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## Filipina Caregivers and the Colonial Construction of their Identities in the U.S

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**Abstract:** Existing literature has noted how a disproportionate percentage of Filipina women are employed in personal care and service positions, especially within caregiving positions (Ezquerro, 2007). Their relative invisibility and lack of access to adequate economic and labor protections potentially feeds into a black market of caregiving positions (Ezquerro, 2007). Due to their precarious status, these women are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and various types of harassment. While globalization certainly plays a role in Filipina women's participation within this labor sector, this study explores the concept that colonial gender hierarchies are being reinforced through Philippine media, thus affecting how Filipina caregivers perceive their identities and their position in the caregiving work sector.

Filipina women's contributions to the economy of the Philippines is substantial given current remittances rates. In popular media representations, the recurring image of the maternal OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) portrayed in TV campaigns and advertisements is testament to Filipina workers' contributions. In this essay, I argue that these depictions may be amplified by a historical colonial mentality that has idealized life abroad, and simultaneously, idealized the role of caregivers. For this study, I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with eight current or former Filipina caregivers born in the Philippines to examine to what extent colonial mindframes inform Filipina caregivers' identity formation in the United States.

Results from this qualitative study suggest that participants derive empowerment from their work and familial duties, which reframe capitalistic ideas of caregiving. Drawing from Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales' concept of Pinayism, I suggest the importance of amplifying how Filipina caregivers account for experiences of newfound agency and independence within their context in the United States, regardless of the nature of their work.

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The gender disparity among Filipino migrants is rooted in the demand for labor in the reproductive labor sector, which includes housekeepers and caregivers. While these labor sectors are not necessarily gender-rigid, the composition remains mostly female (Hochschild, 2016). Filipinas in California are employed in personal care and service positions, of which they

are largely concentrated in caregiving positions (Ezquerro, 2007). In Tope's (2016) study, she asserts that Filipinas have been labored as "maids, caregivers, medical personnel and entertainers" (p.1). In fact, in the United States, a large portion of Filipinas are concentrated in the caregiving sector (Labadie-Jackson, 2008). A survey found that 67% of Filipina caregivers are employed in a private home, i.e. one on one care, and 29% are employed in a residential care for the elderly (Nazareno et. al., 2015). According to Nazareno et. al. (2015), in 2014, private caregivers were paid an average of \$109.47 per day which is \$6.59 per hour—significantly lower than the minimum wage. Those working in a residential care facility for the elderly were earning even less at \$97.43 per day (5.87 per hour). Women working in a private home not only garner less protections than those that work in a residential care facility for the elderly, but they also are subject to a lot more tasks (Nazareno et. al., 2015). Despite these work conditions that they are subject to, many Filipinas are still in the field of care work. This paper investigates the layers of familial responsibility, colonial influence and empowerment that goes into Filipinas, and their identity formation within caregiving.

### **Colonial Mentality and the Distinction of the Caregiver Experience**

In this work, I argue that colonial mentality, a psychological effect precipitated by historical patterns of colonialism, plays a significant role in the way that Filipina caregivers perceive their work and their position (Felipe, 2016). Colonial mentality is essentially the belief that the colonizer's culture is superior than one's own and can lead to an internalized inferiority (Felipe, 2016). David (2008), argues that classical colonialism has several stages that ultimately result in a phenomenon called "internal colonialism" that seeps within a culture and survives through legacies (p. 120). In fact, Ferrera (2016) mentions that "Filipinos and first generation Filipino Americans indubitably have experienced what bell hooks (2010) refers to as the "colonization of the mind," internalizing, albeit consciously or subconsciously, the "civilizing presence of the colonizer" (p. 175) which accurately describes how Filipinos internalize their colonizers and by extension, the systems that were placed during that time period.

Historically, the Philippines was occupied by Spain, the U.S., and Japan. The generational impact of hundreds of years of colonization is by no means reversible. This is observable in Spanish colloquialisms present in the Filipino language, and the strictly English-taught classes in schools that date all the way back to American colonial times (Ocampo, 2016). Further, David (2013) argues that English is accepted as the language of the educated in the Philippines, and is regarded more superior than their own mother tongue. Thinly veiled instances of colorism such as the numerous beauty products and campaigns that advocate for having fairer skin also elucidates that the typical Filipino brown skin is inferior (David, et. al., 2013). In addition, Choy (2003) highlights the "insidious persistence of the interrelated myths of U.S. exceptionalism and benevolence, which claim that Americans embraced their 'little brown brothers' in the Philippines" (p. 4). These myths are perpetuated from systems placed during colonial times such as an Americanized education, infrastructure, and public health (Choy, 2003). In contemporary times, these systems are still in place; For instance, it is shown in the ongoing outflow of Filipina nurses overseas because of established "Americanized professional nursing training" dating all the way to U.S. colonial regimes (Choy, 2003).

It is arguable that legacies of colonialism have paved the way for the glorification of these Western ideals and the denigration of the Filipino ethnic identity. Felipe (2016) even goes so far in saying that Filipinos suffer greatly from the loss of identity, which then negatively affects their

own individual perception (p. 25). In a similar vein, colonization also plays a considerable role in how Filipinas construct their gender identity. Colonialism not only increased Filipinas' legal disadvantages and overall opportunities, but it has also cemented their domesticity. (Parreñas, 2000). In Eviota's (1992) work, she mentions that sex-gender systems were introduced to the Philippines upon colonization, which enabled the unequal sexual division of labor—men were in charge of providing, while the women were designated the household tasks (p. 19). In the Spanish colonial rule, Filipina women were the main caregivers for their sick family members at home (Choy, 2003). Additionally, the category of work for Filipina women in this time period was limited to midwifery (Choy, 2003). This gendered division of labor precipitated the formation of gender hierarchies—arguably a byproduct of colonization (Eviota, 1992). In Neher's (1980) study on women's political participation in the Philippines, both Filipino men and women held the belief that family and household responsibilities should be shouldered by the women (p. 113). He also argues that because of these gender-enforcing notions supported across the board, "Their homemaking chores keep Filipinas from learning useful skills for work outside the house and assure continued dependence on their husband's salary. Wealthy women can break out of the dependence cycle by hiring helpers to perform housekeeping chores, but this option is available to less than 4 percent of Filipina women. For the most part, women who work outside the home must also perform the duties of a full-time homemaker" (Neher 1980, p. 113). In the 19th century, common occupations for Filipina women were "*cigarreras* (tobacco factory workers), *criadas* (female domestic servants), *tenderas* (store owners), *vendadoras* (vendors), *costureras* (seamstresses) and *bordadoras* (embroiderers)" (Camagay, 1995, p.1). The lack of opportunities for Filipina women outside of traditionally "feminine" roles elucidates their worth, status, and power, that objectifies them, and by extension, marginalizes and racializes them.

As Parreñas (2000) contextualizes, "In the Philippines, men are expected to sustain the family and women to reproduce family life. In fact, ideological constructs of feminine identity are molded from "mothering and caring roles in the domestic arena" (p. 567). Neher (1980) found that both Filipino men and women in rural and urban areas agree that Filipina women should prioritize the house and family above all else (p. 114). It is worth arguing that these patriarchal attitudes were introduced upon colonization and are being constantly reinforced in modern Philippine society. The role of the Filipina woman as the maternal figure is not purely exclusive to micro institutions like the family. It is also observable in the gendered demand for Filipina women in labor sectors that channel their ability to care and provide (Felipe, 2016). Taking into account the worldwide phenomenon of Filipinas clustering in occupations such as "nursing, the mail-order bride industry, domestic work, and prostitution," it is worth noting that there is a transnational impact of the gender roles imposed during colonial times that is being reinforced worldwide (Felipe, 2016).

One of the ways in which gendered colonial ideals is also being reinforced is through media messaging. In this research, I am looking at the media iterations of the image of the Filipina worker. The image of OFWs working as nurses, domestic workers, and other feminized occupations in other countries is common. One such example is a campaign by a famous restaurant chain in the Philippines, Jollibee. Titled, "Pamasko," which is Tagalog for "Christmas Gift," the advertisement revolves around a Filipino couple working in Dubai. The story is told through the mother narrating her letters to her son who was left in the Philippines. She works as a maid, while her husband works as a chauffeur to a well-off family in order to provide for their son's education and basic needs. In another commercial by Google Philippines titled, "Miss Nothing," a series of narratives revolving OFWs and their families connecting online were

shown. In this commercial, Filipina OFWs were portrayed as either nurses or caregivers. Meanwhile, their male counterparts were either chefs or construction workers. Rodriguez (2015) notes that “Migrant families are not only depicted in advertisements for Western Union, box-shipping companies, international telephone cards, and other services commonly associated with migration, but also in local ads for food and other consumer products (Google and Coca-Cola advertisements featuring OFWs are well-known in the Philippines)” (Rodriguez, 2015, 1).

In Choy’s (2003) work, *Empire of Care*, she argues that the history of colonialism between the Philippines and the United States has precipitated the myths of “U.S. exceptionalism and benevolence” which has fueled the desire for Filipinas to migrate to the U.S.. (p. 4). Introducing the concept, “culture of migration,” she argues that the patterns of Filipino immigration to the U.S. are facilitated by narratives from the media as well as Filipino immigrants residing in the United States (Choy, 2003). This phenomenon, I argue, is precipitated by colonial legacies, fueled by the elusive idea of the American Dream veiled in the narratives of the media and current Filipino immigrants. Similarly, in Näre and Nordberg’s (2015) investigative study about the perceptions of Filipina nurses in Finland, a salient narrative held that, “The notion of the Philippines as a nation systematically training and exporting nurses to the global labor market is predominantly constructed in the media as a ‘natural global order of things’ that ‘we’ should succumb to and benefit from” (p. 24). I argue that this “national global order of things’ is rooted in longstanding effects of colonial gendered hierarchies being reinforced cyclically by the media and the people consuming it. This work focuses on historical patterns of colonialism, more specifically, the impact of the reinforcement of colonial gender hierarchies in Philippine media, and the *culture of migration*, as it influences the identity construction of Filipina caregivers in Los Angeles.

## **Methodology**

This study makes use of the lens of Pinayism, a decolonial Filipina feminist theory that aims to put Filipina experiences at the forefront. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales (2005) defines Pinayism as “beyond looking at gender politics as the major focus. Pinayism aims to look at the complexity of the intersections where race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, educational status, age, place of birth, diasporic migration, citizenship, and love cross” (p. 141). It is important to frame these women’s narratives against Western, hegemonic feminism, as these women’s experiences are culturally distinct. I also argue that they should not be seen as victims to their positions in the reproductive labor sector. Using snowball sampling to gather my respondents, I was able to interview eight Filipina caregivers. Snowball sampling is essentially “A method of non-probability sampling where the respondents are themselves used to recruit further respondents from their social networks” (Oxford: A Dictionary of Social Research Methods, 2016). From a network of family and friends, I contacted a caregiver who was willing to participate in the study and provide contact information of fellow caregivers. Through her networks, I was able to contact other respondents who were also willing to participate in this study. As Woodley and Lockard (2016) state, “snowball sampling provides one such way for researchers to study marginalized populations by harnessing the power of social networking and personal connections, which allows for the more thorough analysis of individuals and groups that may otherwise remain inaccessible” (p. 322).

I employed this method with the intention of establishing legitimacy with the community, as some of them may be undocumented and therefore, they may have some skepticisms in being interviewed by a total stranger. This method also allows me to gather more respondents as opposed to contacting them through their workplace, as they might not be willing to talk about their job due to the fear of losing their employment. I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 8 Filipina women who were born in the Philippines. Four of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and four were conducted through FaceTime, a video chatting application, due to some respondents being unable to take time off and meet in person. Most of the participants attained a college education, two participants attained only a high school education.

The interview consisted of ten questions, and each interview took about 30 minutes to an hour to complete. The questions included their experiences in the Philippines to their eventual migration to the United States, as well as their general perspectives on their position in the reproductive labor sector as caregivers. The questions were open-ended—allowing for the participants to freely talk about their experiences and thoughts. Follow-up questions were asked to further gauge what the participants had expressed. Additionally, in order to explore the ways the caregivers see themselves in media they are exposed to in the Philippines, I employed a mixed method approach to this research by using a visual aid which entailed showing the respondents an example of a commercial in the Philippines that makes use of a OFW as the subject. Shannon-Baker and Edwards (2018) states that incorporating visual methods to interviews are utilized for the following rationales: “expanding an understanding of the phenomenon or experience, better communicating findings to various stakeholders, and incorporating or involving more diverse viewpoints” (p. 938). After the commercial is shown, they are then asked what they think about the commercial itself, and further, what they think about the portrayal of Filipinas in the commercial. The purpose for this is to assist the respondents in narrowing their responses based on the question presented on their familiarity with OFW commercials. The same commercial is used throughout the entire qualitative data collection process.

The participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities. All appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols were followed. Participants were made aware that the researcher is fluent in English, Tagalog, and one of the native dialects in the Philippines, Bicol—only if they disclose that they were from the exclusive region in the Philippines that spoke the Bicol language. The options of what language to use is so that participants are able to speak frankly and comfortably about their experiences. Participants were also made aware that everything will remain completely confidential, and that they were free to leave at any time during the interview.

### **Findings and Analysis**

In this study, the following themes were found to be recurring: the caregivers’ American dream and cyclical feminine roles. Although not in the interview questions, some of them mentioned their undocumented status. It was also observed that participants revealed more information once made aware that the audio recording stopped. Some participants, although made aware that the researcher is fluent in Tagalog, English, and one of the Philippine native dialects, Bicol, still resorted to answering the interview questions in English. These women’s past lives in the Philippines greatly influenced their destinies in the United States. My analysis suggests that

maternal roles were reproduced transnationally, however, in the case of these women, such roles were non-traditional as they then became the sole providers for themselves and their families.

### **The Caregiver's American Dream**

Choy (2003) mentions the concept of the "culture of migration," which illuminates the constructed ideas of the U.S. that are perpetuated by the media and migrants that are already in the U.S. (p. 4). She also argues that this phenomenon is one of the driving forces that shape migrants' desire to move abroad (Choy, 2003, p. 4). This idealization of life abroad is a salient issue in the Filipino community, due in part to generational effects of colonialism. Given that the Philippines has a longstanding history of colonialism, the idealization of life abroad is precipitated by the complicated nature of colonial mentality. Many of the respondents expressed that their lives in the U.S. are better than their lives in the Philippines, further perpetuating the romanticized notion of the "American Dream." They also made statements that described their individual life choices being influenced by this necessity to find work outside of the Philippines, more specifically, in the U.S. When Corinne was asked why she chose her major in college, she states,

When I went into college, my first year in college, I had the desire to go to other places like outside of the Philippines and especially to come to United States. To work and also I would like to live in America because you know, in the Philippines we show English movies made in the USA. So when I watch movies English movies, I am thinking, oh, it's beautiful country. And of course, I wanted to land a good job when I come here, then earn good, good money. To be honest since elementary and even in high school I've been, like, I really want to go to America. I know people who have relatives that are here, when they go home [to the Philippines] they say it is just nicer over here [in the U.S.].

Additionally, when Jo was asked about her primary motivations for immigrating to the U.S., she states,

For me, that's one reason [income] and another is the experience of living here in the U.S. I like it here better in the U.S. 'American Dream' you know? All the opportunity is here and then you help your family, you know, in the Philippines. Then most especially I like how the government is running the country unlike the Philippines.

In David and Okazaki's colonial mentality scale, they argue that colonial mentality is manifested in several ways, one of which is the, "*denigration of the Filipino culture or body* (the perception that anything Filipino is inferior to anything White, European, or American, e.g., culture, physical characteristics, language, material products, and government; this may be manifested by the common preference for anything "made in the U.S.A." and by the regard of White physical characteristics as more attractive, advantageous, and desirable)" (David, et. al., 2006, p. 241). The statements made by Jo and Corinne both refer to the constructed notion of the U.S. being an enigmatic ideal, and at the same time, the subtle and yet implied notion that life in the U.S. is much better than life in the Philippines. Although they encountered difficulties with their jobs, these women were grateful for their new lives in the U.S. which eased the

challenges that they faced. Jo adds, "It's hard [being a caregiver] but it's a different experience working here in America. I like my life here. I cannot go back to the Philippines anymore."

Many of the respondents ultimately desired to leave their home countries to find better opportunities. However, respondents provided no other option other than to migrate to the U.S.. Jasmine only obtained a sixth grade education, yet she made a firm decision to move to the U.S., since she was a child. She states, "I felt like I didn't belong anywhere in the Philippines. I don't want to live the life that everyone else here is living." Even though Jasmine was born and raised in the Philippines, she describes the feeling that she never belonged in the Philippines, and so she lived her life with the purpose of moving to the U.S.. When asked why, she describes that "I really didn't have any aspirations in terms of my career. I really just wanted to go to the U.S."

As Choy (2003) mentions, there exists this idea of the greatness of America being perpetuated since their colonization. The overwhelming American presence continues to this day, regardless of Philippine independence. The respondents felt that their lives in the Philippines are not nearly as great as their lives in the U.S. as overtly stated in their responses. This may affect the way in which they perceive themselves and their work sector. However, it is arguable that regardless of this, they have improved their class mobility. Many of the Filipinas interviewed mention candidly that they are able to live better lives here in the U.S., due to the lack of opportunities in the Philippines. Regardless of the nature of their work, they are driven by their individual pursuits.

### **Cyclical Feminine Roles**

Jasmine was a domestic worker in the Philippines, and she eventually saved enough money to get a passport as well as other documents to aid her migration abroad. In talking about her job as a caregiver, she states, "I like it. I was meant to take care of people that's all I know." When asked why she feels that way she adds,

Well, it's because taking care of people is literally all I know. My mom died during childbirth. I ended up taking care of my 4 siblings. Sometimes I couldn't go to school because I had to take care of them. My older siblings were guys, all they did was get drunk and hang out with their friends. They never really helped with the household responsibilities. My aunts tried to help out but they told me that I had to take care of my siblings because I'm the girl.

The idea of "caring" as an innate ability in these women may be rooted in societal expectations for women, in general (Choy, 2003). Important to mention also, are the patterns of female gender roles that these women were exposed to in the Philippines. As Lilliana reflects on her family life in the Philippines, she states,

It was my sisters and I that mostly helped out in the house. My mom was just a housewife and my dad was a farmer. I felt like we were a middle class family so it wasn't bad. My dad or my brothers don't really help out in the house but my dad is a hardworking man. But yeah, mostly my mom and my sisters did the housework.

In terms of their perceptions, these women argued that being an OFW meant that you were either a nurse or a caregiver. They strongly identified with the commercials shown, speaking further on their experiences as OFWs. Interestingly, the participants speak highly on the opportunities for them and other Filipinas to leave the country for jobs. When asked about the commercials about OFWs and the way in which they are portrayed as either caregivers or nurses, Lilliana adds, "It's just how things are, OFWs usually go into nursing or caregiving. It's real life. That's just what they do." When asked to expand on her statement, she adds, "That's the opportunity for Filipinas. Me, personally, I do it to take care of my children and see them finish their studies. I think Filipinas are really industrious."

The idea of "caring" as an innate ability in these women may be rooted in societal expectations for women in the Philippines (Choy, 2003). Jasmine has four siblings—two older brothers, and her two little sisters. She reflects that she had to act as a maternal figure for all of them, despite only being 15, and despite her brothers being much older than she is (18 and 22). In reflecting on her experiences with her clients she states, "I feel like I'm meant to take care of people. I'm devoted to them [clients]. Taking care of people is all I know, so I have to do a good job at it." Shouldering household responsibilities are embedded into the lives of these women in the Philippines, as well as their eventual immigration to the U.S. Reflecting on her experiences with taking care of her immediate family members, Corinne mentions that her job is an extension of her role as a daughter. "My heart, my passion is to take good care of the elderly. I just thought about how I took care of my own grandparents, my own parents back home when I take care of my clients."

A similar statement is made by Claire, "My parents died when I was younger so I feel as though I didn't have the chance to take care of them. I guess this is my way of fulfilling that promise by taking care of the elderly." Rose also adds,

I enjoy caring for the elderly, they're like my parents. I think for when you care about the elderly you just have to think about taking care of your parents. I'm helping them while they are helping me- I mean they're paying for me but they are grateful. It is not just a job.

Present is the innate ability for these women to take care of people, specifically the elderly. They intertwine their perceptions for family duties as well as their professional duties as a caregiver, and this is what shapes their experiences. There is a general expectation that they place on themselves to be able to care for their parents, and by extension, their clients. The feeling of gratefulness is also a salient narrative in these women when asked to talk about their job, as they are ultimately able to provide for their family through working as caregivers in the U.S. Jasmine says of her and her fellow caregivers, "I'm happy with my job, and I'm sure a lot of other Filipina caregivers are because most of my friends, we are grateful to be here. We all really just want to care for our loved ones in the Philippines."

Women's position in the global care chain is arguably a testament to their ability to provide for their family. Despite family ties being compromised, these women send remittances, as well as *balikbayan boxes* to keep their family relations intact. Many of the women expressed great pride in being able to earn more money since moving to the U.S. The selflessness of these women are seen in their candid reflections. When asked about the ups and downs of their migration journey as well as their current job as a caregiver, the women brought up providing



for their family as one of the factors in why they enjoy their occupation. Additionally, they also highlighted this sentiment when shown the OFW commercials. The selflessness of these women and their orientation towards caring for their families were expressed during the interviews. Contrasting their hardships, their family was their source of identity. In their sacrifices, they were able to conclude a greater purpose—one that is maternal in nature. Rose mentions,

“Sometimes I feel deprived because I don’t buy myself anything but I would rather buy my family stuff. You probably won’t understand since you don’t have a family yet but you will eventually. I’m happy that I’m able to help my family. I feel bad when I’m not able to give them the things that they want. I don’t know, I guess it’s a Filipina thing that I’m really family-oriented. I will do anything for my family. That’s why I value my job because without my patients, I’m not able to take care of my family back home.”

The caregivers present their identities as mothers, daughters, and wives. As the respondents were shown the commercials, many expressed the notion that they, as OFWs, were fulfilling a higher purpose. Further, they impose upon themselves a sense of responsibility for their families. In exploring colonial ideals of Filipina domesticity, this complicates the notion of what entails “domesticity.” Regardless of their distance to their home country, these women identify with roles of “mother,” “daughter,” “provider,” and “caregiver.” Though not overtly stated, the respondents’ identities are strongly tied to their familial responsibilities.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

I focus on the voices of Filipina caregivers in Los Angeles as there is limited literature that focuses on their individual identities and perspectives. While there is subsequent literature on colonial ideals affecting the greater Filipino-American diaspora, such as the institutionalization of Filipina nurses in the U.S., few consider the perspectives of Filipina caregivers. Their perspectives are imperative to the field of Critical Filipinx Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, as well as American Studies because their experiences expose the different layers of marginalization as well as empowerment coming from the informality of their work sector. In this work, I have shown that these caregivers are influenced by their colonial upbringing in the Philippines, performing feminine roles and exhibiting the white savior complex disguised within their version of the “American Dream.” Therefore, it is important to trace the roots of this romanticized notion of the American Dream as it affects the perceptions of these women.

This study has also highlighted that while individual perceptions matter, as do the factors that shape those perceptions. In the global reproductive labor market, Filipina women dominate the space. Rodriguez (2010) contends, “The gendered labor of women haunts the Philippine system of labor brokerage even as it is the labor of women that proves to be most profitable for the state” (p. 96). Taking into account the Philippine’s dependence on remittances, it is then within the state’s benefit to urge its people to migrate as OFWs. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the image of OFWs, more specifically, the Filipina caregiver, is an image that is exploited in Philippine media. Rodriguez (2010) also adds, “much of the gender knowledge about women’s migration from the Philippines tended to reify patriarchal understandings and led to state policies and programs aimed at regulating their gender roles and their sexuality and doing so in line with the state’s larger commitment to neoliberal labor brokerage” (p. 97). The gendered aspect of these migration patterns are inscribed within the continual commodification of Filipinas’ work in the global sphere, which I argue, exploits their ability to care. However,

many of the respondents ultimately desired to leave their home countries to fare better opportunities than in the Philippines. Additionally, the idea of America as the ideal place to be facilitates the desires of these women to immigrate to the United States, so much so, that the narrative is still relevant after their eventual migration. The role of Philippine media should be taken into account in shaping the “collective desires” of moving to America, as Choy (2003) puts it. The presence of America, more specifically, the idea of what America is and represents, continues to thrive in the Philippines, post-colonial times. Constructed from American shows, movies, and other forms of entertainment, the enigma of “America” is produced. The caregivers candidly expressed that they are able to live better lives here in the U.S., due to the lack of opportunities in the Philippines. However, regardless of the nature of their work, they are content with their new life and are satisfied with the newfound agency and independence that they found in the U.S.

This study then aims to devictimize the narratives of Filipinas, as their experiences should not be dictated by the commodification of their labor, but rather, their individual perceptions. The respondents ultimately derived empowerment from their work and familial duties, which reframes the capitalistic idea of caregiving. The idea of Pinayism, coined by Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, is significant. The rationale being that, Pinayism is “the gendered analysis of imperial trauma—the Philippines’ dual colonizations by Spain and the United States—and the articulation of Pinay resistance to imperialism’s lingering effects: colonial mentality, deracination, and self-alienation” (Cubales, 2005, p. 6 as cited in De Jesus, 2005). Within the lens of Pinayism, one is able to take into account conflicting roles and expectations rooted from historical patterns of colonialism. It is worth arguing that although these women may ascribe to roles which include internalizing the role of “caretaker” and “maternal figure,” and “viewing getting married and having children as a primary life goal,” they derive empowerment from such values given the agency that they possess in their position in the global reproductive labor market (Nadal, 2011, p. 166). Barken, et. al. (2015) argues that “sociologists of work and gender have devoted considerable attention to gender inequalities that shape views of care work as low skilled. They connect the devaluation of care work to the belief that caring is an intrinsic feminine capacity rather than a learned skill” (p. 295). Therefore, it is worth questioning what society’s foundational ideals are with regards to women’s work.

### **About the Author**

Ashlee Monton is a doctoral student in American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her work focuses on Critical Filipinx Studies, gendered labor, embodiment, and decolonization. Born and raised in Naga City, Philippines, Ashlee's scholarship is rooted in kapwa, a shared bond with the self, the community, and the homeland. She received her B.A. in Political Science and a minor in Asian American Studies at California State University Northridge (CSUN). At CSUN, she was also a HSI Pathways/Mellon Fellow, where she produced her first research project, *Filipina Caregivers and the Colonial Construction of their Identities in the U.S.*. You may reach her at [abmonton@email.unc.edu](mailto:abmonton@email.unc.edu).

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