

# *Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies*

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This essay examines the historical and theoretical development of sexuality in migration research. Noting gaps and omissions in the literature, the essay proposes a dual notion of sexuality including one that is produced by the intersection of other social identities such as class and race, and a queer studies-derived idea of the sexual that goes against the normalizing of heterosexual institutions and practices. Utilizing a case study of Filipina migrant workers, the essay demonstrates the pivotal role of sexuality in the future of gender and migration research through a critique of the implicit normative assumptions around family, heterosexual reproduction, and marriage that abound in this body of literature, and how a critical notion of sexuality enables a more inclusive and accurate portrait of global gendered migration.

## *INTRODUCTION*

Sexuality has traversed a circuitous historical route as a topic for social research in general and as a unit of analysis in migration studies in particular. While gender has been stereotypically rendered as female in many works, until very recently sexuality has almost always been relegated to and equated with the realms of heterosexual reproduction and family life. Additionally, sexuality has been submerged under or closeted within concepts and rubrics like gender roles, morals, deviance, and pathology.

Recent works on sexuality and migration, particularly those that document queer sexualities, have emphasized not only the viability and importance of sexuality as an object of study, but also pointed to its constitutive role in the formation and definitions of citizenship and nation. In other words, sexuality, specifically as it is understood in queer studies<sup>1</sup> terms not only expands the meaning of migration but also alters our understanding of gender and challenges migration studies' reliance on heteronormative meanings, institutions, and practices (Luibhéid, 2004). This essay investigates how a queer perspective on

<sup>1</sup>I use "queer studies" and not "lesbian and gay studies" to emphasize the fact that queer studies go beyond lesbian and gay identities to question and undermine the idea of sexual identities and orientation.

sexuality can enrich gender and migration research by unraveling under-examined assumptions about kinship, marriage, desires, and social roles.

By “queer” I do not mean merely adding homosexual identities and practices to the mix. Rather, I am positing a political and theoretical perspective that suggests that sexuality is disciplined by social institutions and practices that normalize and naturalize heterosexuality and heterosexual practices including marriage, family, and biological reproduction by marginalizing persons, institutions, or practices that deviate from these norms. Queer scholars argue that all social discourses – including some scholarly works by politically progressive feminists – more often privilege, if not exclusively promote, hetero-normative ideas, practices, and institutions. One of the tasks then for queer studies scholars is to expose these privileging and normalizing tendencies in institutions and texts. In this spirit, this paper attempts to delineate the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual slippages and underlying assumptions that permeate recent works in gender and migration studies. The aim is not to diminish their contributions, but rather to highlight alternative frameworks of analysis and to demonstrate the contested boundaries between gender and sexuality.

I also use “queer” both as an anti-normative signifier as well as a social category produced through the “intersectionality” of identities, practices, and institutions. Political theorist Cathy Cohen, echoing feminists of the seventies and eighties, underscores the interconnections between the predicaments of marginalized figures such as the welfare queen and the lesbian bulldyke and advocates for a “broadened understanding of queerness . . . based on an intersectional analysis that recognizes how numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate . . . the lives of most people” (1997:441; *see also* Harper *et al.*, 1997).

Following this logic, I would argue that sexuality and sexual identities, practices, and desires may be pivotal factors for migration. Hector Carillo (2004:58) suggests that sexuality, broadly conceived, can be the indirect or direct motivation for international relocation and movement. Carillo (2004) calls this concept “sexual migration.” He proposes that “sexual migration,” far from a normalizing process where migrants move for the purposes of biological and heterosexual reproduction, suggests that transnational movements enable queer practices, identities, and subjectivities.

This paper examines the various ways in which a queer perspective on sexuality can positively influence gender and migration studies. The first section of the essay will briefly trace the historical antecedents of the study of sexuality in gender and migration research. While neither an exhaustive chronological examination nor broad-ranging literature review, the next couple

of sections will highlight scholarly themes in the research that articulate with specific historical moments. The study of sexuality in migration emerged in the past ten to fifteen years due to numerous intellectual, political, and historical conditions, specifically the rise of the AIDS pandemic and the emergence of intellectual currents in feminism, race/ethnic studies, and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) studies.

The following section of the paper will briefly examine dominant themes in gender and migration research and focus on specific works that have advanced the study of sexuality in the field. As part of this special issue on gender and migration research, this essay will not be a comprehensive review of all possible bodies of research. As the other essays in this special *IMR* issue suggest, there are many exciting new projects that are advancing the field of sexuality and gender in migration research, but more work needs to be done.

The primary aim of this paper is to illustrate how sexuality is an important factor in the migration process and how migration researchers might reconceptualize prevailing notions in gender and migration studies not only by including queer people but also by utilizing the tools of queer studies as a way to complicate and reexamine assumptions and concepts that unwittingly reify normative notions of gender and sexuality. To emphasize the value of a queer perspective to the study of sexuality in gender and migration research, I present a case study or a “queer reading” of a particular body of literature in gender and migration studies that focuses on Filipina domestic workers. While researchers in this area of gender and migration research have been successful in showcasing the gendered dimensions and experiences of Filipina labor migrants, they have unwittingly ignored the normalizing and naturalizing tendencies in their own concepts and methods. In the final section, I enumerate the various ways this perspective may help expand and complicate gender and migration research.

### *THINKING SEX, THINKING GENDER: FROM FEMINISM TO TRANSNATIONAL STUDIES*

A pressing question comes to mind in relation to the essays in this volume: why “think sex” and not think sex in tandem with gender? Can gender subsume sexuality conceptually and theoretically? In other words, why devote a section to sexuality in a collection of works that aims to review the valences of gender in migration studies? Can we think of gender separate from sexuality? In her seminal essay “Thinking Sex,” Gayle Rubin (1993) calls for a conceptual and theoretical separation of gender from sexuality. She suggests that sexual

oppression and regulation demanded an alternative explanatory framework beyond familiar feminist culprits such as patriarchy and male dominance. Therefore, sexuality demands a separate investigative path while still maintaining a critical dialogue with gender. The development of contemporary research on sexuality and migration reflects the complicated tensions between gender and sexuality (*see* Valentine, 2004). To better understand these tensions, it is important to look into the historical and cultural contexts in which these categories developed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The overlapping histories of feminism, the AIDS pandemic, and lesbian and gay studies were important sources of a conglomeration of ideas, situations, and practices that shaped and influenced the contemporary study of sexuality. Significant developments in feminist studies in the seventies and eighties were important milestones in the trajectory of queer sexuality research. Feminists during this period departed from a universalized notion of “woman” and acknowledged how particular groups of women, particularly those from the third world, have specific struggles and experiences that are not similar to those of their Western counterparts.

An emergent cohort of feminists in the late seventies and early eighties attempted to dislodge the universalizing tone of early “second wave” feminism by arguing for the intersectionality of sexuality and gender or their contextual definition and operation in conjunction with other identities and practices such as race and class. Adrienne Rich (1986) attempted to dismantle monolithic constructions of gendered and sexualized experiences by positing the notion of the “politics of location.” The “politics of location” suggests the specificity and particularity of gendering and sexualizing processes and how they are important in trying to understand and transform women’s predicament. Women and their experiences, she argued, are always situated, positioned, and marked by race, class, and ethnicity (Lewis and Mills, 2003:5).

The emergence of feminists of color and the third-world feminist movement was the catalyst for a new path or divergent strand of feminist and sexuality studies as they confronted the vicissitudes and diversity of women’s oppression. For example, the African American writer and lesbian feminist Audre Lorde argued that women should recognize the relative privilege of white women that was achieved in part at the cost of black and third-world women’s lives. She further suggested that this recognition should also lead to a political process for change (Lewis and Mill, 2003; *see also* Hull, Scott, and Smith, 1982; Anzaldúa, 1987; Mohanty, 2003). Therefore, these feminist scholars argued against universal and fixed notions of “woman” and “gender,” and instead pointed to divergences and cleavages due to social, cultural, and historical conditions.

Shifts in understanding sexuality and gender, particularly in terms of their cultural and social inflections, found their way to another body of literature that emerged out of the AIDS pandemic in the mid-eighties. AIDS as a global phenomenon shaped the development of the research agenda on sexuality as one that is not merely about physical contacts, but about culturally mediated behaviors and identities. Human travel and movement were singled out to be crucial vectors in the spread of the disease. While simplistic and problematic, this notion of the disease's "mobility" did provide the grist for new research that broadened the scope and range of sexual ideologies, practices, and identities. AIDS became a catalyst in the transformation of the research agenda by both public health professionals and academic scholars. The change in research direction was based on the realization that Western models of sexual orientation were untenable in various cultural contexts. While anthropological studies in various non-Western societies had advanced this idea long before the eighties, it was only in the later half of the first decade of the pandemic in the U.S. when it became apparent that AIDS – which was first labeled GRID (gay-related immune deficiency) when it was first thought to be affecting primarily white gay men – started to devastate communities of color and immigrant communities. The radical changes in the epidemiology showed how the disease also affected "heterosexuals" or several groups of men and women who eventually were found to have been involved in same-sex relations but did not identify as either homosexual or gay/lesbian.

Beyond discrepancies in identities and behavior, epidemiologists and social scientists found that the meanings and valences of "straight," "gay," or "lesbian" in communities of color and immigrant communities were radically different from mainstream American society (Herdt, 1997; Parker, 2001; Patton, 2002b). More importantly, specific migrant groups such as Haitians were given special epidemiological labels because they could not be easily classified into existing risk behaviors and identity categories. The radical shift in AIDS epidemiology in the mid to late eighties when communities of color and immigrant communities started showing signs of the pandemic's ravages led epidemiologists and social scientists on a mad rush to try to understand non-Western and non-mainstream identities, values, and practices around sex and gender.

At the same time, migrants, who have been historically held as culprits in various epidemics in history, have also become one of the exemplary figures of the pandemic. The disease and the organizing around various sexual minorities, including gays, lesbians, and sex workers, highlighted the idea that not only did migration bring cultural and racial differences into the mix but that the movement of people around the world and the globalizing of cultural economic and

political institutions have brought divergent sexual ideologies and identities into sharp relief (Mishra, Connor, and Magaña, 1996; *see also* Patton, 1990, 1992, 2002b). These realities established new research avenues for AIDS tracking and prevention, and also shaped the parallel emergence of the academic discipline of gay and lesbian studies and eventually queer studies. Not only were academics and health researchers acknowledging the bias in the usage of such terms as “gay”, “lesbian”, and/or “homosexual”, they were also trying to understand how migration can be an important factor in the creation of a variety of sexual identity categories and practices that do not depend on Western conceptions of selfhood and community. This shift in understanding can be likened to the situation with feminists of color and third-world feminists in the late seventies and early nineties. Therefore, departing from a popular notion of universal categories of sexual orientation, research during the early eighties up till the mid-nineties eventually strongly advocated for the cultural “situatedness” of sexuality (Weston, 1998:168–173).

Queer studies in particular and sexuality research in general were influenced by changes in the pandemic and also by a growing realization about the effects of globalization. While Rubin (1993) hinted at the importance of migration, it was only in the past ten years that the study of sexuality in a transnational and global perspective gained ground (Altman, 1997, 2001; Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel, 1999; Bell and Binnie, 2000). Povinelli and Chauncey (1999) in their introduction to an important collection of essays interrogated the question of how sexuality can be unmoored from a static geographic frame to a mobile one by demonstrating how the sexual provides a better understanding of global movements and “flows” by positing the notion of “subjective mediation.” In other words, they go against the abstraction of flows and mass group movement and emphasize the ways in which people as agentic subjects negotiate sexual and gender identities in processes that include immigration, tourism, business travel, etc.

Part of the new emerging attitude toward sexuality, mirroring that of gender, is to understand the particular factors, conditions, and ideologies that shape sexual identities and practices, and how these permeate social institutions. Film and other forms of mass media, the Internet, tourism, and migration of people have created a stage on which to scrutinize sexual phenomena as part of globalization and transnationalism. Scholars who examine the transnationalization of sexuality and sexual identities have shown that far from a homogenizing or McDonaldization of sexual mores and practices, globalization and rapid transnational movements have created emergent hybrid forms that interact with Western or Euro-American sexual ideologies. In other words,

non-Western sexual ideologies do not follow a unilinear assimilative process into Western modern sexual ideologies but rather are involved in syncretic processes that create alternative sexual politics, cultures, and identities (Manalansan, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003; Eng and Hom, 1998; Cruz-Malavé, and Manalansan, 2002; Luidhéid, 2002, 2005). Following this idea, feminist theorists Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and queer studies scholars Patton and Sánchez-Eppler (2000:2) have suggested that transnational travel and movement have not diminished the influence of indigenous local practices and institutions but rather created situations where ideologies, identities, and practices highlight the crucial articulation between the local and the global.

In sum, this rather abbreviated genealogy of theories and research on sexuality showcases the shifting meaning of sexuality in research texts from a universalized biological and psychological reflex of static bodies into a constitutive element of cross-cultural, cross-national migrant experiences. These main ideas provide broad hints to the specific themes and processes of existing works that incorporate a sexuality perspective in migration research.

### *SEX AND MIGRATION: A GLIMPSE OF THE LANDSCAPE*

A quick perusal of the empirical literature on sexuality and migration will readily show how particular disciplines such as anthropology, history, and sociology have been at the forefront of research on sexuality and migration. Sociology's specialized subfield of deviance and anthropology's interest in non-Western practices, and history's focus on the development and provenance of identities and communities have been the foundational bases for the development and accumulation of knowledge. Other disciplines have contributed to the corpus of work on sexuality and migration. These disciplines include psychology and social psychology, which deal with migrant sexual attitudes after settlement (see Suárez-Orozco and Qin, this volume). Sexual mores and attitudes in addition to family and community restrictions were seen as the barometer of migrants' adjustments to their new homes (Espín, 1997, 1999; Ahmadi, 2003).

Historical research on sexuality and migration is particularly notable. Specifically the reinterpretation of specific events such as Chinese migration to the United States were reinterpreted and portrayed not merely as symptoms of political and economic factors, but rather as a product of intersecting processes of racialization and sexualization (Hing, 1993). Nayan Shah's (2001) study of San Francisco's Chinatown showed how struggles around public hygiene and health in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were



suffused with overt Orientalized images of the Chinese during this period that were inflected by sex and gender. Therefore, Chinese women, who were virtually barred from the United States until the middle of the twentieth century, were portrayed as embodiments of illicit sex, loose morals, and disease (Peffer, 1986, 1999). At the same time, Shah (2001) suggests that Chinese men were feminized in such a way that they were easily figured into an American domesticity yet rendered in conflicting images of asexuality and threatening heterosexuality at various times during this period of antimiscegenation (*see also* Hodes, 1999; Ngai, 2003).

The history of U.S. immigration shows how various laws restricted entry of particular groups by constructing them as sexually deviant and morally corrupt. For example, the Page Law of 1882, which restricted Chinese migration, included barring Chinese women for being alleged prostitutes (Luibhéid, 2005:xiv). The McCarren-Walter Act was an important act of immigration legislation that, among other things, specifically barred homosexuals since homosexuality was considered to be a pathological or psychopathic condition akin to an infectious disease (Luibhéid, 2005:xii).

The landscape of sexuality in gender and migration research is too broad to cover in this essay. Other works in this special issue of *IMR* have done far more in-depth disciplinary investigations of these matters. Here, I would like to highlight three important trends and themes in recent research that provide new vantage points on popular theoretical frameworks, concepts, and methodologies in gender and migration research. While the following discussion points to some of the more exciting research, it also calls for more work to be done.

### *1. Queer Asylum*

Apart from antimiscegenation laws and migrants' struggle for citizenship, research around refugees and asylum cases has become a prominent part of the literature on sexuality. Issues around asylum gained ground during the height of the AIDS pandemic, particularly in relation to undocumented immigrants who have come down with the disease. Legal measures were promulgated to allow these immigrants to have a stay of deportation for humanitarian purposes, while at the same time ironically maintaining strict quarantine rules that prevented visitors and immigrants with HIV/AIDS from crossing U.S. borders (Herdt, 1997).

Political organizing around AIDS and gay rights enabled the establishment of immigration provisions for refugee/asylum cases based on sexual orientation.



This legal development was double-edged. The laws required the asylum petitioners to assert and document the horrible conditions that existed in their home countries. Of particular importance are the dossiers developed based on social science expert testimony on the conditions for nonnormative sexualities in Muslim societies and other non-Western nations. This created a dilemma because it appeared to effectively demonize specific societies and in the words of legal scholar Sonia Katyal (2002) led to the process of “exporting identities” from the West to other countries. Sexual orientation and labels such as gay, lesbian, and homosexual were uncritically deployed in legal proceedings, thereby creating an East-West dichotomy that was morally and culturally hierarchical. At the same time, this development allowed for the inclusion of sexuality as a possible basis for acquiring asylum status. This broadened the definition of conditions for the granting of asylum and in turn transformed the idea of what it meant to be a refugee. The efforts around asylum work rationalized the lack of gray or nuanced types of information were rationalized those involved in asylum work because it was more effective in court proceedings to argue that conditions in the home country are so inhuman in order for the petitioned to be granted asylum. It is also possible that both lawyers and petitioners actually believed in the universal nature of gender and sexual identities by couching the whole project in terms of human rights (Human Rights Watch, 1992; Bhabha, 1996, 2002; Welch, 2002).

However, a counter argument by Juana Rodriguez (2003) in her analysis of the case, *In Re Tenorio*, about the asylum application of a Brazilian black man, serves to advance a different understanding of the process of queer asylum. She argues that asylum need not be read in terms of a national portrait of “evil” or “backward” societies but in terms of the complex arrangements of events and statuses – such as the concatenation of race and class in the case of Marcelo Tenorio, the petitioner who grew up poor and racially marginalized in Brazil. Her contention therefore echoes the need to read queer asylum as being not merely about the protection of people from persecution due to their sexual predilections but more broadly in the context of the intersection of marginalized racialized and classed sexualities.

The current conservative and anti-immigration political climate, especially after September 11, 2001, may in fact reverse if not halt the progress in the legal domain, particularly for asylum seekers from the Middle East (Randazzo, 2005:51–53). However, there are efforts to offset this unfortunate turn of events both in the form of new writing on the topic (Randazzo, 2005) and through the political work of nonprofit organizations like the Audre Lorde Project in New York City, which combines feminist concerns about migration

and asylum (particularly female genital mutilation and domestic abuse) and those of queer sexual orientation. However, more work clearly needs to be done in this area.

## *2. Shifting Notions of Female Sexuality in Sex Tourism, Pen Pal Brides, and Second-Generation Young Women*

While it is beyond the purview of this essay to map out the full range of the burgeoning literature on the shifting notions of female sexuality (*see* other essays in this issue for further discussion), I would like to briefly focus on specific research on women involved in tourism and sex work, pen pal or Internet romances, and second-generation young women. It is important to highlight some general trends that are relevant to the discussion of sexuality and migration. Female sexuality is not merely the conduit for biological reproduction but is also the site for the contestation of various group and institutional norms. In other words, female migrant sexuality is the arena for the contestation of tradition, assimilation, and the travails of transnational migration.

Recent research literature challenges the earlier myth of women's lack of agency and their image as unwilling and unwitting victims of circumstance by moving toward the detailing of strategies employed by many women who are involved in transnational sex work and "pen pal" marriages, thus actively contesting received ideas and situations. In other words, new works suggests that these women are not innocent victims in these situations but are in some ways complicit with as well as active resisters of powerful structural arrangements and ideas.

Recent literature has focused on affect and most importantly on "love" as important arenas through which female sex workers are in fact creating and then manipulating situations that will enable them to garner material and cultural capital through emotional and monetary relationships with foreign men who may eventually enable the women to live more comfortable lives. Brennan (2004) conducted an ethnographic study of Dominican women who have sexual relationships with Western men and how "love" as an idiom is manipulated to rationalize work, pleasure, suffering, and eventual migration. What is fascinating in this ethnography and other works like it is the decentering of heterosexual reproduction and the troubling of the heterosexual dyad. In other words, love and coupling are enabled not by romance on the ground but through the influences of economic plight, mass media representations of love, and the objectification of desire as located in the West.

Recent works illustrate the various conduits to the sexual commodification of women and queers that lead to their migration across national borders. Women and third-world queers are active participants in sex tourism and in the Internet. By exposure to the ideas, practices, and images of the West through tourism and through exploring the Web, third-world women and queers are involved in new forms of recruitment where the impulse to migrate and the desire for life outside the homeland are seen through the lenses of sexual desire and pleasures. Constable (2003) conducted an ethnographic study of Filipina and Chinese women who were involved in romantic Internet relationships with Western men. She suggests that these women are able to narrate their relationships in terms of romance and fairy tales by manipulating idioms of love, sex, and money. At the same time, the Internet affords these women the ability to get to know and fall in "love" with their partners before actually migrating or meeting them in person.

The Internet is the medium that gives rise to the desire to migrate by creating new and efficient ways of navigating cultural, racial, and class differences as well as physical distance. Third-world and immigrant queers are also utilizing the Internet to negotiate the racial and cultural divides in the sexual communities. At the same time, sex tourism also becomes a site for the reification of racial and economic differences (Alexander, 1994, 1997; Cantú, 2002; Giorgi, 2002). For example, Jasbir Puar (2002) illustrates how non-Western queers are exposed to gay and lesbian cultures through established tours and mass media connected to such industries. These may lead to the visualization of the West as a haven for various queers.

Research suggests that there is still a moral dimension attached to traditional practices from the homeland and a resistance to the seemingly amoral racialized dimensions of gender and sexual practices in the new land of settlement. Yen Le Espiritu (2003) demonstrated this theme in her study of Filipina second-generation girls in California who see themselves as being pitted against white girls in terms of normative moral behavior. Oliva Espín's (1997, 1999) pioneering studies of Latina lesbian migrants suggest that they are caught between their own communities' homophobic and misogynist tendencies and the larger new homeland's racialized, classed, and ethnicized attitudes and practices. As such, their struggle to negotiate their own identities can be seen as not mere passive assimilation to or adoption of lesbian and/or American identities. Second-generation and young immigrant women are held to be the repositories of their communities' traditions and their sexual behavior as "evidence" of the groups' worth and are therefore highly policed (Luibhéid, 2005:xxvi–xxvii).

Again, more work needs to be done on these aspects of migrant female sexuality, particularly those that go beyond normative conceptions of marriage and family. However, Jennifer Hirsch's (2004) work on Mexican transnational families provides a strong innovative model for future research by demonstrating that reproductive choices and gender relations among Mexican migrants are experiencing dramatic transformation due to mobility. She shows the ways in which female roles, family relationships, and male-female interactions among Mexican migrants have departed from the focus on biological reproduction and economic concerns to one that highlights struggles around marital intimacy and the construction of companionate marriages. Therefore, reproductive choices, including the use of contraception and birthing methods, are set within the shifting cultural, emotional, and economic contexts of Mexican female sexuality, family dynamics, and marriage.

In sum, female sexuality in migration situations functions not as mere symbol of homeland traditions but rather as the site of ideological and material struggles that shape the impetus to migrate and influence the manner of settlement and assimilation. Female migrant sexuality therefore deflects the imputed normative meanings of reproduction and mothering, and poses new ways of thinking about female sexual agency and the redefinition of gender roles in a transnational context. More importantly, this section suggests that new works should also look into how migrant lives and conditions set the stage for dramatically altering normalized ideas of the family primarily as reproductive units, marriage as economic transactions, and sexuality as always and already heterosexual.

### *3. Queer Settlement and the Question of Assimilation*

In her pioneering work *Entry Denied*, Eithne Luibhéid (2002:xii–xv) notes that the state regulates migration through legal, political, cultural, and economic means that in turn reproduce sexual identities, practices, and categories. Luibhéid suggests that the movement of migrants are not only monitored and controlled by state authorities by specific racial, ethnic, and gender preferences and prohibitions, but are mediated through implicit sexualized ideas in law and immigration proceedings. Therefore, she suggests that the migrant body is the site where the racialized, ethnicized, and gendered disciplinary measures employed by various states and their agents come together and is also the venue for promoting as well as repressing sexualized images, desires, and stereotypes (see Minter, 1993).

The renaissance of research on queer immigrant cultures and sexuality in the past ten years illustrates the complicated ways in which migrants understand, make sense of, and engage with the prevailing practices of the new land of

settlement. As I have argued above, several important themes arise out of these encounters. First, studies of Filipino and Latino gay migrant men (Manalansan, 1994, 1997; Cantú, 1999, 2000; Roque Ramirez, 2001) demonstrate how they evaluate their experiences with the gay community in terms of the conflict between tradition and modernity. Second, third-world migrant queers are often conflicted over issues regarding home and family. Far from having a “natural affiliation” with their biological families, these men and women establish complex fictive family networks of friends and lovers to mitigate the violence and rejection of the former (Cantú, 1999; Manalansan, 2000, 2003). At the same time, coming from biological families who still live in the homeland and who depend on their remittances and other kinds of support, these queers need to negotiate conflicting emotions and attitudes to mark the economic transnational binds that connect them to each other (Cantú, 1999, 2001). Third, migrant queers experience discrimination and stigma from both their own communities as well as from mainstream culture. These experiences extend the marginalization of migrant queers even within the “gay and lesbian” communities in the United States (Gopinath, 1996, 2005; Puar, 1998; Reddy and Syed, 2001; Wat, 2002). As migrants of color, these queers are gendered and racialized accordingly by these communities. Unable to be easily located in normalized acceptable identities and categories, these migrants of color are establishing multiple hybrid cultures and creating spaces for community activities and new cultural “traditions” that depart from both their own migrant communities and from mainstream “straight” and “gay and lesbian” cultures.

In sum, this section provides a brief glimpse of the various issues and modes of thinking around sexuality in migration research and suggests the need for more work on sexuality and migration. This subsection on queer settlement points to the innovative ways queer migrants are reconfiguring family and social networks, as well as negotiating stigma and ostracism from mainstream communities. That migrant queers are creating non-normative family formations and hybrid cultural arrangements is an important fact. Its utility extends beyond the confines of queer migrant lives. The next section will demonstrate how a queer perspective can provide new avenues for research and critical insight for a significant body of migration literature on Filipina domestic workers.

### *HETERONORMATIVITY ACROSS BORDERS: THE CASE OF FILIPINA DOMESTIC WORKERS*

Global labor migration has become increasingly female. This reality has led to particular themes and concepts in the migration literature that address the issue

of gender but ironically reify normative notions of both gender and sexuality. A major part of this burgeoning literature has focused on female migrant workers from the Philippines and their dispersal into various parts of the world and has formed over the past eight to ten years. A good number of these works have focused primarily on the travails and experiences of Filipina domestic workers. While most of the research conducted about these women attempts to engender the processes of migration, several themes in the research can be characterized by the following heteronormative tendencies.

The literature has tended to focus on heterosexual married mothers. While this had led to interesting follow-up work on the children of transnational families, it has also led to the neglect of the experiences of gay and straight men and single women. In fact the implication seems to be that the nuclear family is the primary model of the transnational family and that heterosexual marriage or heterosexual partnering are only plausible cornerstones of family life with parenthood gendered in static biological terms and motherhood or maternal love, the province solely of biological (typically married) women with children.

A critical examination of this body of literature from the perspective of queer sexuality studies and theory will illustrate how these themes are played out in the research texts focusing on Filipinas who have been constructed as the “servants of globalization” in the best known study on the topic, by Rhacel Parreñas (2001). I will show that while women from the Philippines have been the most thoroughly studied female migrant laborers in the world, they have also been subject to an implicit gendering and sexualizing even from the most politically progressive and analytically sophisticated feminist researchers.

My purpose here is not to disparage these works but to forge an agenda that might push the research into a more critical and reflective stage. Indeed, the works I will be engaging with are those that have clearly made important contributions to the study of gender and migration. The research by Parreñas (2001) and Nicole Constable (1997) are among the notable works that have provided moving and incisive ethnographic portraits of Filipina domestic workers in Rome, Los Angeles, and Hong Kong. The authors are clearly sensitive to the economic and social realities of these women and are focused on how Filipina migrants are actively engaging transnational issues of labor, family obligations, and “caring.” These pioneering works have successfully mapped the unique transnational labor market for nannies and maids in the “first world,” to which third-world women go to work as cooks, cleaners, and housekeepers – labor that is always feminized or widely recognized as the province of women.

At the heart of these workers’ dilemma is the “chain of care.” Not only are Filipina domestic workers expending physical energy for salaries, they are

also involved in providing emotional or “caring” work by looking after the children of more affluent first-world families. At the same time, they are displaced and torn away from their biological families and forced to leave their children in the care of poorer women in the homeland. Hence, this “chain” is forged primarily through links constituted by biologically reproducing women of the first and third worlds and the displacement of their labor from their biological families.

Unfortunately, despite the excellent work that has been done in documenting and analyzing these women’s transnational dilemma, researchers have conceptualized the maternal and affective labor inherent in the “chain of care” of the global domestic service industry as being embodied in married mothers from the third world. In other words, the work of the home, including caring for children, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic chores, is rendered in heteronormative terms.

For example, Rhacel Parreñas (2001) in her study of Filipina domestics in Rome and Los Angeles unwittingly reifies stereotypical gendered conceptions of domesticity and affect. Her methodology section argues for a preponderance of married women in her sample and case studies, despite the fact that nearly half of the respondents are single women. While she provides several case studies of single women, they are eventually marginalized when the idea of children and transnational mothering gains dominance in the ethnography. Additionally, she conducted a nonrandom survey of domestic workers in Rome with 222 women at least half of whom were single. The sample also included 79 men (Parreñas, 2001:16). While she conducted ten interviews with male domestic workers, single female and lesbian domestic workers, these interviews are eventually sidelined in relation to the dominant stories of Filipina migrant mothers.

Of course, it is not a methodological error to focus on married mothers, but without the necessary contextualization this focus creates naturalized and normalized conceptions of motherhood, domesticity, child care, and reproduction. Parreñas seems to imply that married women with children are the only possible and logical links in this “chain of care.” But the presence of single women and men (be they queer or heterosexual) among migrant domestic workers disrupts the neat synchronicity of the “chain of care” in which third-world mothers take up the “reproductive labor” of their first-world counterparts while in turn employing poorer relations or other more destitute women in their countries to take care of the children they left behind.

I am not arguing for merely adding more analyses of single and/or queer migrant domestics, but questioning how the “chain of care” framework



unwittingly privileges the experiences of migrant women with children. Note for example that in the concluding section of the chapter on intergenerational and gender relations where she presents a couple of case studies of single women, Parreñas creates a monolithic construction of the migrant laborers when she writes “emotional repression enables parents to delay reunification, the more they aggravate the intergenerational strains of the transnational household formation and the harder it is for them to return to the Philippines, face their children and confront the tensions that migration has caused the family” (Parreñas, 2001:149). This statement starkly illustrates how the biological nuclear family is the pivot around which the dynamics of the so-called chain of care migration operate.

In another work, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild (2003) argue that the “chain of care” of the international domestic labor industry has created “a crisis of care” or a “care drain.” In *Global Woman*, Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003:1–13) suggest that this crisis is not caused by the departure of women or of domestic workers per se, but by the departure of third-world mothers and wives. The problem is that the authors perceive the gender, reproductive, and marital status of these laborers as the all-encompassing rationale for the inequality of labor conditions left behind in the homeland. In doing so, these researchers again construct the international care industry by privileging a heterosexual (mostly) married third-world mother.

One way to complicate this deceptively simple picture is to commit to changes in the research agenda. First, it is important to examine the work of male domestic workers. Second, new works need to focus on gender fluidity and the role of women as sexual and gendered agentive subjects. If, as the essays in this special *IMR* issue contend, gender is relational, then my move to include the work of male domestic workers does *not* in any way disavow the strong gender factor in labor market segmentation nor dismiss issues of sexism and gender inequality. Rather, including the labor of male domestic workers can help nuance and complicate our understanding of the idea and process of “gendering” in the domestic industry. While the easy answer to the question of gender in domestic work could be that not too many men are involved in it, placing the experiences of these men alongside that of women highlights the continuities and discontinuities of domestic work. In other words, my purpose here is not to valorize the male domestic labor but to show how it complicates the idea of carework and prevents us from falling into the normative and universalizing trap of implicitly regarding women as natural nurturers.

In the recent years, it has become apparent that the Filipina or Filipino woman as the global careworker par excellence exists hand in hand with the

figure of male migrant careworker, specifically gay Filipino men, who are becoming the new figure of foreign careworkers. An example is the nurses and unskilled domestic workers, who according to recent accounts are tending to the elderly in Israel. A television documentary produced in Tel Aviv entitled "Paper Dolls" chronicles the travails of these men (who are not professional nurses but unskilled domestic careworkers for the elderly) as they contend with the racializing, gendering, and sexualizing processes in Israel.

Therefore, current works on Filipino migrant labor do not take into consideration the present and shifting terrain of gender (broadly construed) in the global care industry. In care industry fields such as nursing, recent trends in the past five years indicate that Filipino male doctors are retraining themselves to become nurses to find employment in the United States and Europe. At the same time, anecdotal accounts suggest that an increasing number of Filipino nurses in the U.S. are gay men. I do not intend to equate the work of nurses with those of domestic workers, but I am interested in the ways in which gender operates when third-world migrant men work in unskilled, paraprofessional, and professional fields that have been traditionally constructed as female. Indeed, in order to get a comprehensive idea of the gendered dimension of domestic work, it is necessary for future work to move away from this oversight of migrant male labor and examine how such relationships are in fact crucial and constitutive elements of gendering processes in the international care industry.

Parreñas (2001:77) and Hochschild (2003:29) depict the Filipino (and other third-world) male as being pathologically prevented by cultural "tradition" from participating in domestic affairs while at the same time rendering the domestic sphere as always and already female. Hochschild (2003:29) suggests a solution to this "problem" by advocating for an educational program that will train these men to become more involved in domestic activities. This supposed pathological condition of men "traditionally" avoiding and being discouraged from domestic affairs is not only ethnographically erroneous, it belies a particular kind of knowledge "imperialism," to use Hochschild's term, since it portrays third-world men as lacking the cultural knowledge to be authentic modern fathers. A related problem is Hochschild's tendency to implicitly create a context in which third-world male and female migrants are seen as premodern or wallowing in tradition only to move as domestic workers into Western modernity. Therefore, Hochschild's proposed educational program unwittingly portrays third-world cultures as primarily archaic patriarchies that can only be transformed through the infusion of Western gender equalities. This idea reifies gender and sexism in static black-and-white terms. While I strongly believe

in the existence of gender inequalities, statements such as Hochschild's provide a rather inflexible gender script that actually inhibits the politicizing of female domestics by rendering their status as "natural" and inevitable.

My point here is not to excuse or deny the existence of sexism in the Philippines, but to contest the universalizing claim that third-world men are not involved in domestic work and, more importantly, to demonstrate the variation in cultural ideologies regarding men and domestic work that can potentially dislodge normative universalizing notions of gender scripts and domesticity. Ethnographic evidence on gender relations in Southeast Asia actually point to more fluid notions of male and female that counter simplistic conceptions of gender roles (*see* Errington and Atkinson, 1990; Brenner, 1998; Cannell, 1999). Alicia Pingol's (2001) study of husbands in the northern part of the Philippines whose wives are overseas contract workers (a good number of them domestics) showed a significant number of the men taking over the work of "mothering" and suggests a shift or "re-making" of masculinities. Pingol is not describing a liberatory process happening to male roles in the Philippines, but rather, her work implies that there are shifting, oftentimes messy and contradictory relationships between ideal conditions and everyday practices within transnational families and in gender relations in migration.

At the same time, it is useful to note that in most of the literature on Filipina domestic workers, the notions of motherhood and fatherhood are determined solely by the biological features of specific bodies and not as disciplinary results of social and cultural norms. These researchers are unable to seriously consider motherhood without biological reproduction and/or marriage. Feminist researchers of gender and migration might benefit from unsettling their normative conceptions of parenthood, maternal love, and care by not locking them into specific gendered and married bodies. The focus on biological parenthood also means that sexuality in this body of migration research is relegated to either reproductive sex, forced abstinence brought about by migration, and sexual abuse, or rape. There have been very limited discussions of sexuality and pleasure (either heterosexual or homosexual) in the lives of these women.

The gendering of these women is rendered on the basis of rigid or stereotypical notions of being "feminine." Constable (1997:95–99) documented the disciplining of Filipina women's bodies by their Hong Kong employers by obscuring or deemphasizing their femininity including by forbidding nail polish, prescribing daily wear, and having their hair cut short like a boy. The prescribed defeminization of these women is seen solely in terms of employers' discipline and there is no consideration or further investigation as to whether

any of these women found either pleasure in it or had some positive reaction. In other words, is it not possible that the disciplining of the feminine aspects of their appearance might also present the opportunity for gender insubordination and gender-crossing behavior, or a source of agency or even pleasure for these women? Another interesting project would be to reexamine these women's weekly gatherings, which are typically seen as merely leisure activities or sometimes as politically oriented meetings and to entertain the possibility that these occasions offer homosocial sites for same-sex affection, intimacy, and romance and how these erotic entanglements can destabilize dominant notions of femininity, female roles, and reproduction.

In a more recent work, Constable (2002) examined how women constantly negotiated the disciplining of their appearances by their employers attempting to achieve a balance between the overtly "sexy" feminine look that could label them as "easy" prey for male sexual advances and an excessively masculine look that could lead them to be mistaken for a "T-bird" or lesbian. This promising path of research could benefit from actually looking at how lesbian and/or gender-insubordinate "female" workers actually perceive these defeminizing disciplinary measures in relation to desire and erotic practices. Feminist researchers of gender and migration might want to consider third-world women and men in the international care industry as viable desiring subjects without imputing compulsory heterosexuality and middle-class domesticity and thus locating them within the very patriarchal confines that these researchers have implicitly vowed to critique.

While more work needs to be done to move away from these heteronormative presuppositions, new work is beginning to appear as a way to counteract these tendencies. Rhacel Parreñas's (2005) recent work *The Children of Global Migration*, on the children in transnational families, provides a useful starting point for future works. She begins the book by narrating her unique fieldwork experiences in the Philippines, where she encountered situations of gender and sexual misrecognition – that is, she was mistaken for a bakla, which is a Tagalog gloss for a homosexual, transvestite, and effeminate "man." Again, toward the end of the book, she points to the idea of the limits and possibilities of gender fluidity as one important vantage point for understanding and engaging with the plight of these children. These observations build on Parreñas's earlier pioneering work and can potentially be the first steps toward new provocative insights.

In sum, a critical queer reading reveals the gaps and fissures in this emergent literature on Filipina migrant worker and shows that even recent research that purports to sensitively bring gender to the center of migration studies fails to consider how specific normalizing and naturalizing ideas around

reproduction, parenting, carework, and family formation create discrepant and incomplete understandings of third-world female migrant labor. While new works are starting to emerge in response to this gap, more research needs to be done to create a more expansive and provocative body of literature that engages with the dynamic aspects of migrants' institutions, bodies, and desires.

*SEXUALITY AS PART OF THE RESEARCH EQUATION:  
ADDED VALUE OR COMPLICATING FACTOR?*

As I have argued above, far from being a conservative force that leaves bodies and cultures intact, migration creates specific dilemmas and contradictory situations that disturb static notions of gender and sexuality. Therefore, it is important to see how a radical repositioning and reexamination of heteronormative premises in gender and migration research can yield expansive and provocative insights. This essay then is not about mere documentation, but aims to strongly push for migration scholars to step back and reflect on their works in the face of these hegemonic premises.

To summarize the main points of this essay, the following are the main contributions of a queer analysis of gender and migration research. First, the queer perspective suggests going beyond a laboring gendered agent and highlighting a desiring and pleasure-seeking migrant subject. As seen through the queer reading of Filipina migrant laborers above, migrants are not just displaced caretakers and mothering workers but in fact possess sexual desires and erotic practices that must be taken into consideration. These desires are not limited to migrants' search for material and social advancement but also are often pivotal reasons for the decision to migrate.

Secondly, the queer perspective suggests that sexuality is not an all-encompassing reality but one that intersects with and through other social, economic, and cultural practices and identities. At the same time, a queer notion of sexuality enables migration research to go beyond normative and universalized family patterns and biological rationales. I have argued that the crises around migrant laborers do not have to center on nuclear and biological family bonds nor to firmly ground caring and maternal love in biologically reproducing women. The rather provocative questions in the preceding section were meant to disentangle parenting and affect from biologically deterministic notions of male and female.

Finally, a queer perspective of sexuality expands the notions of refugee, asylum, recruitment, and assimilation particularly as to what constitutes factors that force people to migrate or flee particular spaces for other places.

The growing importance of the Internet, sex tourism, and other global cultural flows showcases the influence on people's imagination about the rest of the world beyond their immediate locality, thus expanding the terms of their longings and desires. A queer perspective complicates conceptions of integration or assimilation particularly when citizenship and alien status are marked by racialized, classed, sexualized, and gendered images of specific migrant groups. For example, figures who are portrayed as simultaneously sexually deviant, gendered, foreign, and dangerous are Middle Eastern or South Asian males of a certain age range who after September 11, 2001, were seen to be part of a profile that is labeled as "terrorist" and, as such, unable to be incorporated into the idea of nationhood and patriotism (Puar and Rai, 2002).

These aforementioned ideas are already part of the new emerging works in the field, and scholars are beginning to heed the call for critical analysis that includes sexuality as part of migration research, thereby charting new provocative theoretical and conceptual terrains and resulting in relevant empirical research and interventions. Despite all these accomplishments, a lot more work remains to be done. Researchers should remain vigilant in guarding against the reification of the heteronormative and be active in opening new and alternative ways of understanding sexuality and gender in migration studies.

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