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Difference and Alliance in Transnational Social Fields

The Pendular Identity of the Filipino Middle Class

This article offers a cultural analysis of Filipino middle-class identity emerging in transnational social fields. Although the practice of identity construction of the middle class leads to polarization and fragmentation of society, the ambivalent character of their identity results in social networks and alliances with members of different social classes in the Philippines. This article provides an approach to understand seemingly discrete and contrasting dual aspects—of differentiation and alliance, exclusion and inclusion, and plurality and unity—found in transnational social fields through an alternative framework of civil society and public sphere in the Philippines and other parts of the globalizing world.

KEYWORDS: MIGRATION OF NURSES • THE NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY COMMISSION • CIVIL SOCIETY • PUBLIC SPHERE • NEOLIBERALISM

Particularly since the late 1980s the emergent middle classes of Asian countries have been seen as pivotal in the democratization process and as significant in pushing for economic liberalization and maintaining a vigorous civil society (Robison and Goodman 1996; Rodan 1996; Sen and Stevens 1998; Pinches 1999; Chua 2000). In the Philippine setting, studies suggest that the middle class, together with the business elite, is crucial for realizing the public sphere by integrating other social classes and marginalized peoples into mainstream civil society (Ferrer 1997; Hilhorst 2003; Silliman and Noble 1998; Bryant 2005). Notwithstanding the significant role of the middle class in political and economic development processes, a cultural analysis focusing on the identity of the middle class brings into sharp relief its ambivalent character. This ambivalence derives precisely from its position of being in the middle. While the middle class engages itself in social practices of distinction and differentiation by improving its economic status and attaining its desired lifestyle, its newly acquired wealth and status are always contested particularly by both the laboring and the upper classes.¹

The same ambivalence has been given a characteristic twist in the context of the Philippines, where the middle class is increasingly entangled with expanding transnational social fields.² As shown in the cases presented in this article, the middle class harbors a double-sided sentiment: while desiring to immigrate to a developed country to attain more wealth and a better lifestyle than in the Philippines, at the same time members of the middle class are hesitant to leave the country. The reasons for such hesitation vary: the anxiety about living in a foreign culture and facing severe discrimination overseas; the fear of losing every achievement, status, and comfort they have in the Philippines; the apprehension of having to start from scratch in a foreign land and plunging into a world of severe competition abroad; and the nationalistic aspiration for helping their countrymen and reforming the home government. Such contrastive, sometimes contradictory, inclination of the middle class toward its own country and a foreign land results in contrastive dual processes, a “pendulum” swinging between differentiation from and alliance with social groups in the contemporary Philippines. On the one hand, the desire to leave the country by migrating abroad coexists with the practice of distinction and differentiation from other social classes and from the country itself, thus inviting divisiveness and fragmentation in society. On the other hand, the hesitation to leave and, positively stated,

the middle-class members’ wish to remain in the country coexist with their aspiration to be bound with their countrymen and even forge social alliances to attain shared goals. Indeed, my contention is that, prior to discussing the role of the middle class in forming a robust civil society, what should be examined are the said dual processes of differentiation and alliance that in fact lie at the core of civil society. This article deals with this problem through an analysis of the Filipino middle class’s “pendular identity” as observed in its members’ narratives of transnational migration.

Social Class, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Globalization

The sociological and anthropological literature on social differences and alliances in the globalizing world helps clarify this article’s argument in regard to social classes, civil society, and the public sphere. Current globalization and its accompanying neoliberal governmentality encourage “individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2005, 2).³ The strong trend of deregulation and privatization has weakened the traditional ties among family, community, and class; and the process of polarization, fragmentation, and individualization can be observed in various aspects of society (Crompton 2008; Harvey 2005). Some anthropologists maintain that the “logic of globalization has not resulted in the solidification of differences among civilians, but rather in the proliferation of differentiated sovereignty within and across borders” (Ong 2005, 97). Thus, globalization is always viewed as a “fragmented globality” in which “the individuals, groups, and agencies that have privileged access to particular kinds of flows—notably information—can use that privilege in ways that reinforce an already uneven distribution of power”; at the same time, numerous peoples are “increasingly aware of the impact of events happening elsewhere, yet relatively powerless to affect them” (Trouillot 2003, 65–66). As such, anthropology has been accumulating ethnographies that “interrogate the *experiential* contradictions at the core of neoliberal capitalism” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 8). These studies assert that the subjects of anthropologists, namely, indigenous ethnic minorities, small-scale farmers, laborers, and the urban poor, have been increasingly marginalized, excluded from the political and economic arena, and forced to live with a

fragmented identity under neoliberal governmentality (cf. Hanson 2007; Li 2007; Moore 2005; Nevins and Peluso 2008; Tsing 2005).

However, despite the marginalization and increasing powerlessness of people, a number of studies also examine the formation of networks and alliances in the expanding social space. These studies focus on nonstate actors, such as NGOs and grassroots organizations engaged in counterhegemonic activities, or “governmentality from below” (Appadurai 2002; see also Appadurai 2000; Ferguson and Gupta 2005; Ong 2005; Tanabe 2007). Further, in relation to the expanding public sphere where such networks and alliances are made possible, some anthropologists have criticized the idea of the bourgeois civil society of the modern West, which is “constituted as a hierarchy of unequally valued individuals with unequal capacities for self-regulation,” and thus “has always given rise to regimes of inequality and difference” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 24–25). Instead, they articulate the need for an alternative approach to civil society, which, taking into account the plurality and hybridity of societies in Asia and Africa, focuses on “indigenous public spheres” (*ibid.*, 28; cf. Gupta 2006; Hann 1996). While those studies endeavor to determine how social networks and alliances can possibly exist amid the divisive and polarizing logic of global governmentality, there remains for in-depth study the cultural analysis of the middle class, which is regarded as important in forging civil society and the public sphere in the Philippines and other Asian societies.

A cultural analysis of the identity of the middle class and its relationship with other social classes takes “class” not as an objective category measurable by certain productive or economic relations, but as a cultural construct emerging through the contestation of identity and representation, and differentiation from other classes through the manipulation of various forms of symbolic capital. As such, people of the middle class are involved in the politics of representation, in which “they struggle to distinguish themselves from the working class, with reference to such qualities as sobriety, rigour and neatness; on the other [hand], they go out of their way to emulate the bourgeois, but in doing so are distinguished by the bourgeoisie as ‘pretentious’ and ‘flashy’” (Pinches 1999, 34, cf. Bourdieu 1984, 246–47).

Especially in the Philippines, a cultural analysis of middle-class identity should be discussed in the context of the increasing fluidity of social classes brought about by transnational migration. Although both permanent and temporary labor migrations widen the socioeconomic gap between social

classes—particularly between the lower and middle classes—and reproduce the difference between them, this same process leads to the emergence of a new category of middle-class people called the “new rich.” They are those who used to belong to the lower labor class but have attained a certain level of economic status and purchasing power after their successful overseas employment (Pinches 1996).⁴ In other words, the relations of the social classes in the Philippines today are becoming “hybrid” and “overlapping” (Aguilar 2003, 154) in the sense of fluid mobility between the social classes, and the blurring of their boundaries. Paradoxically, the increasingly blurred boundary between the middle and lower classes actually encourages the members of the middle class to construct a symbolic boundary between themselves and other social classes through the practice of distinction and differentiation. Such cultural analysis should give attention to the fact that the identity of social classes has never been static but has always been contested by other classes, consequently bringing about conflict and distinction between different social classes rather than integration in a homogeneous civil society (Garrido 2008; Schaffer 2005, 2008; cf. Bautista 2001; Doronila 2001; Parnell 2002).

Such an approach, which studies in detail the politics of representation, has further criticized the assumption of homogeneity inherent in the idea of the discursive public sphere, particularly as discussed by Habermas (1989), based on the experience of civil society in the modern West. It maintains that “the hegemony of bourgeois publicity was always incomplete and exercised within a field constituted partly by its relation to other insurgent discourses” (Calhoun 1992, 39), and criticizes Habermas’s neglect of the “plebeian public sphere” (*ibid.*, 38–39) or “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser 1992). It also points out that Habermas’s concept of the public sphere indicates the “‘politics of purity’ [which] expels and devalues difference” (Gardiner 2004, 40), and remains “overtly abstract and formalistic” so that it fails to grasp adequately “the significance of the embodied, situational and dialogical elements of everyday human life” (*ibid.*, 30; cf. Crossley and Roberts 2004).

This article shares the approach of those studies mentioned above, which consider a class not as a substantial or essentialized category but rather as a relational category constructed through the negotiation of a symbolic boundary between classes. However, considering the ambivalent character of middle-class identity and its contrastive inclinations, this article maintains that it is not sufficient to look into divisiveness and fragmentation in the civil

social space, but it is also crucial to identify the social arena that includes both differences and alliances, division and disconnected ties as well as unity and connectedness.

In order to discuss this dynamism, this article focuses on two groups within the middle class—one consisting of those who try to secure nursing licenses in order to work abroad, the other consisting of those who entertain a concrete plan to migrate overseas yet are involved in local NGO activities. The following section discusses the current trend in the Philippines involving members of the middle class who have secured nursing licenses for the expediency of emigration. The subsequent section presents the second group of middle-class informants who also pursue the strategy of emigration but, as members of NGOs, are engaged in uplifting the welfare of overseas contract workers (OCWs) and their families in the Philippines.

The Philippine Middle Class and Migration

Philippine society has been commonly characterized as a two-class structure, composed mainly of a small number of landed oligarchs and numerous tenant farmers, or the so-called big and little people (Lynch 2004) respectively, a system that has remained basically unchanged since the nineteenth century. However, the Philippines has been undergoing a remarkable transformation of its class structure owing mainly to democratization, stabilization of the government, and the liberalization of trade and the economy particularly after the end of Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorial regime. This transformation is seen in the emergence of a "new middle class," which is composed of the growing corps of professional managers, administrators, and technical experts (Pinches 1996, 106).⁵ This article focuses on the middle class that has grown in political and economic presence during the democratization process, which started under the presidency of Corazon Aquino in the late 1980s. It includes particularly middle-class professionals who have attained a level of education equivalent to or higher than a college degree and are licensed professionals such as doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, certified public accountants (CPAs), architects, as well as businessmen and corporate managers employed particularly in multinational corporations.

The Filipino diaspora, composed of OCWs working mainly in the Middle East and East Asia and immigrants in Europe, the United States, and Canada, has reached about 9.45 million people as of December 2010

(Commission on Filipino Overseas n.d.), which represent 10 percent of the Philippines's estimated population of 92.34 million as of May 2010 (Philippine National Statistics Office 2012). A conspicuous feature of today's emigration from the Philippines is a drastic increase in the number of nurses migrating to North America, Europe, and the Middle East, following the rise in demand for health-related workers in those parts of the world. Although the exodus of Filipino health professionals, such as doctors and nurses, particularly to the United States, has been a phenomenon since the mid-1960s (cf. Choy 2003), the current migration presents an interesting trend in that middle-class professionals such as engineers, CPAs, architects, teachers, corporate managers, and doctors are shifting careers and trying to secure nursing licenses for the expediency of working and migrating abroad. Thus for these Filipino middle-class professionals, a nursing license is akin to a "second passport" to help facilitate their immigration.⁶

Statistics released by the Philippine Overseas Employment Authority (2008) indicate more or less 5,000 to 10,000 nursing professionals who left the country annually to work abroad during the period from 1994 to 2006. The total number of Filipino nurses working abroad during those twelve years was over 102,000. Their destinations covered the Middle East, East Asia and Southeast Asia (such as Singapore), the United States, and Europe (particularly the United Kingdom). The main destination in the Middle East is Saudi Arabia, which accepts about 5,000 Filipino nurses every year (POEA 2008). While the United States accepted 2,833 nurses in 1994 and 3,690 nurses in 1995, the number decreased drastically to only 5 in 1998. But the number increased again to 3,853 in 2005. In the same way, the United Kingdom has been receiving none or only a few nurses during the 1990s, but it employed 5,383 nurses in 2001. Thus, it can be inferred that the employment of nurses abroad fluctuates markedly in accordance with the demand for health professionals or the immigration policy in host countries.

It is worth emphasizing that middle-class professionals who have retrained to secure nursing licenses already possess nonnursing college degrees and oftentimes have government licenses to practice their own professions. To meet this need for retooling, many nursing schools have started to offer a special curriculum aimed specifically at middle-class professionals, enabling completion of the course in a period shorter than that of the normal

Number of enrollees in major nursing schools offering a curriculum for “second coursers,” Metro Manila, 2005

	SCHOOL A (MANILA)	SCHOOL B (MANILA)	SCHOOL C (MANILA)	SCHOOL D (VALENZUELA)	SCHOOL E (CALOOCAN)	SCHOOL F (QUEZON CITY)
AY2000	103	—	138	n.a.	41	170
AY2001	258	—	201	1,766	72	603
AY2002	886	—	970	1,728	153	1,225
AY2003	2,133	427*	1,214	2,135	426	2,316
AY2004	3,447	744	1,465	2,978	577	3,753
AY2005	4,728	895	1,612	3,128	772	4,446

*Initial batch

Source: Interviews with the university registrar's office of the respective schools

nursing curriculum. The table above indicates the number of enrollees in major nursing schools and colleges in Metro Manila that offer this special curriculum for so-called “second coursers.”⁷

Unmistakably the number of enrollees in those schools has increased drastically in the past few years. Furthermore, interviews with university registrar's offices confirmed that enrollees in the second-coursers curriculum were already college-degree holders and many of them had been working as middle-class professionals such as doctors, engineers, certified public accountants, architects, corporate managers, and self-employed businessmen. This article focuses on this type of middle-class professionals as an exemplary case of middle-class adaptation strategy to transnational social fields and their identity emerging from such practice.

Boundary Making by the Middle Class

The narratives of middle-class professionals regarding their motivation and plans for migration highlight middle-class identity and its ambivalence. This identity is constructed through practices of boundary making between members of the middle class and other social classes, namely the upper elite class and the laboring class. Such practices are observed in their narratives of distinction and differentiation from other social classes and, furthermore, from their country itself.⁸

Case 1: Alma Cruz, M.D.

Born in 1970, Alma is a doctor of medicine. She passed the medical board examinations in 1995, and is currently working as a dermatologist in several clinics in Metro Manila. In 2002 she enrolled in a nursing school for a two-and-a-half-year course. The tuition fee for the nursing school, quite steep at P120,000⁹ for the entire course, was shouldered by her husband, a well-known veterinarian in the Veterinary Inspection Section of the City Hall of Manila. Since then, Alma has been steadily preparing for her immigration to the United States. After graduating from nursing school, Alma took and passed the nursing board examinations in June 2004. In November of the same year, she passed the examination given by the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing School (CGFNS), which is necessary for working in medical institutions in the United States. She applied for a working visa to the US in March 2005, and at the time of the interview had been waiting for the visa, hoping to receive it by the end of 2006.

Regarding the motivation behind her endeavor to be a nurse and to migrate to the United States, she says, “It is for my child.” She has a daughter who is 4 years old, and she says,

I want her to have an option as to where she would like to stay, to experience the best of both countries. There is a difference between the social welfare and system of benefits that you can avail of in the Philippines and the United States. I want my daughter to be able to avail of the best benefits from both countries.

Furthermore, Alma emphasizes that her reason for migration is not a financial one. Her income combined with that of her husband, who is well known in his field, is sufficient for a comfortable life in Metro Manila. Rather, Alma explains that the true motivation lies in her anxiety about living in the Philippines, where the political situation seems to be quite unstable and lacking direction. She expresses her feeling by saying that “Nothing can be changed by People Power. Nothing can be gained by People Power (Wala namang nakukuha sa People Power).”

In the Philippines the memory of the “People Power Revolution” in 1986, which toppled the Marcos dictatorship, has been called upon repeatedly in times of political turmoil, which have been caused primarily by the perceived corruption of politicians in government positions. To many

Filipinos, it seems to have provided a framework where street demonstrations and civic movements are regarded as the most effective means of fighting against a corrupt incumbent government. Particularly in January 2001, then Pres. Joseph Estrada, who had been accused of graft, was ousted from the presidency by tens of thousands of people who protested in the streets of Manila, an event that came to be called “People Power 2.” Nevertheless, the political unrest remained unabated and street protests in varying scales continued despite the extraconstitutional ascent of Gloria Arroyo, then vice president, to the presidency. Alma indicates her disappointment with the political instability brought about by “People Power,” saying, “This country is going nowhere” (Walang patutunguhan ang bansang ito).

Such anxiety and disappointment coexist with a somewhat critical gaze toward the masses, the lower class known colloquially as the *masa*, who are often present at street demonstrations. Alma, for instance, says that “The masses are very spoiled. If you ask them, they respond that they are pitiful” (Masyadong i-spoiled ang masa, if you ask the masa, sila ang kawawa). At the time of the interview in September 2005, street protests clamoring for the resignation of President Arroyo, who had been accused of cheating in the 2004 presidential election that gave her a full presidential term, were frequently held in the streets of Metro Manila. The masses were the main component of the crowd protesting in the streets, and they sometimes clashed violently with the police. Alma’s comment reproaches the masses whose street demonstrations are perceived to be disorderly, with the *masa* demanding violently for what they want. According to her, the masses are so spoiled that they think anything can be provided to them as their due right, as the price for their “miserable situation.” Alma’s comment expresses a strong rebuke for the self-pity of the poor.

Yet, while expressing her feeling of deep frustration with the political situation in the Philippines and her desire to immigrate to the United States, Alma explains that immigration for her is nothing but a “fallback option.” In other words, it is a security or safety net for her and her family should the country’s situation get worse. To migrate is neither an urgent need nor a dire necessity that for her would require an immediate decision; rather, it is one of the options she merely wants to secure. This is because, Alma concludes, “To leave your own country is not an easy thing to do. There might be severe discrimination in the United States. My brain is enticed by the United States, but my heart remains here” (Malapit ang utak sa States, pero ang puso nandito).

Case 2: Atty. Vilma de los Reyes

Born in 1969, Vilma graduated from the law school of the University of the Philippines. As a lawyer, she has been working as a senior manager in a multinational pharmaceutical company in Metro Manila for several years now. Despite having an economically remunerative job and a financially stable life, she is planning to immigrate to Canada with her husband and three children. They also intend to transfer to the United States after they secure Canadian citizenship.

She narrates her motivation for migration as different from that of OCWs:

OCWs go abroad in order to acquire status symbols such as a sturdy house (*bahay na bato*), an owner jeep, and a *sari-sari* (variety) store in the Philippines.¹⁰ But we, the middle class, can only achieve our desired lifestyle and quality of life abroad. This is quite a sad situation that the middle-class people have in the Philippines. Such feeling can never be understood by the Japanese like you.
...

The middle class people migrate abroad because we have capability, competence, and resources that can be utilized in foreign countries. Through migrating, we avoid competing with the lower class people who only have limited resources, and leave much local opportunities to them.

However, she adds, expressing her anxiety about migrating, “It is of course hard to leave everything you have achieved in the Philippines, and start from scratch.”

Case 3: Engr. John and May Devara

Born in 1969, John is an electronics and communications engineer, and is currently working in a research institution in Metro Manila. Although he has harbored an intention to migrate since around 2001, he was hesitant to leave in the beginning because he was not sure if he could find a steady job abroad such as the one he now has in the Philippines. Yet, according to John, the positive aspect of migration has overwhelmed the negative aspect, given the fact that he has increasingly felt the corruption and instability of the government under the Estrada administration.

John's wife, May, majored in fine arts at the University of Santo Tomas and is now working as an interior designer. May narrates that her anxiety about staying in the Philippines began in 1998, when Estrada announced his candidacy for president. She explains her feeling,

I started to be quite anxious about a society in which the politician who doesn't have capacity for governance can be elected as a leader through mobilization of the masses; and in effect, the masses who have been mobilized in that way actually had the final say regarding which direction the country will be heading.

The statement above expresses the feeling of helplessness entertained by the middle class in view of their realization that the direction of the country will not be decided by them but by someone else, in particular the *masa*, who can bring bulk votes to politicians who, in the opinion of the middle class, are populists and quite often corrupt. This observation is also reflected in the following two cases.

Case 4: Peter Ocampo, M.D., and wife Maria

Peter, like Alma in Case 1, is also a doctor of medicine. Peter, about 40 years old at the time of the interview, is an ophthalmologist who passed the medical board examinations in the early 1990s. While working as a doctor in several hospitals in Metro Manila, he enrolled in and completed his nursing education and then secured a nursing license. His wife, Maria, born in 1969, graduated from the University of the Philippines, College of Business Administration, and has worked as a senior manager in several multinational corporations.

Mr. and Mrs. Ocampo are hoping to migrate to the United States, and they explain their motive for migration by saying, "We want our kids to spend their lives in a First World country." Peter and Maria have two children, a 12-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl, who are both studying in "exclusive schools"¹¹ in Metro Manila. Maria cannot help but feel anxious about the future of her children. According to her,

In order to spend a comfortable life in the Philippines, you must at least find a job in a multinational corporation. You also need to study in the University of the Philippines, or Ateneo de Manila, or De la Salle

University, and you have to graduate with outstanding grades. Yet, today, even if you have graduated from those schools, you sometimes end up working in a call center.¹²

Maria's anxiety regarding the future of their children is associated with the political situation in the Philippines. Maria narrates:

When President Marcos was ousted in February 1986, I had high hopes that the new political system and nation building would begin in the Aquino administration. I was thinking that the Philippines will soon join the progressive countries. But the current situation is worse than the dictatorship of Marcos.

She started to think seriously about migrating, particularly after Estrada became president in 1998. Maria says, "Although the Arroyo administration is also criticized for corruption and injustices, Arroyo is the lesser evil." She adds, "Even if President Arroyo is ousted through impeachment or another People Power, there will be no one to replace her. The Philippines will not get anywhere" (Walang patutunguhan ang Pilipinas).

While expressing feelings of disappointment with the country, which they share with Alma in Case 1, and their desire to migrate to the United States, the Ocampos say that definitely "you have to secure the option to come back home anytime." Particularly for Peter who can practice ophthalmology in the Philippines anytime, it is crucially important to "have several options" for which purpose he points out, "Don't burn your bridges."

Case 5: Fe Padilla

Born in 1963, Fe is a certified public accountant who has been working in one of the major Philippine banks and multinational companies. Among her prospective destinations for migration are Canada, the United States, and Australia. The reason behind her desire to migrate is to prepare a better environment for her 10-year-old daughter. It seems that Fe does not want her daughter to grow up in the Philippines, where the political situation is so unstable. According to her,

The Filipinos are never satisfied with the person whom they voted for. When the people are not satisfied with the leaders they elected,

they simply want to kick them out by People Power. But nothing can be fundamentally changed by People Power, regardless of how many times people repeat it. Corruption will never be gone. GMA [President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo] should resign, but even though Noli [Vice-President Noli de Castro] takes over, he will be ousted again by the people.

Aside from the feeling of helplessness, the narrative above indicates a cynical view by members of the middle class, who stand aloof from the political events happening in the Philippines. From the cases above, it can be understood that the desire of middle-class professionals for migration and a new lifestyle abroad coexists with a strong feeling of reproach for the lower class, that is, the “masa,” or “the people,” as well as for the corrupt political elites who are largely seen as belonging to the upper class of society. In other words, migration for the middle-class professionals is seen as a practice of distinction made through differentiating themselves from the other social classes in the country as well as from the country itself. Furthermore, the other feelings entertained by middle-class professionals are anxiety, disappointment, and distrust against the state and the system of government, which can also motivate migration. The following cases indicate these feelings.

Case 6: Corazon Sison

Corazon is a businesswoman. She was born in 1963 in Leyte province and studied in the University of the Philippines in Tacloban, the capital of Leyte. After graduating in 1984, she went to Manila and met her husband, who was a graduate of the University of the Philippines, Diliman, majoring in architecture. They married in 1986. Corazon and her husband are now engaged in the manufacture and sale of acrylic plastic products such as key holders, trophies, and signboards, and are expanding their sales outlets in major commercial establishments such as SM.

While engaged in running their business, Corazon began to study nursing in 2004. She plans to migrate to the United States after securing her nursing license. Her motivation for migration is similar to the other two cases presented earlier: “to give the children the choice of studying in the United States.” Her children, four in all, the eldest of whom is 16 years old while the youngest is 4 years old, are all studying in prestigious private schools

such as the Ateneo de Manila. Nevertheless, as a mother, her anxiety about the future of her children remains. According to Corazon, “There are good schools in the Philippines, but the problem is that there are no jobs available after graduation.” Further, her anxiety apparently is not only about the lack of employment opportunities or financial issues. She adds, “I don’t want my kids to grow up in the Philippines, because the government is so unstable.” Corazon’s criticism of the government is not merely an expression of fear of its instability but also of a deep distrust in the system. As a person who regularly engages in private business transactions, she is strongly dissatisfied with how the government manages the operation of businesses within its jurisdiction. Corazon points out that the government has no set of consistent and written rules and regulations regarding business operations, and often rules for transactions are merely dependent on instant negotiations with whoever is in charge, who makes on-the-spot decisions. She deplores such a situation saying, “There are so many gray zones here.” She feels frustrated that in some situations she has had no choice but to go along with what she believes is a corrupt system. She laments,

You don't know what the real rules are because they are not clearly written. Under such system, the unscrupulous person who is good at bending the law for his own interest always benefits the most. You cannot survive unless you ride the tide, even though you know well that the system is corrupt. Under this situation, whether you like it or not, you are swallowed up by the system (*Makakain ka ng sistema*).

Furthermore, such cynicism toward the system of government makes her hesitant to observe a basic obligation as a citizen and she says, “I am becoming hesitant to pay taxes” (Nakakahinayang magbayad ng tax).

Case 7: Diana Yu, D.M.D.

Diana, born in 1961, is a dentist who practices in her own clinic as well as in other clinics in Metro Manila. She studied her nursing course from 2004 to 2006, and is now preparing to migrate to the United States as a nurse. One of her motivations behind migration is the “corruption in the government,” which she encounters in everyday transactions in government offices. For example, she narrates,

Once, at the city hall, I applied for a business permit and was asked by an assessor to pay P5,000. But I was asked to pay only the minimum amount of P600 in the following year even though I submitted the same documents and no conditions of my business had been changed since the previous year. You don't know who is right and who is wrong, everyone has their own rule (*Hindi mo alam kung sino ang tama, kanya-kanya ang ruling*). When the city mayor is replaced and, accordingly, his underlings in the government office are also replaced, the rules change as well. Here, we are not ruled by the law, but by the people.

Further, the nursing license for Diana is an “insurance” against the deteriorating peace and order situation in the Philippines. As a Chinese Filipino, she is fearful of the increasing kidnap-for-ransom incidents victimizing wealthy Chinese Filipinos in Metro Manila. Under such situation, the nursing license and the option to migrate abroad provide her a “security” or “insurance” in case the peace and order situation of the country turns for the worse.

Despair over Politics, Attachment to Country

Some similarities indicative of middle-class identity can be gleaned from the cases presented above. The sentiment common to middle-class professionals who desire to leave the country is expressed, for example, in the despondent phrase, “This country is going nowhere” (*Walang patutunguhan ang bansang ito*). The implication of this phrase, mentioned by several informants, can be properly considered by locating it first in the specific circumstance prevailing at the time of the interviews. It is a criticism against the governance of then incumbent President Arroyo as well as that of deposed President Estrada. Estrada, who used *Erap Para sa Mahirap* (Erap for the Poor) as a campaign slogan and overwhelmingly won the presidency in 1998 owing to the huge support garnered from the lower class. His administration, according to informants, had continued the populist policy of dole-out without any clear and long-range plan.

In 2001 Estrada was ousted by street demonstrations that involved numerous middle-class people, his then Vice-President Arroyo subsequently assuming the presidency. She went on sitting as president by winning the 2004 presidential elections. However, the Philippines has remained in a

political stalemate and chaos caused by political scandals and the alleged fraud committed by Arroyo in the 2004 elections, prompting opposition politicians to demand her impeachment and instigating civil groups to plan and stage yet another “People Power” to kick her out of office. It is in this situation that middle-class professionals expressed disappointment and distrust toward the drifting state, as seen in the cases presented above. Most of the informants actually joined the two People Power events of 1986 and 2001 in order to express their political will. Their disappointment has been further deepened by the sense that unscrupulous politicians and the corrupt system of government have stolen the fruits attained by the two People Power events.

Similarly, the frequent mention of the phrase by many informants, “You are swallowed up by the system” (*Makakain ka ng sistema*), indicates a deep-seated distrust of the system of government as a compelling reason behind the middle-class professionals’ desire to emigrate. Such distrust is connected to the dissatisfaction that the taxes they pay are not properly compensated for. As one informant reasons,

We cannot decline to pay the taxes because it is withdrawn automatically from our salary. The masa are not paying the taxes. But the masses can have what they want realized through their votes in elections owing to their huge numbers. While we, who are paying taxes, cannot choose the leader of the country; the masses, who are not paying taxes, have the power to elect their chosen leader.

Thus, on the one hand, the middle-class professionals hold a deep-seated distrust toward upper-class political elites and the system of government implemented by those elites. On the other hand, their reproach for the lower-class poor, the *masa*, is just as entrenched. As shown in the informants’ narratives, such rebuke is directed particularly toward the poor people’s seemingly relentless demand for pity and compassion for their miserable situation from the populist-styled politicians. This critical gaze indicates that the middle-class professionals are trying to define who they are in contrast to the poor (Schaffer 2005, 20).¹³ Such narratives and gaze of the middle-class professionals can be considered a practice of boundary making, which lies at the basis of their identity. As Schaffer (*ibid.*, 21) points out in a similar situation in Metro Manila, such practice serves “to remind middle class . . .

of who they are and how they are different—and morally or politically superior to—the poor.” The middle class’s distrust and disdain toward both upper and lower classes have led to their disappointment and frustration with the country and its future direction. Under this situation, migration is an opportunity for the middle class to leave behind such disappointment and resignation, and to seek an alternative lifestyle abroad hoping for an improvement of one’s career, a good quality of social security and welfare, and better education for their children.

Yet, while migration for middle-class professionals enables them to distinguish themselves from other social classes, the informants display a conspicuous hesitance to leave the country. Compared with the flexible and fluid mobility of “multiple-passport holders” and “astronaut” Chinese professionals discussed by Ong (1999), the Filipino middle-class professionals examined here stand out for their indecision, despite all compelling reasons, to leave the Philippines. As told by Alma of Case 1, for the many informants of this study, to immigrate to the United States and other foreign countries is a mere “fallback option” or “insurance” in case the political-economic situation in the Philippines turns for the worse. While securing the option to leave the country, and at the same time desiring to leave, the middle-class professionals in this study opt to actually remain and stay where they are, thereby containing their disappointment and resignation. Such ambivalence is clearly expressed by Alma of Case 1, “My brain is enticed by the United States, but my heart remains here” (*Malapit ang utak sa States, pero ang puso nandito*), and also by Vilma of Case 2, “it is of course hard to leave everything you have achieved in the Philippines, and start from scratch.”

Another informant, a doctor who specialized as an anesthesiologist and who is now a nurse in the United States, narrates,

There are many doctors who turned to nursing like me but who are still hesitant to leave the country. This is because it is difficult for them to give up all the comforts they have in the Philippines. Here you can depend on many persons to help you such as a *yaya* (dry-nurse), a helper, and extended family. Those doctors will finally leave the country only when the situation of the country worsens. If not, they will remain here.

Such ambivalence can be observed even in the case of middle-class people who have already migrated abroad. These middle-class professionals

usually do not formally resign from their jobs in the Philippines, even though they have already started a new career and life abroad—a fact sometimes unknown to their bosses. Thus, even though they have moved physically to foreign lands, they are hesitant to leave their career and status in the Philippines. Hence, their lives straddle between two countries. Such ambivalence is expressed by Peter in Case 4, “Don’t burn your bridges,” which suggests that, despite having migrated abroad, middle-class people strive to maintain multiple options for retreat in case their transnational endeavors fail. The following case illustrates this situation.

Case 8: Joshua Espinosa, M.D., and wife Gena Espinosa, M.D.

Joshua, born in 1967, is a medical doctor specializing in internal medicine. His wife, Gena, born in 1966, is an ophthalmologist. They had been working as doctors in a military base and hospital for several years, when Gena went to nursing school in Metro Manila beginning in 2002. After securing her nursing license, she, together with Joshua and their two children, migrated to the United States in 2005. The reason behind their migration is their discontent with their salary; which is meager compared to that of their doctor colleagues, and their dislike of their working condition that often required them to transfer to different military hospitals, some located near the battle zones of Mindanao.

At the time of the interview, they had been staying in the United States under a tourist visa with a two-year validity, putting pressure on Gena to swiftly find hospital employment before the visa’s expiration. Joshua, for his part, has not resigned from the hospital he used to work for in the Philippines. He has been officially on a leave of absence for a year. That being the case, Joshua can go back to this hospital in the Philippines in case Gena’s job hunt does not turn out to be fruitful.

Joshua and Gena exemplify the ambivalence of middle-class professionals. While these professionals seek to define themselves as being capable of attaining an alternative status and lifestyle abroad and are desirous of migrating, they are at the same time hesitant to carry out their enterprise. While such hesitation is due to the anxiety caused by various factors, the reasons for it further include a nationalistic sentiment harbored by middle-class professionals, that is, their wish to be connected to and allied with their countrymen. The next section deals with this specific aspect of the middle class’s ambivalence and its implication on the possibility for social alliance and unity.

Social Alliances by the Middle Class

The discussion has so far clarified the identity of the Filipino middle class, which is pendulating between two poles: to migrate on one end, and to stay in the country on the other. Gravitating toward the latter pole, to stay in the Philippines, is caused not only by fear and anxiety observed in the previous section, but also by a positive aspiration for social ties and networks with their countrymen. The case below indicates such aspiration of middle-class professionals.

Case 9: Atty. Benjie Fajardo and wife Lea

Born in 1972, Benjie graduated from the University of the Philippines, majoring in Business Economy, and later pursued a law degree in the same university. Having passed the bar examination in 2001, he joined a law firm in Metro Manila where he continues to work at the time of the interview. His wife, Lea, after completing her college education from the University of Santo Tomas, was employed in a multinational pharmaceutical company in Metro Manila. They have thought about migrating to Canada since around 2002. They have passed some steps in the evaluation process required by the Canadian Embassy and attended several seminars in preparation for migration.

However, at the same time they are hesitant to push through with their migration plan. Benjie has just started his career as a lawyer in the Philippines and they are unsure of the kind of job he can find in Canada. Further, it seems that Benjie entertains a more positive motivation to stay in the country. He says, "I realized that we should not give up on trying to change the government no matter how corrupt it is. If a revolution is necessary, I will join the revolution. Should People Power fail to bring a good government, we will simply repeat People Power again." Benjie and Lea recall that they were present almost everyday in Ortigas during People Power 2, which ousted Estrada from the presidency in 2001. Benjie's narrative suggests that, even after the Arroyo administration that replaced Estrada has been tainted by various scandals and corruption, he is willing to stay in the Philippines to help improve the government.

This case suggests that the identity, a definition of who they are, of the Filipino middle-class professionals, is not only constructed by their practice of distinction and differentiation through migration but also by their aspiration for social reform and the improvement of the government. This aspiration

can be clearly observed in the following cases in the second group of middle class informants in this study, that is, the middle class engaged in local NGO activities. Considering such aspiration, it is possible that the identity of the middle class leads them further to forge social alliances in an expansive space of civil society. However, such alliance is possible only as an ambivalent one. This is because, as shown in the case above, the middle-class professionals' aspiration for an alliance with their countrymen quite often coexists with their desire for migrating abroad, and this pendulum can easily gravitate to the other pole depending on contingencies in the country. Yet, what should be pointed out here is that this seemingly unstable pendulum does not necessarily mean that the alliance is always weak and destined to fail in bringing about tangible achievements. Rather, as the following case study indicates, such an ambivalent alliance and network are capable of bringing about a degree of concrete social reform amid the apparent divisiveness and fragmentation of society.

NGOs in the National Anti-Poverty Commission

During the mid-2000s, the same period when the narratives presented above were collected, several NGOs that comprise the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), which was established as a result of the Social Reform Agenda of the Ramos administration (1992–1998), were pursuing the move to revise Republic Act (RA) 8042, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act. In particular these NGOs compose the Migrant Workers Sector of the NAPC. While the NAPC is under the Office of the President, and therefore a government entity, every basic sector that comprises the NAPC is composed of NGOs.¹⁴ The NAPC is a recommendatory body to the government in regard to the policy for alleviating poverty of every sector. The migrant workers sector discussed here, composed of fourteen NGOs based in Metro Manila, is engaged in activities aimed at improving the welfare of vulnerable OCWs.

RA 8042 was hastily drafted and enforced amid severe criticisms of the perceived failure and inability of government to protect the human rights of OCWs, as evinced by the execution of Flor Contemplacion in Singapore in 1995. The law includes a provision requiring the deregulation of recruitment activities and the phase-out of all regulatory functions then undertaken by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and their transfer to the private sector within five years from the time the law came

into force (Art. VII, Sec. 29 and 30). The NGOs composing the Migrant Workers Sector of the NAPC had been vehemently demanding the repeal of this article on deregulation and phase out. According to those NGOs, when all administrative procedures and regulatory functions of the government concerning OCWs are phased out, the migrant workers would be exploited directly by private recruitment companies and foreign employers, and so the workers' rights and welfare would not be protected.

In 2006, at a time when the deregulation and phase-out requirement had not been implemented despite the law, several meetings were held in Metro Manila by migration NGOs in order to lobby some congressmen. In those meetings, the congressman who was either the Chairman of the Committee on Labor, or that of the Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs, along with members of his staff were invited, and the negative effects on OCWs and the expected outcomes from the deregulation and phase out were fervently discussed. The NGOs were especially concerned about the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS), which is a mandatory training for the people set to be deployed for overseas employment.¹⁵ Since the 1980s, the PDOS had been provided by six NGOs accredited by the government, particularly by the POEA. The NGOs contend that the deregulation of the PDOS and its administration by the private sector would diminish the seminar's standard of quality and contents, and it would emphasize more the rights of foreign employers rather than the security and welfare of the workers. After repeated discussions in the meetings, the NGOs finally won the repeal of the article on deregulation and phase out in March 2007.

Thus the group of NGOs, which comprised of the Migrant Workers Sector of the NAPC can be considered an actor of social reform that demands the revision of excessive liberalization policies, and the protection of the rights and welfare of OCWs. Such movement was made possible through the negotiations and cooperation of NGOs with different social classes, such as the lower labor class comprising the main population of the OCWs, and with the upper class of congressmen and bureaucrats.

The case indicates that a space for civic alliance, albeit transitory, was created for the purpose of the revision of the law. The questions that should be examined next are: Who are the members of those NGOs comprising the Migrant Workers Sectors of NAPC? What are their social status and class backgrounds? What are their motivations for their NGO activities? The following cases answer those queries.

Case 10: Michael Rodrigo

Michael was born in 1960 in Mindoro island, southeast of Metro Manila. His parents are both public school teachers. He studied in a private university in Metro Manila during the late 1970s, when student activism against the Marcos dictatorship was at its peak. Michael also deeply involved himself in a nationalistic and leftist antigovernment movement during those days. During the administration of Corazon Aquino, which started in 1986, Michael began to organize labor unions in various sectors. As part of such organizing work, he formed an NGO in 1988 for the protection of the rights of OCWs. As of 2006, his NGO has gained 45,000 OCWs as members nationwide, and Michael has been working as chairman of the Migrant Workers Sector of the NAPC.

Michael's wife graduated from the University of the Philippines and had worked as a teacher in an exclusive private high school in Metro Manila for eight years. She has immigrated to the United States and is currently working in Houston, Texas, as a public school teacher. Michael and the children are also planning to immigrate to the United States within a few years. Michael says,

It is possible to continue an activity similar to what I am doing now even after I have settled in the United States. There are around 10,000 Filipinos in Houston. Some of them are professionals but there are also many who are suffering discrimination. Even if they are able to secure American citizenship, they are still looked down on as 'second class citizens.' The activities, such as the ones I am doing now in the Philippines, are also needed to protect the human rights of the Filipinos in the United States.

Case 11: Jorge Araneta

Born in 1951, Jorge graduated from the University of the Philippines, College of Engineering, in 1975 and then received his MBA. from the Ateneo de Manila University in 1979. He has long been working as a manager in the banking and financial sectors in Metro Manila before he organized an NGO, whose main activity is to provide the PDOS for the OCWs. Asked about his motivation for this NGO activity, Jorge answered, "Since I have accomplished a lot, I wanted to give back to the people."

Jorge's wife, on the other hand, has a BS degree in Business Administration and more than one master's degrees in related fields. She had been working as a government employee for quite some time when she applied for a Canadian immigrant visa in 1995. Regarding the reason behind the application, Jorge explains, "At that time, since the economy was good under the Ramos administration, we were hesitant to apply for the immigrant visa. But there was quite a high possibility that Estrada was going to be elected as president in the succeeding election. That's why my wife thought we should apply 'in preparation for the worst scenario (*manigurado tayo*)'." He continues, "I am still supporting President Arroyo. But the political situation in this country has been chaotic since the People Power of 1986. I always feel insecure, haunted by the anxiety about the worst thing that might happen."

The immigrant visa was issued by the Canadian government in 1997. Jorge's wife, who migrated ahead of her family, has been residing in Canada for seven years now, doing various menial jobs such as that of a cashier, a bagger at a grocery or the supermarket, or a temporary clerk at the city hall. While staying in Canada, she has not resigned her position in her government office in the Philippines and keeps her status as a government employee under leave of absence. Jorge, who is also aiming for Canadian citizenship within three years, is shuttling between Canada and the Philippines because, in order to secure Canadian citizenship, he cannot be found to have been absent from his residency in Canada for more than six months for a period of three years. Jorge's son, who was born in 1982, graduated from the Ateneo de Manila University and wishes to immigrate to the United States. For that purpose, he has already secured his Philippine nursing license, and is currently preparing for the nursing board examination of the United States.

Case 12: Dante Paterno

Dante was born in 1946 in San Pablo, Laguna, and was educated at San Beda College in Manila from elementary through college, graduating with a degree in Business Administration in the late 1960s. He obtained a Master's Degree in Marketing Management from the University of Louisville in the United States, and later studied Traffic Engineering at the University of the Philippines. Since then Dante has been working as an executive in several companies in the field of transportation and aviation. Aside from corporate work, he has involved himself in NGO activities since the 1970s, and he

currently presides over an NGO that works for the environment, education, and human rights and welfare of OCWs. Dante's wife is a nurse working in the Philippines.

Many of Dante's uncles, aunts, and his own siblings have already left the Philippines and mainly live in the United States as American citizens. Dante himself possesses a multiple-entry visa to the United States and frequently travels there. For him, migrating to the United States is an option that he always entertains. He says, "America is attractive. The idea of migrating to America never escaped me. This is because the US is where opportunity is available in all stages of your life." Regarding the motivation behind the migration of middle-class professionals including himself, he explains, "It is not because of financial reasons, but of the losing of trust for the system of the country, and the feeling of fear caused by it." He adds,

My wish is to live in a place where I don't have any worry, anxiety, and fear when I wake up every morning. Particularly, what I need is a sense of security when I grow old. They say that New York has a higher crime rate than Manila, but I don't feel that is true. I can walk in the streets of Manhattan without any fear even during midnight. But in Parañaque, I can hear a gunshot sometimes emanating from the Muslim community near my residence. What we are looking for is not financial stability but quality of life.

However, denying his intention to migrate abroad right now, he confirms, "You should not ask only for personal comfort and convenience. What is needed is a concern for the needs of our community, society, and the people. I cannot simply depart for abroad and just leave all the NGO activities behind."

The Middle Class Caught Up in a Pendulum

The cases of Michael, Jorge, and Dante—three informants who preside over NGOs comprising the Migrant Workers Sector of NAPC—indicate that they and their families have high educational achievements and are engaged in professional and corporate executive jobs. In this sense, they share the same class background of the middle-class professionals presented earlier.¹⁶ Similarly they are either planning to migrate abroad, mainly to the United States, or have families who have already settled abroad. What should be

pointed out here is that, while they are entertaining their hope and have concrete plans of migrating to the United States, or Canada, they are also remaining in the country to pursue their NGO work in order to uplift the welfare of their countrymen, particularly the vulnerable OCWs, in the cases discussed above.

Michael of Case 10 is keen on helping local laborers and OCWs and their families to improve their situation in the Philippines. Yet, his wife has already settled in the United States, and Michael also plans to follow her soon. It seems that he is torn by contradictory desires—to help his countrymen and migrate to the United States. His statement of “the activities, such as the ones I am doing now in the Philippines, are also needed to protect the human rights of the Filipinos in the United States” sounds like a compromise to solve such contradiction.

Jorge in Case 11, who is engaged in an NGO as a way of “giving back” to the people and society, would seem to now straddle between the Philippines and Canada. But it also appears that settling permanently in Canada is a fallback option for him in “preparation for the worst scenario” (*manigurado tayo*). Indeed, Jorge’s wife, even after she secured the immigrant visa for Canada, is reluctant to resign entirely from her government post in the Philippines. Finally, migration to the United States is a quite realizable option for Dante in Case 12, who maintains rich networks and resources in the United States. However, it is also difficult for him to leave behind the “interests of community, society, and the people.”

As such, the middle-class professionals in this section are also identified by the same ambivalence that can be found in the cases discussed in the previous section. Thus, it can be argued that the two groups of middle-class professionals dealt with in separate sections of this article suggest the two distinctive, but equally characteristic, aspects of middle-class identity.¹⁷ In a sense, they are both similarly swaying between two contrastive poles of a single pendulum, an exact metaphor for the ambivalence in middle-class identity. For instance, while the group of middle-class professionals presented in the previous section is gravitating toward migration as a way of distinction and differentiation, the middle class of this section on the other hand is gravitating toward staying in the country to help their countrymen through their NGO work.

This observation corresponds with the analysis made by a Filipino political scientist on the middle class in the contemporary Philippines.

Rivera (2006, 195) discusses that the Filipino middle classes’ quest for varying aspects of modernity is sought to be fulfilled “in the promises of foreign shores.” It emphasizes the threat and danger that former President Estrada’s administration posed to middle-class lifestyle and aspirations, and the economic downturn that accompanied the series of scandals and corruption cases that “not only made it difficult to maintain middle-class amenities but also assailed its prevailing values of justice and fairness” (*ibid.*). As a number of trajectories middle-class participation in politics can assume in the context of “the continuing ineptness of state agency and the irresponsibility of many of the elites,” Rivera (*ibid.*, 199–200) identifies the inclination that is similar to the pendulum identity discussed in this article: middle-class participation in politics, on one hand, “could lead to a cynical depoliticization in which the middle classes would try to prosper without consciously engaging the effete state agencies or by simply voting with their feet by further exploring opportunities outside the country,” or, on the other hand, “within a reformist agenda, the middle classes could try to reinvigorate existing political institutions, particularly the electoral process and political parties through alliances with reformist politicians and bureaucrats.”

What should be emphasized is that the pendulum suggested here gravitates depending on the specific political economic contingencies of the country, such as the unbearable political chaos and instability of the government, or the nationwide anger and demand for protection of rights of the vulnerable OCWs. As such, the pendulum metaphor suggests that it is not sufficient to focus only on the aspect of divisiveness and fragmentation of society, which is caused by the practice of distinction and differentiation of middle-class people; attention should also be paid to the other pole of the pendulum, which is the aspiration of the middle class to remain in the country, to strengthen its ties with the common people, and even to forge a network and alliance in a civic social arena such as the NAPC.

Conclusion

The identity and subjectivity forged under contemporary neoliberal governmentality are characterized by instability, fragmentation, individualization, and social fluidity (Crompton 2008; Harvey 2005; cf. Amin 1994). Under such conditions class identities, or consciousness, emerge not from a sense of collective belonging but from a process of differentiation from others (Crompton 2008, 92). The transnational migration of Filipino

middle-class professionals examined in this study is also considered a social practice of distinction and differentiation from others. The ambivalence reflected in the narratives of the informants suggests the middle class's "individualized identities, generated by a continuous process of comparison 'up' and 'down'" (*ibid.*).

The anthropological studies on neoliberalism have been concerned with "the cultural knowledge and self-making of individuals" (Ellison 2009, 83) who have internalized values such as "self-help," "individual responsibility," "self-activating," "self-monitoring," "accountability," "entrepreneurship," and "audit" as subjectivities produced under neoliberal governmentality (Collier and Ong 2005; Kipnis 2007; 2008). The middle-class professionals examined in this article can also be considered as such subjectivities, as enterprising selves who are engaged in social practices of enhancing their "marketability" and "employability" in transnational social fields (Treanor 2005). They are "persons who are 'entrepreneurs of themselves' flexibly altering their bundles of skills and managing their careers, but they also become the bearers of risk, thus shifting the burden of risk from the state to the individual" (Dunn 2004, 22).

While most anthropological studies of neoliberalism have focused on the counterhegemonic subalterns who participate in the "zones of resistance" against the neoliberal governmentality (Cahn 2008), there is also a growing number of articles that focus on "the loci and communities of social action and relation where the moves toward marketization and privatization seem to be embraced with open arms" (Richland 2009, 172) and middle-class people and corporate actors who actively participate in advancing neoliberal projects in order to realize their desired identities and lifestyles. This article, which focuses on Filipino middle-class professionals as enterprising selves who are engaged in the practices of distinction and differentiation through the utilization of various networks and opportunities in transnational social fields, can be properly contextualized in this burgeoning area of anthropological inquiry.

However, the middle-class selves that the data of this article suggest are not freewheeling entrepreneurs who, embracing the neoliberal project of marketization and privatization "with open arms," simply seek to improve their status and attain better lifestyles. The situation, as suggested by the data, is also not simply one of deepening divisiveness and disunity caused by the practices of such an individualized middle class. Rather, the data suggest that

the relations of social classes become more fluid and complicated owing to the ambivalence of members of the middle class who, while keenly involved in the practices of distinction and differentiation, cannot help but be hesitant to push through their enterprise, particularly transnational migration. As the informants of this study have frequently mentioned, emigration is a "fallback option" as it is not easy for them to leave the country for good despite their anxiety about and disappointment with its government.

Thus, while it is true that the practice of identity construction of the middle-class professionals in this study leads to a deepening polarization and fragmentation of the society on one hand, the ambivalent character of their identity, on the other hand, results in networks and social ties with people of different social classes in the Philippines. Such social alliances may neither share a coherent identity nor have a unified moral or long-term endurance. Rather such alliances tend to be loose and transient networks of people. This study, however, maintains that under the neoliberal situation of deepening fragmentation and polarization of social classes, and also the individualization accompanied by the gaps and inequalities in various social fields, no association and civil society movement can be coherent entities with members having unified goals and a homogeneous identity. Rather, what should be emphasized here is that a pendulum of middle-class identity suggests that even individualistic pursuits for distinction and differentiation quite often include the possibility of forging networks and alliances with others. The discussion made in this article provides an approach to understanding seemingly discrete, and contrasting, dual aspects of differentiation and alliance, exclusion and inclusion, and plurality and unity, found in transnational social fields through an alternative framework of civil society and public sphere emerging in the Philippines and beyond.

Notes

- 1 The aspect of ambivalent upward mobility of the middle class is also reflected in the "fear of falling" held by the American middle class studied by Ehrenreich (1990), and also in "the anxious pretension" of the promoted petite bourgeoisie in France discussed by Bourdieu (1984).
- 2 Glick Schiller et al. (1992, 1), in their seminal work on transnationalism, define "transnationalism" and "transnational social field" as follows: "We have defined transnationalism as the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated 'transmigrants.' Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social,

organizational, religious, and political that span borders." Further, a social field can be understood more conceptually as "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1009). In this sense a transnational social field is forged not only by immigrants settled abroad but also by people who remain in the home country, for whom networks with the transmigrants are nevertheless indispensable for their identities and social lives. Thus although majority of the informants in this article actually stay in their home country, the Philippines, their identities and lifestyles are constructed arguably in a "transnational social field."

- 3 Foucault (1991) argues that governmentality can be considered a broad effect of power, which organizes and structures the conduct of people and their interaction, through which some subjectivity internalizing specific norms and rationality is constituted. Neoliberal governmentality, as defined concisely by Ong (1999, 129), is "a regime of normalizing whereby *homo economicus* is the standard against which all other citizens are measured and ranked."
- 4 However, class relations in the Philippines become complicated owing to the situation in which even the laboring class who have succeeded in accumulating financial wealth through their overseas work are distinguished from and often looked down upon by the middle class as those who do not have "taste" and "refinement" in regard to how they use their money (Pinches 1999, 2001).
- 5 According to the National Statistical Coordination Board (2009), the occupation groups that can be considered as middle class, such as corporate executives and managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals, and clerks occupied 23 percent of total employment in 2007.
- 6 The description presented here applies to the situation in the mid-2000s when fieldwork was conducted. It might no longer reflect some transitions of the migration trend since that time.
- 7 The label "major" nursing schools in the table refers either to schools that already have a decades-old tradition of nursing education and an established reputation, or newly opened schools that are rapidly recruiting large numbers of enrollees.
- 8 The data presented in this section are based on interviews conducted in Metro Manila in August and September 2005. The informants were mainly selected from the enrollees of two schools; one a nursing college in Quezon City, the other a review school for the nursing board examinations in Manila. The questionnaire sheets, which asked for basic information such as personal profile and motivation for migrating overseas, were distributed in two classes (107 attendants in total) of the school in Quezon City, and in one class (156 attendants in total) of the review school in Manila. Forty-five informants were selected further for in-depth interviews based on the type of occupation, age, sex, and other variables. The semistructured interviews, which usually lasted for one hour to two hours, were focused on family relations, professions, and motivation for migration. The names of all informants in this article are pseudonyms.
- 9 P1 was roughly equivalent to ₢2 at the time of the research.
- 10 The following are referred to as symbols of OCW aspirations: building a house made of strong materials; possessing an "owner jeep," a four-seater doorless Philippine custom-made family jeepney; and owning a *sari-sari* store, a small-sized neighborhood convenience store usually manned by a family member.

- 11 An exclusive school in the Philippines literally means "exclusive" in terms of gender, that is, "exclusive for boys" or "exclusive for girls," but it is also common among Filipinos to take such exclusivity in a financial sense, that is, as pertaining to families in the upper and middle classes who are able and willing to pay high fees for a perceived better education.
- 12 These three schools are considered the most prestigious universities in the Philippines, which have produced elites in various areas such as politics, business and economics, the bureaucracy, and the academe.
- 13 Regarding the contrastive view of the poor and the middle class on politics and politicians in the Philippines, Schaffer (2005, 15) points out that "Politics, then, for many among the poor in Barangay Commonwealth is a politics of dignity. 'Bad' politics is a politics of callousness and insult, while 'good' politics is a politics of consideration and kindness. In contrast, many in the upper and middle classes tend to view 'bad' politics as a dirty politics of patronage and corruption, while 'good' politics as a clean politics of issues, accountability, transparency."
- 14 The NAPC consists of fourteen basic sectors: farmers and landless rural workers, artisanal fisherfolk, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples, workers in the formal sector and migrant workers, workers in the informal sector, women, youth and students, persons with disabilities, victims of disasters and calamities, senior citizens, nongovernment organizations, children, and cooperatives.
- 15 Among the contents provided during the PDOS are the following: general information on the region/country of destination; requirements and procedures for overseas employment; the OCW's rights and duties; empowerment and coping mechanism of the OCWs in foreign countries; effects of migration on family life; programs and services for OCWs; financial management of earnings gained from overseas employment; basic steps for OCWs' reintegration preparedness, and so on.
- 16 The other members of the NGOs that comprise the Migrant Workers Sector of the NAPC are also middle-class professionals: medical doctors, corporate managers and executives, nuns from Catholic covenants, maritime engineers, and so on. Generally NGOs in the Philippines are composed of middle-class professionals. By virtue of their proficiency with the English language, knowledge of technical terms, and skills of drafting technical papers and documents, they tend to monopolize the negotiation process with the government and international donors. As such, a certain power gap has been observed between NGOs composed of middle-class professionals and People's Organizations (POs) composed mainly of the lower-class residents of indigent neighborhoods (Ferrer 1997; Hilhorst 2003).
- 17 The author is fully aware of the danger of reifying the middle class in the Philippines. The discussion in this article may be criticized for generalizing the identity of the middle class based on a limited number of cases. However, there is no intention here to presuppose a single, homogeneous, and essential character in the Filipino middle class, which is admittedly a heterogeneous category composed of multiple groups of people. Based on this perspective, the two groups examined in this article indicate two separate categories of the middle class.

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