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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

This issue presents the first of two parts of a special collection of papers on Filipino overseas migration. The question of social class, which is central to the migration process but not often enough analyzed, is taken up by Philip F. Kelly and Koki Seki. At the level of the family unit, marital intimacy in migration is tackled by Roderick G. Galam and Mario Ivan Lopez. These contributors take the vantage point of either the origin or the destination. At the destination, Kelly interrogates the various dimensions of social class as these pertain to Filipino migrants in Canada, while Lopez investigates marital intimacy among Filipina migrants in Japan. At the origin, Seki examines the desire to emigrate among members of the middle class in Metro Manila, while Galam probes seafarers' wives in Ilocos Norte and how they deal with their husbands' absence. In all cases, the dynamics are embedded in transnational networks of social ties that traverse state and geographic borders, connecting migrants and nonmigrants in both origin and destination. Even nonmigrants become immersed in migrant transnationalism.

Kelly proposes a four-point typology of distinct but overlapping dimensions of class as position in a social hierarchy; as process of producing and allocating the surplus; as performance of identity and position via consumption and embodied attributes; and as politics. Each of these dimensions, Kelly argues, can be fully explored only when we consider subjective understandings of class and space as constitutive of class processes—both of which gain acuteness in the context of overseas migration. For instance, downward class mobility overseas may result in upward mobility in positional, processual, and performative terms for kin in the homeland. Moreover, migrants assess their experiences of downward mobility in class position in Canada through practices brought from the

Philippines rather than those that already prevail in Canada. However, future work need to conceptualize the relationship between the Philippine and Canadian class structures and their mediation by transnational processes.

In the Philippines upward mobility continues to feed upon dreams of outward mobility, yet being in the middle class breeds the desire of leaving and at the same time staying put in the country. Seki explores this ambivalence by looking at two groups: medical doctors who are training to become nurses to facilitate relocation overseas, and NGO practitioners engaged in social reform. On the one hand, the idea to leave is fueled by frustration with politics, its corruption, instability, and populism, the last causing the middle class to frown upon the masses from whom they distance themselves. On the other hand, the motivation to stay derives from the quest for meaningful engagement in the country's transformation, a sense of patriotism as well as solidarity with the masses, and apprehensions about their diminished social status overseas. Amid this conflicted stance, they retain migration as an option, should exit rule the day.

Issuing from the liberalization of the Philippine telecommunications industry, cellphone technology has revolutionized communicative practices in migrant families, conjuring copresence despite physical separation. Galam argues that wives play a key role in the reconstitution of the family by bringing a sense of home to their husbands while integrating their absent husbands in the lives of their children—who in turn substitute for the absent husband in addressing the wives' need for physical intimacy. But while telephone conversations bond father to children, and simulate the couple's face-to-face exchanges and even arguments, the most intimate communication between husbands and wives is through the written, if fleeting, word: text messages to express longings that elude orality/aurality in a conjugally private sphere.

Religion is not always a prominent motif in the unions of Japanese men and Filipina migrant women, but in several such marriages it actually is. Lopez's study explores this issue, which until now has received only scant scholarly attention. Under varying circumstances and at different life stages, Filipina wives may undergo a faith experience that, without active proselytizing but relying on diverse communicative strategies, draws in their Japanese husbands. Although not inevitable, faith becomes a primary articulator of the marital relationship. Without the migrant's intention to replicate the religious milieu of the homeland, religious practices may migrate even after the migrant has long settled in her destination. Further inquiries on this transnational field are needed.