the exams.

In the absence of registration, a foreign-trained doctor could only work in a hospital with the latter’s sponsorship. Susan was instead offered a research position in the same hospital, but she declined it. It was a full-time job with possibilities of overtime work. “*How could I juggle?*” given that her sickly child was then entering school age. Susan instead found a part-time medical officer position in another

suburb, which lasted for only a year. Her contract was discontinued due to lack of funds for an ongoing position. During our interview, Susan was not employed, and uncertain about pursuing her dream to become a full-fledged psychiatrist. She could appeal to the board, if she wanted to, but her husband was unsupportive of this idea. If she was granted consideration and eventually completed the clinical test, Susan would still have to undertake a separate set of hurdles to become a psychiatric specialist, entailing another three years.

In their qualitative study of skilled migrants and so-called employment 'gatekeepers' (represented by public sector recruiters and skilled migrant placement officers) Wagner and Childs explore symbolic themes that block migrants' optimum labor market participation. Three themes—the 'lucky country,' 'buy Australian,' and the laidback attitude expressed in 'no worries' and 'she'll be alright, mate' catchphrases all configure the dominant 'Anglo' nationalistic gatekeepers' mindset. As such, skilled migrants are expected to be grateful to have been accepted in a lucky country and should be happy with whatever (non-skilled and un-related) jobs they are offered. 'To buy Australian' means they are expected to acquire formal qualifications in Australian soil, as those obtained overseas can be disregarded as inferior (57). They are expected to undergo further studies to bridge the qualifications or technology gap, if not take an entirely new study/training program. The labor market is assumed to employ people based on merit, thus the 'no worries' and 'she'll be alright' attitudes. For these reasons, the problem of joblessness can be attributed to the individual's 'personal failure, incompetence or laziness, or *any* unwillingness to do any kind of job' and not on the social and institutional barriers (58). These themes reflect how 'subterranean racisms' as gatekeepers in formal and informal recognition processes resist acknowledging them. These institutional discrimination and the traditional gender roles at home coalesce and make Susan's bid for accreditation very hard to achieve.

Unlike Gemma, Susan enrolled her son in a childcare facility. This indicated a fair attempt to balance work and family. She renegotiated her mothering duties in order to attend to her career plans. But curtailed by personal circumstances, in this case, the sickly nature of her son left Susan in a constant dilemma. In Australia, the medical profession is one that has the most stringent accreditation process for overseas-trained practitioners, and has allegedly suffered from system-based discrimination (Birrel; Groutsis; Hawthorne and Toth). The intersection of personal-familial situation and institutional barriers intensified Susan's plight. It situated her in a similar position to Gemma's where the only choice available was a forced one: to opt out. It can be gleaned from her story that both her gender role in the private sphere—particularly her maternal hopes and later care work, and her ethnic identity in the public sphere—as an overseas-trained doctor needing to go

through a stringent accreditation process, coalesced in order to disrupt her career plan.

It can be argued that the women above did ‘enterprise themselves.’ They tried to modify their values and expectations of themselves, and often redraw their strategies as mothers and professionals in order to balance these roles. Yet their cultural appreciation of themselves as a mother and the inherent responsibilities attached to this role cannot be easily un-done. There needs to be a stronger advocacy for gender egalitarianism in the household (Limpangog). Equally, there needs to be a more acute understanding of the complexity of prejudices experienced by Non-English speaking skilled migrant women as they negotiate institutional barriers. It would be unfair to leave to women, in this case, migrant women, the onus of defending themselves through the use of agency, choice, inner resources and human capitals. While neoliberalism allows for these resources to flourish, the women’s success would also importantly depend on other actors, especially the state, to reinforce their rights and protect them from further discrimination.

## VI. DISCUSSION

This monograph has drawn attention to the informants’ strategies in entering the Australian labor market. The women’s resources—human capital, cultural capital, inner resources, and personal goals—and how these elements interacted with the raced and gendered labor market variously complicate their career trajectories.

The institutional and social barriers faced by skilled NESB immigrants in Australia, as described in the literature, were similar to what the informants negotiated irrespective of their modes of entry. These were recognition and accreditation of qualifications, obtaining local experience, and the inevitability of downward occupational mobility, at least during the first two years of settlement. As their accounts showed, they neither complained nor resented this drastic shift in work status. They came expecting to face these barriers. It can be argued that due to their resilience, resourcefulness and adaptability, the informants readily assumed a job that was not commensurate to their qualifications. They were also prepared to undertake additional studies to bridge their so-called “qualifications gap.” To them, downward occupational mobility was a strategy to accumulate local experience, and subsequently “penetrate the market,” at least in the short-term.

In a nutshell, the informants found various ways of living with the structural disadvantages. Although they did not resist these disadvantages, they also refused to become victims. Their resourcefulness and sense of purpose prevailed over these far too complex realities beyond their control. I maintain that women in the Philippines’ access to higher education, although highly westernized, gender-segmented, and



achieved much later than men’s, is key to reconstructing their subordinated identity. I view my informants’ internal self-confidence as linked to this. Better command of the English language, an asset that other skilled NESB women did not possess, also facilitated their negotiation of workplace-related barriers, although as stressed in this monograph, the intersection of culture and gender produced an orientation that was less confrontational, which they carried over to the Australian workplaces, at times to their detriment. Thus, the informants’ ability to reconstitute their careers in Australia sets them apart from other NESB skilled women such as the Chinese, Taiwanese, Koreans, South Asians and the Italians described in earlier studies. Using Brah’s concept of social relation as a difference marker (117–119), it is possible that the informants’ material circumstances and cultural capitals particularly their educational attainment, social status and the long history of Filipinas’ struggle against colonialism and patriarchy within their indigenous culture all intertwine to construct a self-confident character.

Elsewhere I have emphasized the informants’ immigration goals in terms of seeking improved quality of life, financial security, and greater autonomy (Limpangog, “Migration as a Strategy”). They left the Philippines because its perennial lack of peace and order, economic problems and corrupt governance reduced their chance to thrive and maintain middle-class status. Their migration was anchored on the belief of a greater chance to prosper in Australia commensurate with their credentials and hard work. With the view of accumulating wealth, owning a house and sending their children to decent schools, the informants drew on their human capital. They also redressed any short-term disadvantages by accepting lower job positions that were not necessarily 3-D (dirty, demeaning and dangerous) in nature. Carol volunteered to teach computing skills in school; Rosanna worked as a dental nurse while processing her accreditation as a dentist; and Bing took a box-sorting job at Australia Post. By avoiding low status, low paid, inferior jobs these women positioned themselves outside of the modern-day female labor migration that a great majority of their compatriots in other parts of the world take— as domestic workers, nannies, entertainers. Other informants either modified their career plans or simply persisted in using their credentials. These individual-level strategies were all symbolic of conviction and purposefulness. By doing these, they also maintained a positive identity about themselves. I argue that the informants clearly wanted to resume their identities as skilled workers from which they gained pride, after migration. Being a skilled worker of middle-class standing must have been a core identity to these women even before they came to Australia. Thus, they were prepared to hurdle institutional constraints as well as reconfigure their gendered relationships in household work division (Limpangog, “Gender Equality in Housework”) in order to regain their careers, an in effect, their middle-class status.

It is possible that the informants’ ability to assimilate helped in adapting to the new environment. They did not live in ethnic enclaves nor concentrate on certain occupations despite the prevailing labor market segmentation in Melbourne. Many had also married outside of the Filipino ethnic group. Some of the informants’ insecurity about interaction with native Australian English speaking co-workers was only short-lived, and that was because they had high levels of proficiency prior to migration. It is possible that their capacity to linguistically assimilate (which the Korean, Taiwanese and other NESB women seemingly fail to do) easily facilitated social networking with people from other ethnic groups.

English language ability variously affected the informants. It did not hinder the majority’s job application, but it did impinge on others’ readiness to assume jobs upon arrival. Differentiated command of the medium, accent, and knowledge of Australian phraseology did curtail others from fully interacting with co-workers. It can be inferred in some accounts that their use of the English language was a source of prejudice, which I have elaborated elsewhere (Limpangog, “Racialised and Gendered Workplace”). However, the informants drew upon their personal initiative, professional esteem and beliefs in equal rights at work in order to counter their language deficits. Their far greater willingness to cope with hardships and adapt is a cultural description that has been affirmed by sociologists (Ramirez, “The Socio-Cultural Presuppositions of Filipino Outmigration”; Aguilar). In general, “[t]he Filipinos’ ability to survive is evident in their capacity to endure despite difficult times and to get by on so very little. This ability is clearly related to other Filipino strengths, such as optimism, flexibility, adaptability, hard work and a deep faith in God” (Okamura and Agbayani 107). While the interview questions were not constructed to directly elicit evidences on the informants’ survival capacities in their migration process, their individual stories speak of hope, hard work, and self-confidence, that contributed to their survival. The strategy of relying on one’s inner resources and making choices for oneself is consistent with Rose’s idea of modern subjects who make autonomous choices, develop expertise, elect a lifestyle they want, and thus fulfil their lives. It is not about rejecting the state’s power, but putting the responsibility and choice for one’s own life in the hands of the citizens. On the other hand, the interviews clearly showed the women’s use of human and cultural capitals, took strategies in acquiring local experience even if it means lowered occupational mobility at the outset, including additional university enrolment. They also surmounted the initial difficulty of having a differentiated English accent. At the household, the women while mostly retaining their traditional role of *ilaw ng tahanan*, tried to push for their career reconstitution. I have also argued elsewhere (“Gender Equality in Housework”) that the women successfully although with great difficulty convinced their spouses to take on more housework and carework responsibilities. They negotiated with patriarchy within their paid work and their domestic work (Limpangog, “Moving Identities”),

hurdled race- and gender-based discrimination in the workplace (Limpangog, “Racialised and Gendered Workplace”) and as this monograph shows, institutional discrimination. As a result, they attained the middle-class professional identity they aspired for, but they had to weather lots of stress and challenges along the way.

It is possible that the proliferation of Filipino labor migration over several decades must have prepared the informants to anticipate a lowered job status during the first few years of immigration. The informants’ experiences correlated with many other skilled Filipinos in other parts of the world. Individuals with established careers would pursue additional qualification as a response to the preferences of receiving countries. For instance, in the Philippines one in five doctors enroll in nursing schools (Mercado). Filipino nurses bound for Canada would take up a certificate course on caregiving as they take advantage of the Live-in Caregiver Program, a unique opportunity attached to a work visa that allows conversion to permanent residence (Pratt, “From Registered Nurse to Registered Nanny”). Such strategy proved to be rewarding, as most of the informants were able to either recapture their original career plans or switch to one that was equivalent in status with their last occupation in the Philippines.

Yet I maintain that the informants’ successes at an individual level by way of deploying personal resources and succumbing to underemployment should not stop us from questioning the structural forces that impede their attempts. Racial and gender-based discrimination is palpable in their experiences of institutional-level hiring and promotion, and in their everyday transactions. What I would like to emphasize here is that much of their suffering is prone to be sidelined because of their capacity to endure and adapt and their willingness to see the problems as matters of the ‘self’. This is a condition that seems under-analyzed in the growing field of study on middle-class skilled migrant women. The informants have actively utilized their human capital and the various rights and opportunities available in order to reacquire their careers, although not without severe difficulties. The reworking of their mothering identities, institutional disadvantages by ways of stringent accreditation of some professions, deficits in the English language and local experience all combine to thwart their ambitions.

In many respects, what can readily be construed as ‘personal qualities’ that have been described in terms of the women’s adaptability, can also be viewed as essentially modern conceptualizations of the self and individuality that are internalized in ways that then obscure the structural disadvantages they encounter. It is significant that none of the women presented the problems they faced as structural, nor as aspects of state-endorsed barriers to migrant integration into the workforce at appropriate levels. Although they felt undermined and distressed by the difficulties they faced, they had apparently embraced modernist, liberal

notions of self-determination as both the source and solution to barriers. This is in accord with pervasive Australian cultural ideologies that stress forms of “rugged individualism” as ideal characteristics, both at a personal and citizenship level.

Almost all described their strategic responses in ways that emphasize particularities in their circumstances and notions of the self as the locus of agency. When they succeeded, they stressed their own agency; when they “failed” they internalized this and became depressed or unhappy, as if responsibility was of the individual. This shift in focus from structural determinations to individual responsibility is a factor that women themselves often adopt to their disadvantage. They could often discern forms of discrimination that were deployed to exclude them or demean them as “un-Australian,” yet almost all chose to resolve the problem as a personal issue by changing “themselves” in order to conform. While their solutions varied greatly—from interpersonal confrontation to strategic retreat—the majority of women display strong commitment to ideals of inclusion and acceptance as Australian citizens. On one hand, this can be considered as a mode to assimilate in a society that valorizes individual autonomy, but on the other, it in some way can be viewed as *refusing* assimilation. For in their determination to succeed, negotiating a hybrid identity was inevitable. Lowe describes hybridity not in terms of assimilation of immigrants’ practices into the hegemonic culture but in terms of retaining certain aspects of their prior cultural identity within relationships of unequal power and domination (67). Self-determination was already embedded in their identity but the challenges that confronted them in Australia provoked the demonstration of this character in a very strong way. It was common for the informants to declare “*ayokong umuwi ng luhaan*” (I don’t want to go back home in tears).

Applying Brah’s social relation model, this perhaps reflects not only their own socialization and class position in the Philippines, where application and hard work were viewed as the ways of attaining personal goals. It also reflects the differences between them and the many NESB women immigrants who come from countries and class positions where these ideals are less pronounced. I suggest that the informants’ strategies for overcoming or sidestepping structural deficits do not position them in the same category with the dominant ‘NESB immigrant women’ in Australia, which is typified in literature as highly encumbered in entering the labor market. I also would like to emphasize that the informants’ resourcefulness, sense of purpose and self-confidence were crucial in reconfiguring their identities as skilled workers in a new setting.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyze the institutional and social barriers encountered by the skilled Filipina women upon their entry in the Australian labor market, thus giving them visibility in an otherwise male-centered migration discourse in Australia, and non-skilled focus migration regimes of current Filipino diaspora. Recognition of qualifications and employers’ demands for local employment experience emerged as barriers for the women of my study. While downward occupational mobility was ubiquitous among the women during their first two years of resettlement, they used it a strategy to ‘penetrate’ and reposition themselves in the labor market. They used and in so doing also acquired both human and cultural capitals and personal resources during career repositioning.

By personal resources, I have described how the informants found various ways of living with many of the social and institutional disadvantages they encountered. They did not perceive themselves as victims of these external realities. They deployed their resilience, sense of purpose, resourcefulness as well as positive “images and imaginings of themselves” (Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler) to overcome these barriers. I have suggested that their strong drive to succeed was closely linked to their original intentions in coming to Australia, which were mainly those of middle-class status maintenance—to own a house, send their children to good schools, to afford a holiday. The proliferation of Filipino immigration in many parts of the world and widespread knowledge about the occupational downward mobility many of them experience may have psychologically prepared the informants for diminished job status, at least at the outset in their new country. It is also possible that their high levels of education and successful work experiences prior to migration, combined with “deep seated historical core values reasserting themselves” (Cahill, *Intermarriages in International Contexts* 50) all contributed to the internal confidence displayed by these women. Their command of English also worked to their advantage. Thus most eventually, and after hardship and stress, resumed their careers at a level commensurate with their qualifications.

I have argued that the women embodied the classical modernist ideology of the self within a capitalist system. They deploy a combination of agency and privilege, including qualifications and ambition to succeed, although they often internalized their failure to advance in their careers as an individual deficit, obscuring or denying the relevance of structural factors. The women were aware of the structural disadvantages and discriminatory practices that excluded or demeaned them as “un-Australian: but most of them chose to change their behavior or their attitudes in order to conform. In all, I have shown in this monograph the limits of human agency in overcoming or sidestepping institutional barriers as it is with effecting smooth or rapid change in the area of family obligations. Human capital, personal



resources, privileged social status prior to migration, human and cultural capitals, and the exercise of agency while all essential in reconfiguring their identities as skilled workers, proved to be insufficient in overcoming more complex social and structural barriers.

Aside from institutional barriers, familial responsibilities as inscribed in their gender identity accounted for the informants’ difficulty in reconstituting their careers. The seeming non-negotiability of and pride over this idealized role would have to be altered in order for women’s careers to flourish. Yet, to a few, who clearly attempted to revise their childcare work arrangements, such renegotiation did not satisfactorily result in career progression. The conjunction of familial responsibilities and persistent institutional barriers compels reiteration of the limits of human capital theory. Stringent accreditation process in certain professions and mothering duties curtailed their plans. The refusal of a few informants to revise their mothering ideology especially during the first years upon arrival combined with lack of childcare support from kin impacted their career ambitions. They were left with “forced choices,” which leaned towards opting out. Despite their high levels of qualifications and willingness to adapt, career reconstitution remained difficult for these women. Despite equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws, racism remains deeply entrenched in skills recognition processes.

The women’s narratives of successful assimilation and career reconstitution, however, inadvertently depict them as docile “model minority” subjects. Such portrayals obscure the severe hardships they endured, subsequently preventing us from critiquing the structural, social and cultural barriers. Instead, it dangerously reinforces the myth that uncomplaining, hardworking, enterprising immigrants who possess the *right* qualifications could succeed in Australia, whereas unskilled, non-English speaking, and those who openly criticize the discriminatory practices in the labor market, fail, precisely because they do not have ‘it.’ The liberal individualist approaches of the women ironically legitimize rather than resist social inequities befalling immigrants in general and Filipino women in particular. Thus this study refutes the effectiveness of the notion of activating the individuals’ capacity over the state to “enterprise themselves” (Rose; Rose and Miller) as a success strategy. The women’s active exercise of citizenship rights, informed choices and personal motivation did not easily lead them to goal attainment.



## Notes

1. The Australian Bureau of Statistics define persons ‘not in the labor force’ as those who are 15 years and over, neither employed nor unemployed. They may want a job but for some reasons are laden with home duties, retired, or their qualifications are not recognized in Australia.
2. 20680-Country of Birth of Persons by Labour Force Status by Sex – Australia published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. See <[www.abs.gov.au/](http://www.abs.gov.au/)> downloaded on August 9, 2011.
3. Then President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1972. He ruled the Philippines until 1986 when his dictatorship was toppled by the famous People’s Power movement. Subsequent leaderships attempted to restore democracy, install transparency in governance and improve the country’s economic life but with little success. Infuriated by systemic corruption, Filipinos went back to the streets in 2002 to oust then Pres. Joseph Estrada. His predecessor, Vice-President then President-elect Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had been linked to various high-level scams that she too was a constant target of coup d’états and mass demonstrations.
4. Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Table 10.
5. The Philippines was declared a republic in 1898, although its independence was immediately disrupted by the invading Americans. It was only in 1946 when it became an independent nation state. Before 1898, inhabitants of the archipelago were recognized in terms of their regional orientation. Those who came from Manila and the larger Luzon region were simply called ‘Manilla men’, while those who were from the Mindanao Region were called ‘Sulu men’. See Iletto and Sullivan.
6. Colloquially known as ‘boat people’, asylum seekers who arrive by boat such as those aboard the historic Tampa in 2001 had to be subjected to mandatory detention. Such political posture is a blunt contravention of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Australia is a signatory.
7. In 1996, politician Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party have endorsed a populist and protectionist stand calling for the abolition of multiculturalism and prevention of further Asian immigration to Australia.
8. The Colombo Plan was a bilateral aid set up in the 1950s to enable economic, technical and educational assistance by western countries to developing countries in South and Southeast Asia. Australia played a critical role in the Colombo Plan by sponsoring Asian students in its tertiary academic institutions.
9. The term ‘not in the labor force’ is used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to refer to persons who do not have a qualification and those whose qualification is out of its classification scopes.
10. Data are extrapolated from tables presented in pages 19 and 21 of Victorian Community Profiles: 2006 Census Philippines-Born produced by the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

11. The Australian immigration point system covers educational qualifications, work experience, age, English language skill, and family relationships. In the case of sponsorship, additional requirements include length of sponsor's Australian citizenship, his/her location within Australia, and evidence of financial support to the applicant, among others. These are stipulated under Migration Regulations 1994 in consonance with the Migration Act of 1958.
12. Centrelink is an Australian government agency that provides diverse support, especially financial in nature to the disadvantaged and those facing major life changes.

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