

## **Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides**

Philippine Women Centre of B.C.

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*This is dedicated to the brave and strong  
FILIPINO MAIL-ORDER BRIDES WHO SHARED  
THEIR STORIES AND STRUGGLES.*

## **ABSTRACT**

This ground-breaking, community-based research seeks to bring out the voices, experiences and struggles of Filipino mail-order brides in Canada. Forty Filipino mail-order brides from five provinces in Canada participated in this study. This growing group of women from developing countries remains in an extremely marginalized and vulnerable position. Commodified and purchased by their Canadian husbands, they are trapped in traditional and patriarchal notions of the family, economically dependent and experiencing various forms of abuse. The research shows that the social construct of the identity of Filipino women as mail-order brides in Canada is slowly emerging. But their spirit to assert and liberate themselves informs the study's recommendations toward policy development and actions for change toward community empowerment.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CPC	Centre for Philippine Concerns
FDM	Foreign Domestic Movement
GAATW	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LCP	Live-in Caregiver Program
LEP	Labour Export Policy
PAR	participatory action research
PWC	Philippine Women Centre
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SWC	Status of Women Canada
VFCA	Victoria Filipino-Canadian Association

## PREFACE

Good public policy depends on good policy research. In recognition of this, Status of Women Canada instituted the Policy Research Fund in 1996. It supports independent policy research on issues linked to the public policy agenda and in need of gender-based analysis. Our objective is to enhance public debate on gender equality issues and to enable individuals, organizations, policy makers and policy analysts to participate more effectively in the development of policy.

The focus of the research may be on long-term, emerging policy issues or short-term, urgent policy issues that require an analysis of their gender implications. Funding is awarded through an open, competitive call for proposals. A non-governmental, external committee plays a key role in identifying policy research priorities, selecting research proposals for funding and evaluating the final reports.

This policy research paper was proposed and developed under an urgent call for proposals in September 1998, entitled *Trafficking in Women: The Canadian Dimension*. The purpose of this call was to generate research which could provide concrete knowledge on the extent and nature of trafficking in Canada in order to develop policies and programs which would recognize and protect the human rights of trafficked women.

Status of Women Canada funded four research projects on this issue. They deal with Filipino mail-order brides, sex trade workers from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the legal framework for mail-order marriages and immigrant domestic workers, and a comprehensive profile of women trafficked to, from, and within Canada. A complete list of research projects funded under this call for proposals is included at the end of this report.

We thank all the researchers for their contribution to the public policy debate.



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## FOREWORD

*Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides* is certainly groundbreaking work for the Philippine Women Centre of B.C. (PWC) at the start of the new millennium.

The PWC collective spent long hours and many brainstorming sessions to develop the research concept. Early on, we realized that this topic is very sensitive and delicate, and we recognized the tremendous challenge ahead of us. One challenge was to convince these women to share their stories and experiences, openly, with us. With this in mind, the women at the Centre became even more determined to surmount these challenges.

This is a timely piece of research. Mail-order brides have become a major component of the international trafficking of women in the midst of intensifying globalization. Like domestic workers, mail-order brides are slowly emerging as a new identity for many Filipino women in Canada. This is a social construct that stigmatizes the women and makes them virtual modern-day slaves.

The long and arduous research work included thousands of miles and many sleepless nights on the road, dining in fast-food restaurants, the fear of being met with hostility by the husbands and the concerns for the safety of these women as a consequence of this interaction. This concern is more serious for women in rural areas who because of their isolation are vulnerable to a husband's abuse. On the other hand, the mail-order brides develop a strong sense of power as they relate their stories and experiences. Their feeling of isolation is temporarily relieved knowing there are other Filipino women concerned about their situation.

This research work also means a great deal to our volunteers, women migrants and second-generation Filipino-Canadians, as they struggle to understand this phenomenon and relate it to the reality of poverty in their country of origin, the Philippines.

The research team, together with the volunteers, invested time and skills as part of their genuine contribution toward the struggle against oppression and exploitation.

Finally, the PWC is proud to have done research of this magnitude. We have once again crossed a difficult path as we continue our journey toward equality, just and lasting peace and genuine development!

Cecilia Diocson  
Research and Education Committee  
Philippine Women Centre of B.C.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background and Objectives of the Study**

This community-based research starts from the premise that it is impossible to understand the Canadian dimension of trafficking of women without examining the situation, needs and perspectives of Filipino mail-order brides. The study places the situation of these women within the historical and global context for Filipino women's migration to Canada. For 20 years, Filipino women's identity in Canada has been that of domestic worker. Now, the new identity of mail-order bride is slowly emerging.

Using a combination of participatory action research (PAR) methods and interview techniques, 40 Filipino mail-order brides from five provinces in Canada participated in this study. By allowing the women to share their experiences, a clearer picture of their overall economic and social situation in Canada emerges. Based on an analysis of their situation, the study makes recommendations and suggests actions for change in formulating policies to address their situation.

This study is ground breaking for it is the first to look at the mail-order bride phenomenon in Canada. It is also the first community-based research into the situation of Filipino mail-order brides. Prior to this, there were no data available on their presence.

### **Findings**

The study confirms the trend toward increasing numbers of Filipino mail-order brides in Canada. Before the 1980s, there is little evidence of Filipino mail-order brides. However, throughout the 1990s, based on interviews with, and stories of, Filipino women, there has been a marked trend toward an increase in their numbers.

Through an analysis of the women's stories, their extreme marginalization and vulnerability becomes clear. Their desire to escape the poverty in the Philippines pushes them to accept a mail-order marriage. As women from developing countries, who have been commodified and bought by their Canadian husbands, they are already in a marginalized position on arrival in Canada where their vulnerability and underdevelopment deepens. Many are trapped in traditional and patriarchal roles within the family. Despite being highly educated and highly skilled, many of the women, if employed at all, are segregated into low-paying, service-sector jobs. Many also experience forms of abuse—economic, emotional and physical. However, very few of these women access any form of social services.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, recommendations are formulated for policy development in the areas of immigration, violence against women and trafficking of women, their economic situation, human rights and the legal system. Actions for change to strengthen community empowerment and development are also identified.

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

*Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides* is a follow-up project to *Echoes: Cries for Freedom, Justice and Equality: Filipino Women Speak* (GAATW and PWC 1999). The latter was an initial step toward research and documentation of the situation of Filipino women living in abusive and exploitative conditions in a small town in British Columbia. Their life as domestic workers and mail-order brides was uncovered from a community-based perspective. The project revealed two things: a phenomenal number of Filipino domestic workers married their male employers, and local men were seeking Filipino wives. Thus, the project renewed concerns about the impact of 20 years of the Canadian government immigration programs (the Foreign Domestic Movement or FDM, and the Live-In Caregiver Program or LCP) to recruit domestic workers from developing countries.

The consequences of these programs include the de-skilling of Filipino women, the breakdown of the family unit due to years of separation and, most recently, the thirst for mail-order brides. The Philippine Women Centre (PWC) of B.C. defines the term “mail-order bride” as a formal transaction between a man and a woman from different countries, usually brokered by an agent, who is part of the mail-order bride industry, via catalogues or the Internet. The term is also applied to situations where men go to the Philippines with the intention of finding a wife. The PWC also uses the term to encompass Filipino women who have been introduced to Canadian husbands through informal networks of family and friends.

The PWC sees mail-order brides as trafficked women. A precise definition of the term “trafficking of women” is now the subject of intense debate both within and beyond the women’s movement. A narrow definition isolating the elements of abuse and coercion is being peddled by feminists, especially those from the North, who seek to legalize prostitution as a legitimate form of work—a “viable” option for poor women of the South in times of globalization. This reprehensible position effectively sentences poor women to permanent modern-day slavery.

Instead, PWC chooses to assert a broad definition of trafficking that includes domestic workers, mail-order brides, prostitutes and other Filipino women who are forced to emigrate as part of globalization. Essentially, this massive forced migration must be viewed in a global and historical context. The current phenomenon of the trafficking of Filipino women does not merely reflect the power dimensions between domestic worker and employer, between mail-order bride and husband, between prostitute and john, and between trafficked woman and trafficker. It also reflects the fundamentally unjust and unequal relationship between rich countries of the North and poor countries of the South. The inequality among nations is rooted in the historical development of capitalism. In the case of the Philippines, colonialism and neo-colonialism have so distorted the economy that women are now seen as commodities to be bought and sold for profit on the international market. Capitalism, through the trafficking of women, has entered the last frontier in the exploitation of the human body for profit. Therefore, PWC asserts a broad definition of trafficking so

governments, institutions and other policy makers are held accountable for the destructive impacts of globalization—of which trafficking is only one part.

*Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides* is a groundbreaking project: it is the first study to examine the situation of Filipino mail-order brides in Canada and the first undertaken by a community-based organization of Filipino women outside academe. This study looks at the growing number of Filipino mail-order brides entering Canada. It brings out their voices and struggles, seeking to increase the visibility of this marginalized group by raising the public's awareness of their situation. This project also aims to uncover the global and historical context of the trafficking of women in order to highlight the systemic factors underlying this trend. By developing a concrete understanding of their situation, the study also aims to formulate recommendations and suggest actions for change that will promote the human rights, equality, peace and development of these women.

Finally, this study is designed to present the strength and energy of the women who have participated in it. Their assertion to liberate themselves from abusive environments continues to inspire the advancement of our struggle for genuine equality, peace and development.

### **Community-Based Research at the PWC**

The Philippine Women Centre of B.C. was formed by a group of Filipino-Canadian women (including domestic workers) in 1989. Since then, its members have worked to educate, organize and mobilize Filipino women in Vancouver and other areas of British Columbia so they can collectively address the root causes of their oppression as women, as workers and as overseas Filipinos.

As a non-profit society, the objectives of the PWC are:

- Promote awareness of Philippine women of their common interests, issues and problems as women of colour in Canada.
- Help foster feminist values, emphasizing them from the perspective of Philippine women.
- Encourage inter-cultural understanding with women from other ethnic communities.
- Disseminate information about the Philippine community and about events in the Philippines.
- Establish links with other groups that share common interests.
- Co-ordinate and work with agencies, associations, groups and individuals to achieve the above objectives.

The foundation of the work of the PWC is the understanding that Filipino women living in Canada are part of the massive forced migration of Filipinos to the industrialized countries

of the North. Spurred by chronic unemployment and poverty, and encouraged by a government that makes the export of its own people its primary source of foreign dollars, Filipinos have been entering Canada since the 1960s. This flow of highly skilled Filipino immigrants and migrants corresponds perfectly with Canada's need for cheap labour to service its growing economy.

Based on the continual need to deepen our understanding of the reality of Filipino women in Canada, the PWC has developed in-depth experience in community-based research. "Is this Canada? Domestic workers experience in Vancouver, B.C." (Pratt 1997) was the first participatory action research (PAR) project conducted by the PWC in collaboration with Professor Geraldine Pratt of the University of British Columbia. Also in 1996, the PWC completed a study that examined the housing situation of Filipino domestic workers, *Housing Needs Assessment of Filipina Domestic Workers*. Building on this important work, the PWC then conducted a PAR project, in 1997, on the socio-economic violence against Filipino migrant/immigrant women, *Trapped: Holding on to the Knife's Edge*. This community-based research is a significant contribution to the knowledge about the situation of Filipino women in Canada.

With this knowledge, the PWC organized a historic gathering of Filipino women across Canada in 1999, the Filipino-Canadian Women's National Consultative Forum. This forum gathered over 100 Filipino women from different parts of Canada, the United States, Europe and the Philippines under the theme, "Towards Filipino Women's Equality." The forum gave the women an opportunity to share their experiences as women, as workers and as overseas Filipinos, to analyze collectively their experiences and to come up with recommendations and actions for change.

From this foundation of community-based research, education and action, the conditions for this study on Filipino mail-order brides were created.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, despite its rich natural resources, remains in a state of chronic economic stagnation. To ease the ailing economy, the country has become the top labour exporter in the world. Fifty-five percent of Filipino migrants are women. Heavily dependent on the remittances of migrant workers, the Philippine government promotes this so-called “alternative livelihood” abroad that has scattered eight million Filipinos to over 186 countries. About 2,000 Filipinos leave the Philippines every day, the majority being women leaving as domestic workers, entertainers, prostitutes and mail-order brides. The mail-order bride phenomenon reaches its high point in the United States where an estimated 5,000 Filipino mail-order brides enter every year (de Stoop 1994). In Australia, there are an estimated 20,000 mail-order brides—22 have been murdered or have “disappeared” since 1980 (CPC 1994).

Canada is a target destination for Filipinos seeking better lives, but in the last 30 years, the face of Filipino migration to Canada has changed considerably. The exodus began in the 1960s when highly trained and skilled professionals were in demand, especially in the medical field for nurses. Domestic workers and mail-order brides are the latest wave to enter Canada, and are fast becoming distinguishable features of the Filipino community.

The big thrust of migrant workers is a result of the implementation, in 1972, of the Philippine government’s Labour Export Policy (LEP). Along with sugar and rice, the labour power of the Filipino people is just another commodity for export. To resolve its day-care woes, Canada implemented the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) in 1991, the successor of the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM). Armed with the LCP, Canada is able to import highly educated women from developing countries as live-in nannies: the cheap alternative to a universal child-care system. Filipino women now make up 80 percent of all domestic workers in Canada.

The LCP and mail-order marriages have a negative impact on the image and identity of Filipino women. Over the last 20 years, the presence of Filipino women performing domestic work in Canada has resulted in an objectified, slave-like ideal of Filipino women, pushing them further into the margins of exploitation and abuse within Canadian society. Filipino women are the preferred choice for marriage over Western “liberated” White women as reported in *Echoes: Cries for Freedom, Justice and Equality: Filipino Women Speak* (GAATW and PWC 1999). Filipino women are considered better marriage material, not because of the principled virtues they possess, but because of the belief that they are obedient, docile, subservient and old fashioned. Thus, as Ninotchka Rosca (1999a), noted Filipina writer and activist, explains, “the thin line between servant and prostitute is bridged by the mail-order bride.”

*Canada: The New Frontier for Filipino Mail-Order Brides* hopes to deepen our understanding of Filipino women who are subjected to exploitative and abusive circumstances. The report begins with the historical and global context for the migration of Filipino women to Canada. We present their stories, experiences and struggles, uncovering the reasons why they came to

Canada and how these transactions were carried out. We then move to their situation in the Philippines and in Canada, providing the foundation for the formulation of recommendations and actions for change.

It is our hope that this report will begin to help Canadians think critically about the situation of these women and more important, what their presence in Canada means for Canadian society as we search for genuine peace, equality and development.



## **2. PROJECT METHODOLOGY**

This project emphasized a grass-roots, community-based approach to the research process and the formulation of recommendations. This approach was defined by the PWC's desire to promote community participation in the collective empowerment of Filipino women. With this overall goal of empowerment, the composition of the research team and the methodology for data gathering and analysis were set.

### **The Research Team**

A cross section of Filipino women in our community comprised the research team. There were three project researchers plus volunteers. Many already had in-depth experience in the community-based process of participatory research, as carried out by the PWC. The team included young women of various backgrounds, former domestic workers and working women. The research team also served as the core group for setting objectives, planning, and carrying out the overall co-ordination and implementation of the project. Throughout the whole process, a collective approach of sharing experiences, ideas and tasks was emphasized. As part of the community's involvement, the research team also worked under the Research and Education Committee of PWC and with its Coordinating Collective for input and direction. PWC volunteers ensured community participation by being involved in various aspects of the project from conducting interviews and making contacts to transcription. The work and input of the volunteers proved incredibly valuable throughout the project. In fact, it would have been impossible to complete this study without them.

### **Data Gathering**

To gather the data, the research team used a combination of participatory action research methods and interview techniques. The PAR model was developed in Latin America using popular education and community organizing methods. It is a process frequently used in the Philippines to give marginalized women the opportunity to share collectively, understand and analyze their situations through telling their own stories. Unlike traditional forms of research that set the researcher apart from the subjects, a collective attitude of openness and sharing underscores the relationship between researchers and participants.

The special situation of Filipino mail-order brides also necessitated the modification of the PAR methodology. As a particular sector of an already marginalized migrant/immigrant community, the women are in extremely vulnerable situations. On the whole, they are stigmatized for their status as mail-order brides. Therefore, full sharing could not always be achieved. To compensate for this, PAR methods were adjusted by doing follow-up interviews with the women. Other women's feedback about the situation of their friends was also sought to enhance the overall picture of their lives. Since focus groups and interviews could not always be recorded on audiotape, written records of the women's stories were taken by the research team. To protect the women's identity further, their

names and all identifying information were removed from the records of this study, including from this final report.

For this particular study, the research team allowed the data-gathering process to be opened by encouraging informal storytelling and sharing among a group of women. Focus groups were held in the women's homes to make them comfortable, maximizing the richness of their stories. To help frame the flow of these sessions, the research team used certain guideline questions (see Appendix). However, these questions were not strictly followed. Another important aspect of the process was the exchange of experiences as the research team members also shared their stories as Filipino women in Canada. The individual interviews with women who could not attend focus group sessions followed a similar process.

This combination of PAR and interview techniques proved to be positive for the women involved in the research. Through collective sharing and discussion, they were able to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-economic roots of their current marginalized situation. This process also encourages collective action to change the structures underlying the ghettoized position of the women, by bringing them together to realize their common situation and the power of collective action.

A few interviews were also carried out with service agencies in different areas where contacts could be established. The research team was interested in getting the overall picture of the Filipino community, the general situation of women in the area and the services provided by the agencies, as well as their knowledge of, and service provided for, Filipino mail-order brides.

### **Target Participants and Outreach**

Filipino mail-order brides were targeted to participate in this study and were reached through existing contacts developed through the Filipino community and women's organizations in the PWC's existing network. This included the Prince George Filipino Community Association, the Victoria Filipino-Canadian Association, PINAY (Montréal), Filipino Workers Support Group (Montréal) and the Philippine Solidarity Group (Toronto). There were also other efforts to reach out to Filipino mail-order brides through word of mouth and through articles in the PWC's newsletter, *Centre UPdate*. In areas where the level of organization in the Filipino community was low or non-existent, the research team found it difficult to find women to participate in the project. This demonstrates the need for strong national co-ordination to support the development of Filipino women's organizations across Canada.

Despite this difficulty, the extensive existence of Filipino mail-order brides should be noted. In almost all places the research team and other members of PWC visited, even outside the scope of this project, there were comments about the presence of Filipino mail-order brides. Often, PWC members would run into mail-order brides unknowingly.

Ultimately, 40 Filipino women from five provinces across Canada participated in this study.

## **Data Processing and Analysis**

All the focus groups and interviews were transcribed, then translated from Tagalog to English. This process took several months and proved to be an enormous task. As noted previously, identifying information was removed to protect the women's security.

The research team carried out the analysis under the direction of the Research and Education Committee of the PWC. Throughout the entire process, the research team shared the stories they heard and the insights they gained among themselves, the PWC collective and volunteers. This process of sharing and discussion gave team members a sense of the general situation of Filipino mail-order brides and their emerging issues. To deepen this understanding, the collected stories were divided among research team members and other women in the PWC collective for initial analysis and categorization into different themes. The team also conducted a literature review, Web site searches and identification of policy areas. The research team then met to formulate recommendations and actions for change. The collected stories were also sent back to the participants along with updates regarding the project outcomes.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on mail-order brides and international marriages presents recurring themes. The studies seek to explore why both sides choose to marry a foreign partner and the power dynamics within that relationship. The information was based on information outside of Canada, since materials on mail-order brides in Canada do not yet exist.

Exploring why Filipino women choose to marry a foreigner involved several social and economic reasons. An investigation into the social factors discussed the perception of a status increase in a White–Filipino relationship, social pressure to marry (old maid stigma), and greater faith in their fidelity and responsibility as providers. Several Filipino women who had more financial stability viewed their compatriots as unfaithful and irresponsible under the *machismo* concept. Economically, they believed marriage secured stability “because women are marginalised in the labour market and entering into marriage may offer them a better chance of economic security than remaining single” (Piper 1997).

Men choose Filipino women as wives mainly for social reasons and because of media portrayals of Asian women. This image flips from the “meek, docile slaves, oriental beauties with shady histories, passive and manipulable,” to that of women who are “grasping predatory, using marriage to jump immigration queues” (Robinson 1996). The media is not the only source of this image. The Philippine government has capitalized on the image of Filipino women by using a tourism marketing strategy portraying women as sexual objects. “[B]y equating the semi-nude dancers of nightclubs with traditional culture—bare-breasted women of the mountain tribes—tour books regularly portrayed the sexuality of Filipina bar-girls as natural and unchanging” (Tyner 1997). The men who choose to find a mail-order bride are predominantly between the ages of 40 and 60, previously married, living in rural areas and maintaining antiquated ideals of marriage. For the younger men, they have never married and have limited experience with sexual relationships (Tyner 1996). Moreover, Robinson (1996) describes a marriage between an older Australian man and a woman who was his housekeeper, an indication that the image of Filipino women as domestic workers is international.

The findings are contradictory. Both ends of the spectrum are present, ranging from marriages that function successfully to discoveries of significant domestic violence that goes unreported due to power inequalities. Government programs in Australia and the Philippines have been initiated in response to the outcry concerning mail-order brides. It appears that the majority of the programs are directed toward the prevention of domestic violence rather than hindering mail-order bride businesses. The Philippine government has created an orientation program and has a law prohibiting the mail-order bride business. But this law has done nothing to quell the growth of the mail-order bride industry in the Philippines. The Australian government has altered its immigration policy with a new provision granting residency to the mail-order bride even if the relationship has dissolved due to domestic or child custodial issues. These are possible recommendations that can be suggested to the Canadian government in formulating its immigration policy.

#### **4. THE GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE ARRIVAL OF FILIPINO MAIL-ORDER BRIDES IN CANADA**

To appreciate fully the reasons why Filipino mail-order brides migrate to Canada, it is important to examine the global and historical context for the migration of all Filipino women to Canada. This movement of women must be understood as part of the massive migration of Filipinos from conditions of poverty, unemployment and chronic political and economic crises in their homeland (a developing country) to the industrialized countries where they are exploited as sources of cheap labour. The individual stories of the Filipino mail-order brides reflect this analysis, as detailed further in the project findings.

##### **Migration as Part of Globalization**

Migration from one geographic area to another has existed since the beginning of human society. Initially, studies focussed on the phenomenon of rural to urban migration. However, in the era of globalization, migration operates on a different scale. As the experience of Filipino mail-order brides shows, it is no longer just the movement of people from rural to urban areas. Migration must now be understood as the massive movement of people from the underdeveloped countries of the South to the industrialized countries of the North. The underlying cause of worldwide migration is the globalization of capital and capital's endless search for profit. Through its continuous expansion, international capital distorts the patterns of economic development of countries, forcing people to "migrate" in order to survive. This systematic commodification of people from developing nations benefits both the sending and receiving countries and is an integral part of the neo-liberal globalization agenda.

##### **Root Causes of Migration from the Philippines**

The history of Filipino migration stretches back to the Spanish galleon trade between the Philippines, Mexico and Spain. Filipinos worked aboard the Spanish galleons and, sometimes, settled in the New World of the Americas. The Philippines was a Spanish colony for more than 300 years.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Filipino migration began to increase. For example, during the period of American colonial rule of the Philippines, thousands of Filipino agricultural workers were recruited to work on Hawaiian plantations and California fruit farms (Tujan 1995).

From this initial trickle of migrants, the commodification and export of Filipinos has grown tremendously. The Philippines is now the top labour exporter in the entire world, described as the world's largest migrant nation (Boti 1997). There are more than eight million Filipino migrant workers in over 186 countries worldwide (MIGRANTE 1998). To present this staggering statistic in a different way, it is estimated that there are over 2,000 Filipinos leaving the country every day for work abroad (Batara 1996). Collectively, this exported Filipino labour pumps an average of US\$7 billion into the ailing Philippine economy every year (MIGRANTE 1998). With about 10 percent of its population abroad, the Filipino

people's experience is, sadly, becoming characterized by their displacement and diaspora around the globe.

The root causes of Filipino migration lie in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal character of Philippine society. This state of affairs is caused by the continuing domination of U.S. imperialism and the ruling classes of landlords and *compradors* over Philippine society. The country remains agriculturally backward and without basic industries, leaving it in a forced state of underdevelopment and extreme poverty.

As a developing country, the gap between the rich and the poor in the Philippines continues to worsen. Eighty percent of the population owns less than 20 percent of the country's resources, while 20 percent of the population owns 80 percent of the resources. Seventy percent of the population lives below the poverty line, mostly peasants and workers (IBON 1995). Unemployment and poverty are rampant, as the prices of basic commodities spiral beyond the reach of the ordinary Filipino. The daily minimum wage is about 50 percent lower than the daily cost of living (GABRIELA 1998a). Displacement of entire communities of peasants, indigenous peoples and workers occurs as the Philippine government works to attract more foreign investment in agricultural crop export, mining and real estate development for tourism.

The migration of Filipinos is placed within this context of a deepening political and economic crisis. In fact, the migration and commodification of Filipinos is sanctioned by official Philippine government policy. Known as the Labour Export Policy (LEP), this scheme of systematically exporting labour is part of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank as conditions for borrowing. Ultimately, the LEP and SAPs are part of the neo-liberal policies of the globalization agenda. The LEP seeks to alleviate the continuing problems of massive unemployment, trade deficits, foreign debt and social unrest. First adopted by the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s, labour export has remained a key part of the so-called "development" plans of successive Philippine governments. From the regimes of Corazon Aquino and Fidel V. Ramos to current President Joseph Estrada, the Philippine government relies on the remittances of these migrants to prop up the economy and pay off the massive foreign debt owed to the IMF and the World Bank. Instead of selling coconuts and sugar, the Philippine government is now engaged in the sophisticated practice of selling its own people to industrialized countries. The main attractions of Filipino migrants are that they are highly educated and highly skilled, but most important, they are sources of cheap labour. This makes Filipino workers competitive commodities in the global capitalist market.

Thus, Filipino migrant workers are often touted as the "modern-day heroes" of the Philippines. They are even cited as the reason why the Philippine economy did not suffer as deep a crisis as that of neighbouring economies during the height of the Asian "flu" in 1997-98. But this position of the Philippine government covers up the reality of the violence, low wages, intolerable working conditions, discrimination and exploitation faced by Filipino migrant workers around the world. Their plight was brought into the global consciousness by the cases of Flor Contemplacion (who was hanged in Singapore in 1995) and Sarah

Balabagan (who was sentenced to death for killing her employer after he raped her in 1996). Despite drawing the global spotlight, the Philippine government remains woefully inutile and ineffective in assisting Filipino migrant workers.

### **The Current Trend: The Feminization of Migration and the Trafficking of Women from the Philippines**

A striking majority of Filipino migrant workers are women—55 percent (GABRIELA 1998b). Although the original migrant workers were Filipino men working as seafarers or construction workers, they were surpassed by an increasing number of women. While experiencing the same problems of exploitation and oppression as their male counterparts, Filipino women face the additional problems of gender violence and oppression. Many have returned home to the Philippines dead or the victims of brutal rapes, beatings or other forms of violence (Asia Pacific 1996). But what are the underlying causes of this trend toward the feminization of migration from the Philippines?

First, one must examine the character of the Philippine economy. Filipino women are not immune from the destructive impacts of the Philippine economic crisis. In fact, they are often the ones hardest hit by displacement, poverty and unemployment. Filipino women from the peasantry, workers, urban poor and indigenous communities comprise the majority of the poor. Moreover, specific policies adopted by the Philippine government (such as the setting up of export processing zones<sup>1</sup> and the promotion of tourism) fuel the exploitation of Filipino women. For example, 60 to 80 percent of the workers in export processing zones are women (GABRIELA 1998a). They are often young single women who work for low wages and under deplorable conditions. In some cases, they are subjected to virginity tests and their families are made to sign agreements that they will not allow their daughter to become pregnant or join a union. Many of the Filipino workers laid off in recent years are women workers in the export processing zones. Under the policy of tourism development, Filipino women are also used as prime selling points to attract foreigners to the Philippines. According to Ninotchka Rosca (2000), noted Filipina writer and activist, “the cheapest and easiest way to attract tourists [is] through sex tourism.”

Filipino women are thus pushed into the informal sectors of the Philippine economy, most tragically into prostitution. Despite the fact that “sex for hire (is) not a component of the indigenous culture of the Philippines” (Rosca 2000), the Philippines now has the highest number of prostitutes in Southeast Asia— 600,000—according to the International Labour Organization (GABRIELA 1999c). Entire areas of the Philippines, notably Olongapo and Angeles City (former locations of U.S. military bases), are known internationally as destinations for sex tourists and pedophiles. GABRIELA Philippines, the national alliance of women’s organizations, has warned that the ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement in 1999 between the United States and the Philippines will mean an increase in prostitution (Centre for Women’s Resources 1998). The growth of sex tourism in the Philippines is, therefore, an important factor spurring the global trafficking of Filipino women, including mail-order brides.

Also, feudal and patriarchal structures are deeply embedded in Philippine society and culture. Women are in subordinated and unequal positions within the Philippine family and society, responsible for the replenishment of labour and all associated household work. The historical development of Filipino women's oppression can be traced to the continuing impact of feudalism, colonialism and imperialism on Philippine society. This is manifested in the reality that Filipino women are also responsible for the economic survival of their families (Rosca 2000).

The feminization of migration from the Philippines is also rooted in changes in the economies of the receiving countries, including the shift from manufacturing to service-sector jobs and the increased participation of women in the work force. These changes resulted in the need for workers (most often women) to do domestic work and other related work in the service sector.

Historically, Filipino women left the country as nurses, teachers and other professionals. For example, in Saudi Arabia, many hospitals are staffed by Filipino nurses. In Canada, many Filipino women came to work as nurses and teachers in the 1960s and 1970s. However, as the economies of the receiving countries began to constrict, the need for domestic workers and women to participate in the informal sectors as entertainers and prostitutes began to dominate. Mail-order brides are the latest sector of Filipino women to leave the Philippines. Consequently, the trafficking of Filipino women as domestic workers, entertainers, prostitutes and mail-order brides is a worldwide phenomenon. But the increasing number of trafficked Filipino women is only a part of the estimated one to four million trafficked women worldwide—the majority of whom are from developing countries (ILO 1998d).

The pattern of this forced migration and the trafficking of women clearly emerges from statistical evidence. In Hong Kong, there are more than 100,000 Filipino domestic workers (Timson 1995). In Singapore, there are 50,000 Filipino domestic workers. In Japan, there are 75,000 Filipino women working as “entertainers”—a euphemism for dancers, bar hostesses, masseurs and prostitutes (Batara 1996). In Nigeria in 1995, 150 Filipino women were sold for sex (Monte 1998). In Europe, there are countless cases of Filipino women being trafficked as prostitutes (de Stoop 1994).

Into this mix are thrown the Filipino mail-order brides. According to the Philippine government, close to 150,000 Filipino women left the country between 1989 and 1998, as fiancées or spouses of foreigners (GABRIELA 1998e). The top destinations for Filipino mail-order brides have been the United States (Svensson 1996), Australia and Europe. In these countries, the phenomenon of Filipino mail-order brides has received wide attention because of cases of brutal murders and deaths. For example, in Australia, it is estimated that 22 Filipino mail-order brides have been murdered or have “disappeared” since 1980 (CPC 1994). In the United States, the murder of a pregnant Susanna Blackwell and her Filipino female friend in a Seattle courthouse by her estranged American husband again highlighted the plight of Filipino mail-order brides. The sheer scale of the commodification of Filipino women and the profits to be made in the mail-order bride industry are illustrated by the example of one U.S. agency. Cherry Blossoms has 1,000 men per month paying \$200 each for this “service”—\$2,400,000 gross annual profit.



As the crisis in the Philippines deepens, the forced migration and trafficking of women from developing nations is bound to continue.

### **The Canadian Experience: Immigration Policies and the Growth of the Filipino Community in Canada**

Canada, as an industrialized country in the era of globalization, has also benefited from this massive migration of Filipinos. Before examining the particular history of the Filipino community in Canada, it is useful to look back at the historical development and ideological underpinnings of Canadian immigration policy.

The emergence of capitalism and the growth and expansion of colonial powers into North America and other parts of the world is the context for immigration to Canada today. Except for the First Nations peoples, Canada is a country populated by immigrants.

Because of the need to attract settlers, there were basically no systematic immigration policies before the late 19th century (Anderson and Frideres 1981: 223). Immigration to Canada is generally broken down into five phases:

- French era;
- British era;
- French, German-speaking, Slavic and Scandinavian groups;
- Post-World War I with increasing restrictions based on arbitrary and racist determinants; and
- Post-World War II with a greater number of immigrants and increasing diversity.

The number of immigrants from poor countries of the South rose when immigration policies were liberalized in the 1960s and 1970s through, for example the introduction of the points system. However, the number of people of colour from the South did not surpass the number of European immigrants until 1976.

The immigration of people of colour from developing countries is regulated and influenced by the historical development of Canada as a capitalist country. Principally, the entry of these immigrants is determined by Canada's labour needs. The class and racial bias of the history of Canada can be clearly shown through its immigration policies. Poor people and people of colour are only allowed in to fill Canada's need for cheap labour—Chinese labourers to build the railway, eastern and central European farmers to settle and develop agricultural land in the West and, more recently, women from developing nations to do domestic work.

But while Canada has encouraged immigration to fulfill its own labour needs, it tightens immigration in times of economic crisis and to maintain the predominance of the White status quo. The examples of the Chinese head tax of 1903, the limits set on Japanese immigrants in the late 1930s and 1940s, and the implementation of the "continuous passage" policy to

exclude South Asian immigrants in the early 20th century are clear examples of Canada's "closed door" policy for people of colour during times of economic crisis.

### ***The Filipino Community in Canada***

Filipinos in Canada are part of the latest wave of migration dominated by people of colour from the underdeveloped countries of the South. In fact, Filipinos are relative newcomers to Canada, having first entered in the 1960s.

Since that time, the Filipino community in Canada has quickly grown. Between 1968 and 1973, there were 23,892 immigrants from the Philippines. By 1976, Filipinos were arriving at a rate of about 6,000 per year (CIC 1996). In 1996, the Philippines ranked fifth as a source of immigrants to Canada (13,132 immigrants from all classes) (CIC 1999a).

The pattern of Filipino migration to Canada can be roughly divided into three periods or "waves" (PWC 1997: 16).

- **The 1960s to early 1970s:** Filipino immigrants were mostly professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.) who entered Canada as landed immigrants. They came at a time when Canada's economy was growing and in need of skilled professionals.
- **The 1970s:** As the political and economic crisis in the Philippines intensified with the declaration of martial law in 1972, Filipinos continued to enter Canada as professionals and skilled workers. With the addition of the "family reunification" category under Canadian immigration policy, many family members of the first wave of immigrants were sponsored to Canada.
- **The 1980s to the present:** The striking growth of the migration of Filipino domestic workers marks this last wave. While independent and sponsored immigrants continue to arrive, Canada's need for the cheap labour of domestic workers is dominant.

The Filipino community can be classified into two groups: immigrants (permanent residents and citizens) and migrants (migrant workers, the undocumented, students, professionals or bureaucrats sent to study or train abroad and government officials).

The Filipino community in Canada now numbers over 240,000 according to the 1996 Census. The community is concentrated in the major urban centres of Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Montréal.

An important note should be made about the available statistics on the Filipino community. "Immigrants" does not include domestic workers currently under the Live-in Caregiver Program. These domestic workers have only temporary worker status, but make up a large portion (about one third) of the Filipino community in Canada.

Filipinos in Canada are generally in their prime productive years (25 to 48 years old) and are highly educated. In fact, immigrants from the Philippines are more likely than all immigrants and people born in Canada to have a university degree (CIC 1996). Yet their

incomes are lower than those of other groups. The average income of Filipino immigrants (not including domestic workers) is \$21,700, compared to \$23,700 for those who are Canadian born (CIC 1996).

There is also an extreme degree of occupational segregation. Men are segregated into janitorial and cleaning positions, while women are relegated to child care and household work (Hiebert 1997).

The marginalization and economic segregation of the Filipino community in Canada is clear. As an immigrant and migrant community, Filipinos suffer from the impacts of de-skilling, racism and discrimination, and the general economic crisis in Canada. Despite being a growing group within Canada, their needs and perspectives are often overlooked.

### ***The Position of Filipino Women in Canada***

Filipino women have made up a significant proportion of the Filipino community in Canada since the 1960s. Canada directly recruited many Filipino women to work as teachers and nurses in hospitals and schools experiencing a labour shortage. As such, early Filipino women immigrants were an indispensable part of the growth of the Canadian economy. To illustrate this, many Filipino women worked in remote areas, including many First Nations reserves, because Canadian nurses and teachers would not work there. A large number of Filipino women were also directly recruited to work in Manitoba's garment industry.

Since the turn of the century, Canada has also been exploiting the cheap labour of poor female migrants as domestic workers. This process began with the arrival of European women, followed by Caribbean women who came in the 1950s. In 1973, a temporary visa system was established, rather than have the women enter and remain in Canada illegally (Macklin 1994: 17). Through the struggle of Caribbean women, a more regulated immigration program was created in 1981. The Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) program marked the institutionalization of Canada's exploitation of women from developing countries to do domestic work. This policy of importing domestic workers is the direct result of women in Canada moving into the work force. When women in industrialized countries leave the home to work, hiring a nanny becomes an affordable option for most middle and upper class families. At the same time, Canada abandoned its national child-care policy, choosing instead to address the social responsibility of child care by providing this option for families who could afford a domestic worker.

The implementation of the FDM perfectly corresponded to the escalation of the Philippine government's Labour Export Policy. Thus, with the FDM there was "a dramatic rise in Filipina entrants" (Macklin 1994: 21). It is now estimated that over 90,000 Filipino women have come to Canada as domestic workers under the FDM and its successor program, the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP).

The LCP replaced the FDM in 1991 and remains the official Canadian government program for domestic workers. Although domestic workers' organizations, including Filipino women's groups, struggled against changes to the program that made it more difficult for women from developing countries to migrate (such as higher educational and training

requirements), they also criticized the fundamental pillars of the program perpetuating the exploitation and oppression of these women. These cornerstones of the LCP are the mandatory two-year, live-in requirement (i.e., forcing women to live in their employer's home) and the temporary status granted to the women (in contrast to the Filipino women in the 1960s who entered Canada as landed immigrants). Without the removal of these pillars of exploitation, the situation of Filipino domestic workers will never improve because the systemic context for their abuse and vulnerability remains intact.

Many Filipino domestic workers face long hours, low (or no) wages, physical and emotional abuse, de-skilling, isolation and low self-esteem. Canada, while championing itself as a defender of human rights, ignores the flagrant violation of these women's rights as workers and as women. In fact, Canada has failed to sign the *United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights and Welfare of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*.

Overall, the marginalized position of the Filipino community in Canada, including the situation of Filipino women, is the context for the presence of Filipino mail-order brides. Since Canada has had entrenched and institutionalized programs like the FDM and LCP for close to 20 years, there has not yet been a massive influx of Filipino women migrating through other channels, such as through the mail-order bride industry. But as the project findings illustrate, there is cause for concern as Canada develops into the new frontier for Filipino mail-order brides and other trafficked women.

## 5. OUR VOICES, OUR EXPERIENCES, OUR STRUGGLES: SIX STORIES OF FILIPINO MAIL-ORDER BRIDES<sup>2</sup>

### **Maria**

Jane: *Can you share your background in the Philippines, about your work, family, etc?*

Maria: *In the Philippines, I was the one tutoring my nephews and nieces. The parents of these children were so thankful to me because the children became smart.*

Jane: *Are you a teacher?*

Maria: *No I'm not, but I have many nieces and nephews who are studying. When I started tutoring them, the parents told me that they became smart. Before that, I was already writing for a publication. It happened that the articles of their children were published there.*

Maita: *What kind of stories were you writing?*

Maria: *"Love Story." I enjoy my teenage life so much. I'm the third child in our family. My personality is somewhat, a bit wild, naughty but brave. I grew up in Manila, Philippines.*

Jane: *When did you leave the Philippines?*

Maria: *When I was already in my early 30s. My parents advised me that if my partner does not really love me, I will become pitiful one day. I have some penpals, I'm so lucky in terms of penpals. I said maybe this is my luck in life. I have a boyfriend before from somewhere in Mindanao. He was in the army, but he was only a boyfriend to me.*

Maita: *What are your parents doing in the Philippines?*

Maria: *My father lived and worked for over 20 years in Manila. He even went to work abroad when we were still very young. But when he came home to the Philippines, he never went back abroad anymore. My mother really pushed him to go back and work abroad again, but he's so sentimental.*

Jane: *How about your mother, what is she doing?*

Maria: *My mother is a plain housewife. That's why we only lived from payday to payday.*

Jane: *How did you meet your husband? Where did you meet each other?*

Maria: *We met in the Philippines. I have a long story! One time, I just accidentally looked at this magazine, during Marcos time. I thought I had luck in getting penpals, so I said to myself why not try abroad.*

Jane: *You're just trying it out. It's just like trying?*

Maria: *Yeah! I'm just trying it out. My sister wanted to go abroad. For me, I'm not that interested to go abroad, because I said, I don't want to go abroad, I just feel bored and everything.*

Jane: *How did you meet him or how did you get information about him?*

Maria: *He was in a penpal column ad. He had a very small picture attached in a magazine. But I had another choice. He was an Australian, but this Australian guy didn't respond.*

Jane: *So, since that time, you're already exchanging letters?*

Maria: *Yeah, we exchanged letters for almost one year.*

Jane: *For how long?*

Maria: *One year. Then after one year, he proposed marriage. And the way he said it... "Will you marry me?" That wasn't his question. But what he said was: "I will marry you." Period! That was his proposal, but...*

Maita: *Is it just like that?*

Maria: *Well I like him but then my father told me: "He lives too far away." But I said: "I'm getting old. I might be an old maid forever." But, I accept that I was the one who stood up for him. My mom said to my father: "Let her go," because my father would always run after me around our place. I was already 30 years old and at that time I was panicking. We went on exchanging letters with each other. But I threw his picture out, because he's too old. But then this sister of mine, she said: "Oh come on, nothing will happen to you. If you don't like him, then, so what? He's not going to hurt you. Besides, he didn't get anything from you. But then if you like him, then of course something will happen." Just in case then, she told me again: "Oh come on, answer him now!" Then I finally decided, OK! He wrote very well. His letter was so encouraging, it made you feel great. There's so many wonderful lines in his letters.*

Maita: *What kind of stories does he share with you?*

Maria: *Some nonsense. But he wrote: "When you come out, oh, you may ask yourself, 'Why the hell did you bring me here for?'"*

Jane: *I thought you got married in the Philippines?*

Maria: *Yeah.*

Jane: *So, you married in the Philippines?*

Maria: *Yes, in the Philippines. He's so funny because he can drive my jeep. And he claimed that he didn't know that we were getting married then. Yeah, all I knew was that we're just going shopping. The judge said: "No, you can't." But my sister, she has so much influence, she said: "Oh, come on! You better get married, otherwise, you may get pregnant."*

Jane: *So, you're already pregnant?*

Maria: *Yes, I'm already pregnant. Mike is the kind of person that you could easily get along with, that everybody will love. He's a happy go lucky person.*

Jane: *When you got pregnant, did you stay in the Philippines or did he stay there too?*

Maria: *He stayed there for one month. So, for one whole year, we didn't stay together because he came back here to Canada.*

Jane: *He just went there. Then you got pregnant. Then you got married after one month staying in the Philippines. Then he went back to Canada?*

Maria: *Yeah. I wasn't qualified yet to come here. I don't have any papers yet. But of course for me at that time I was so scared because I was already pregnant and I'm thinking that he'll abandon me. But it seems like he is very willing to look after me. Then after that my mother-in-law was already writing me. There, he left me in the Philippines and paid P150,000 pesos.*

Maita: *What is that P150,000 for?*

Maria: *I used it for the hospital bill when I delivered my baby.*

Jane: *Did you have a cesarean?*

Maria: *No, I had a normal delivery.*

Alice: *Isn't that too expensive?*

Maria: *Yeah, it's really too expensive.*

Jane: *When did you get married again?*

Maria: *Almost 10 years ago.*

Jane: *Did you get pregnant in the Philippines with your second child?*

Maria: *No, I was already here in Canada when I conceived my second child.*

Jane: *After you got married what happened next?*

Maria: *We didn't stay together yet until one year. I was always bugging the Canadian Embassy with their drop boxes because they don't allow you to go inside and they don't accept phone calls either. They're so strict. I was so mad because my baby was already six months old but she didn't see her Canadian father yet. Yeah. At that time, I don't know how to cook. I don't know how to cook rice.*

Maita: *Do you have maids in the Philippines?*

Maria: *Yes, we have someone to cook for us and someone to do the laundry for us. My mom really treated me like a baby because I was the youngest.*

Jane: *When you came here, did he sponsor you?*

Maria: *Yeah.*

Jane: *Are your parents supportive of you too?*

Maria: *Yeah, but just in the end.*

Jane: *But when you arrived here, where did you stay?*

Maria: *I lived in the interior 45 minutes away from the city.*

Jane: *So, what is your experience there? Did you bring your children with you there?*

Maria: *Yes, I brought my children with me. He wasn't there with me in the Philippines. While I was processing my papers, I was sending him my picture because our sex life is active. He sent me money and he sent an automatic camera, so I can picture myself naked.*

Alice: *He wants nude naked body (laughs).*

Jane: *So, that is what you have been doing for all those years?*



Maria: *Yeah. After that, we're doing fine having sex on the phone. I'm sending him naked pictures and we write each other letters.*

Jane: *How about voice tape? Did you exchange voice tapes?*

Maria: *No voice tape, just naked picture or whatever (laughs).*

Jane: *Did you ask your sister to take your picture? What did you do?*

Maria: *No, of course not. (laughs) I'm nude. My niece was taking pictures for me or I would put on a self-timer. So, I said: "Make it good and nice okay?" Because I'm not good in the kitchen. So, his priority is the bedroom of course.*

Alice: *It's hard to adjust to each other, right?*

Maria: *Yeah, and the house had so many problems to fix. We have arguments. We fight. Sometimes, we want to give up. Sometimes, I broke plates due to the problems in the house such as there wasn't any sewage disposal in our house.*

Jane: *Is it a house like this?*

Maria: *No, it's only a cabin. It's a trailer and the water was coming from the lake. There is no running water and I just discovered all these things after.*

Jane: *So, you're getting water from the lake and you have your child with you?*

Maria: *Of course, we used to get the water from there. Yeah, they're coming with me going there to the lake to get water and it's so hard. Especially in the wintertime, to do the house chores, and there's no water at all. Sometimes, during winter my husband was the one getting water from the lake.*

Maita: *What if the water is frozen, what will you do?*

Maria: *Of course, I have to boil it to sterilize it. It's not a joke, really really hard living. My life was such in a great mess. My life was so hard.*

Jane: *Did you get pregnant again?*

Maria: *Yes. When I was washing dishes I was really crying. I go to the toilet crying. Sometimes he's thinking, I just ate a lot and I got stomach pains, something like that.*

Alice: *Maybe you're not good in cooking?*

Maria: *Sometimes he's teaching me how to cook. I thought you can just put water on the pork.*

Jane: *What did you cook when you first stayed together? Are you eating rice or what?*

Maria: *I told him that I don't know how to cook rice and we ate French fries instead. Or he is just acting nice in front of me saying: "Oh you cook good, this is fine," though the rice seems wet.*

Jane: *What can you say about the weather? Aren't you feeling cold or something?*

Maria: *Not really. But, when I get home it's cold and there is snow. It seems like just yesterday.*

Jane: *It's really hard. It's normal. It also helped us learn. It's hard to adjust. How did you manage?*

Maita: *The survival?*

Alice: *How did you manage the lifestyle here in Canada?*

Maita: *How about your big challenges when you arrived here?*

Maria: *The house that we are living in is quite far. So of course, walking in the snow is hard. Looking after my little baby and we had a fight because of his attitude.*

Jane: *Because he's from another culture?*

Maria: *For me, I was so sentimental. We then fight. I don't have money at all. I have to make him satisfied. We have so many incidents. I can't go shopping. Of course it's natural for us women to go out shopping, to buy something. He's not giving me any money. He doesn't know that he should give me money and he just learned from me in the long run.*

Jane: *How did you assert?*

Maria: *About money matters? We fight about money.*

Jane: *Yeah!*

Maria: *I told him, you have to [give me money] because I will make intrigues in the Philippines. You know my father is the one giving money to my mom. My mom is the one doing the budget and keeping the money. So now he's*

*giving me the money and I am the one doing our budget these days. He ended up asking money from me now, for the income tax. He said our tax is \$32 only, but I said my child tax benefits should go straight into my account. I said how can I buy clothes for my child or how can I buy make-up for myself with only \$32?*

*Jane: I think \$32 isn't right for you because you don't have any income. And if your income is too small you should receive a bigger amount.*

*Maria: I think the computation was wrong.*

*Jane: That's one challenge that you learned about.*

*Maria: Yeah, they have that kind of attitude, for now. I realized that there's really a big gap between the attitudes of those from other countries like my husband who is White.*

*Jane: What else are your challenges with your husband besides money matters?*

*Maria: We fought about the sewage system. We hardly fixed it.*

*Maita: He doesn't want to really fix it?*

*Maria: So we had a big fight. I asked him many, many times. But then we also experienced going to a motel, somewhere in the city, just to take a bath there.*

*Maita: Just to take a bath?*

*Maria: Yeah.*

*Jane: How many days can you not take a bath sometimes during the winter?*

*Maria: Sometimes, I'll just think about the good times and slowly forget the bad times. We also sometimes go to his family near here. Then the lifestyle here, there is no respect at all. Like it's not easy for me to just ask or borrow something like the vacuum or money. Sometimes I feel shy to tell him that we need this or we need that.*

*Jane: When did you move to this house?*

*Maria: We moved here a few years ago.*

*Jane: That means you stayed four years in the trailer van?*

Maria: *Yes. We struggled so much for four years staying there and if I only knew about it before, I wouldn't have gone through it. For goodness sake!*

## **Nika**

Small and younger looking than her years, it is hard to imagine a woman like Nika enduring and surviving domestic violence. Playing with her daughter in her comfortable home in a rural town, Nika is friendly, funny and open about her story as a mail-order bride and her past as a battered wife.

Nika, born of peasant stock, hails from one of the largest islands in the Visayan region of the Philippines. She spent her high school life writing to several penpals throughout Canada and the United States. Her older sister, Nela, arrived in Canada several years before as a mail-order bride. Nela was living a comfortable life, raising two young daughters and sending money to the family in the Philippines. Nika knew that her and her family's future depended on her marrying a foreigner, just as her older sister had done.

When Nika was in her first year of college, Nela sent her the address of a Canadian man looking for a wife. Out of all the men writing to Nika, Tom sent the most money, sweet-talked the best and offered her the greatest hope for survival.

After a short courtship through letters, Tom made his way to the Philippines. His stories of a booming taxi business and a comfortable, stable life made a good impression not only on Nika, but on her family. They fell hard for the Canadian. Just barely one month after his arrival in the Philippines, Tom and Nika wed. Nika soon quit college to wait for her husband who promised to sponsor her to Canada.

Nika then arrived in Canada to join Tom. Just barely into the honeymoon phase, the union between the two collapsed. The taxi business Tom had boasted about was non-existent. He failed to provide the comfortable, stable life he had promised her. What shocked Nika was the response she got from the community. Her second day in Canada was spent sightseeing in the small town, but almost everywhere she went, Nika was met with stares, questions and warnings about Tom. Nika soon realized that everything Tom had told her was based on lies and deception. Nika was his *fifth* wife, not his second. He did not tell her he was no longer providing financial support to Nika's family.

Abuse was rampant. Tom's control over Nika started mildly at first; he limited her access to the phone and monitored her calls. Nika's primary source of information, the phone book, was off limits. The abuse escalated when Tom started to control Nika's diet; he regulated what she ate and how much. Slight, spiteful comments became verbal abuse. It was not long before Tom started to inflict physical abuse. Nika would receive slaps if Tom felt she had eaten enough. Being from a rural area from the Philippines, Nika did not understand her way around a Western kitchen and did not understand how to cook and store food properly. An odour began to develop when Nika stored leftover fish in the cupboard one evening. Instead of explaining how to preserve food, Tom beat her. Shortly after that incident, Tom repeated the same assaults after Nika watched a report about welfare and financial fraud. He forbade

watching TV fearing that she would learn he was involved in scams to defraud the government.

Without access to information and help, Nika only had her older sister Nela for support. However, Nela believed that domestic problems must be settled between the husband and wife. She informed Nika that she would help her only *after* she left Tom. In the meantime Nela taught her how to work around the house, including how to store and cook food properly.

After one month of marriage, Nika could no longer tolerate the abuse. With support from her sister and a few Filipino friends, Nika found refuge in a transition house where she stayed for four months until the divorce was settled. Although the marriage ended bitterly, Nika was happy to be free from Tom's abuse and was eager to take control of her life.

Happily settled into her second marriage, Nika enjoys taking care of her daughter and has grown closer to Nela. Despite her experiences, Nika remains optimistic and is grateful for the tremendous support she received from others in the Filipino community.

## **Alice**

Alice was born on a small island in the Philippines, one of seven children. Although not the poorest of the poor, her family experienced the hardships common to the majority of people in developing countries.

During her time in school, she met her first boyfriend, Lito. She was 17 years old, while he was 21. After a few months, Alice discovered she was pregnant. Lito brought her to his hometown in the western Visayan region of the Philippines.

With neither of them employed, the arguments between Alice and Lito began to intensify. Lito physically abused her, going so far as to grab her by the neck. Ashamed of her situation, Alice tried to hide the abuse from her family.

Rumours of the troubled relationship reached Alice's family. Along with the local police, Alice's father talked with Lito. He wanted to take Alice back home, but Lito refused to let her go unless he accompanied her. Eight months pregnant, Alice returned to her hometown. One month later, a son was born.

Another son followed a year later. Still without work, Lito pressed Alice to move back to his town. They had two more children in the next two years. Alice later learned that Lito spent most of his time drinking and gambling with his friends. Still with no means to support herself, she decided to move to Manila and leave Lito. Like millions of Filipinos who live in poverty in rural areas, the lure of jobs in Manila drew her to the big city. Alice was able to rent a small room to live in. Her meagre earnings at the store were supplemented by taking in other people's laundry, which she did by hand at night.

Seeing Alice suffer was difficult on her father. He encouraged her to apply abroad as a domestic worker. Knowing it would be impossible to find work in her profession and with the short-term survival of her family foremost in her mind, Alice agreed.

The process of going abroad began with trying to raise enough money to pay for the recruitment agency's fee for finding a job for Alice in Singapore as a domestic worker. At that time in 1987, the fee was \$2,000.

Alice also had to undergo a training session in domestic work since she had no "experience." The agency training session taught young Filipino women how to scrub walls properly, the mechanics of operating a washing machine and how to address an employer properly.

The next hurdle for Alice was processing her papers to work abroad. This was no easy task, since this bureaucratic and costly process in the Philippines seeks to extract money from these workers before they even leave the country. When she went to the office with her birth certificate, marriage contract and other documents, the agency discovered a problem with Alice. She was married with four children. Employers in Singapore preferred their Filipino nanny to be single. The agency resolved this "problem" by getting new documents for Alice. These would show her as a single woman.

Alice was now eligible to join the ranks of over eight million Filipinos working outside their country in 168 countries worldwide. Many, like Alice, also changed their status to obtain the employment abroad they and their families needed so desperately.

Through her Filipina friends in Singapore, she heard about the Canadian program (then called the Foreign Domestic Movement or FDM), now known as the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). It was easy to get to Canada, they said, and the workload was lighter. Best of all, after working two years, you could sponsor your family to join you and study to upgrade your professional skills. All Alice had to do was submit her documents to the Canadian embassy and prepare for an oral interview with an immigration officer. When Alice asked about the changes the agency had made on her documents, the Singaporean agency told her it was easier to maintain the changes on her application for the FDM. Alice listened to their advice and paid the \$2,000 agency fee.

Alice then entered Canada. She immediately began working but she could not bear the disappointment in her working conditions. She expected the work to be lighter, yet she was regularly working well past 12 hours per day, seven days a week, with a salary much lower than she was making in Singapore. She quit after six weeks.

Her next employer was a young single father, John, recently separated from his wife with a four-month-old son, David. After a few months of employment, John approached Alice and said that he had "feelings" for her. While Alice could see that John was lonely and that she often felt that way also, she rejected his advances.

But the time spent with John and David on camping trips, fishing outings and other "family-oriented" activities helped Alice to develop feelings for John. A romantic relationship

developed between them. About two months into their relationship, Alice opened up to John and told him her story. She told him about her previous marriage and her four children. John was surprisingly supportive, saying that her past did not matter to him. She explained that she wanted to support her children in the Philippines financially, but John was unwilling to provide anything for them.

John began to pressure Alice to marry, despite his knowledge of her previous marriage, so he could sponsor her without having to wait for her to complete the 24 months of live-in work required under the FDM. John felt that no one had to know about the previous marriage anyway. It was easier to keep this a secret. Alice was concerned about this, as she still wanted to bring her children to Canada from the Philippines. She wanted to go to Canada Immigration and ask for their help, but John was unbending in his view that she should keep quiet.

On her part, Alice was adamant that she did not want to be sponsored by John. She wanted to complete the work period required under the FDM and apply for landed immigrant status in Canada on her own. Alice had thought about moving after she obtained her landed status, but John would not let her go. He said he needed a good mother for David and that he wanted to marry her.

They were then married. A few months later, Alice was granted her landed immigrant status. In the early days of their relationship, their life continued in much the same manner as it had before. John controlled the finances of the household, as he would not allow Alice to work outside the home. Alice often thought about her children in the Philippines, but was unable to send them money regularly.

After about nine months of marriage, Alice became pregnant. She gave birth to a daughter, Rowena. After Rowena's birth, John's drinking became more of a problem. They would argue, with John physically grabbing or squeezing her. Besides exerting physical control over her, John became more demanding about the finances. He would not even allow her to take driving lessons. Alice fell into a depression and rapidly gained weight.

One evening just after Rowena's second birthday party, John returned from a fishing trip drunk. An argument between Alice and John ensued. As she struggled to get away from him, John reached over from behind her and bit her cheek. He continued to threaten her, even after she was able to get away from him. Alice left John in the morning, bringing Rowena with her as she was concerned for her safety.

Alice and Rowena went to the Elizabeth Fry Society for counselling and emotional support. She filed criminal charges against John two weeks after entering the women's shelter. The RCMP arrested John on the charges of uttering threats, assault and assault causing bodily harm. He was questioned and the trial was scheduled. In the meantime, Alice was able to obtain a restraining order against John since she feared for her safety and that of her child.

After leaving the women's shelter, Alice and Rowena obtained social assistance and a space in a social housing complex. She found work in a restaurant and in the food court of the

local mall. She also took a seven-week training course in the food industry to help upgrade her skills. She could feel her life improving.

However, John and his family reported her to Immigration. John revealed that Alice was previously married in the Philippines and that she had never been divorced. John also told Immigration that Alice had four sons in the Philippines.

Alice was soon brought before a deportation inquiry. Immediately, Alice's struggle was brought to a new and more difficult level. She was no longer fighting for a chance to rebuild her life in Canada—she was fighting to stay in Canada and not be separated from one of her children again. For support, she turned to her counsellors at the Elizabeth Fry Society, who were helping her with her divorce and custody application, and an application for a peace bond against John.

Alice travelled with Rowena to attend the deportation inquiry. She met with the Philippine Women Centre (PWC) for more support. The hearing did not last very long. The decision maker reviewed the case file, including the information and recommendation from Immigration. Alice's lawyer argued that, while Alice had misrepresented her marital status on her application for landed status, there were compassionate and humanitarian grounds (including having a Canadian-born daughter) for her stay in Canada. However, she was ordered deported from Canada for "misrepresentation."

Alice's appeal hearing before the Immigration and Refugee Board then took place. It was an emotionally draining experience for Alice and for her supporters who formed the Committee for Justice for Alice. While Alice's lawyer continued to argue that there were compassionate and humanitarian grounds for Alice to stay in Canada, Immigration portrayed Alice as a liar and manipulator of the Canadian system. John testified over the phone that Alice had "seduced" him into a romantic relationship and that he was concerned she would "abandon" her four children in the Philippines. He denied having knowledge of her previous marriage and denied that he prevented her from reporting the information to Immigration. When asked about his abusive treatment of Alice and his drinking, he also denied that he had any problems.

In his closing remarks, the Immigration representative made the appointed statement that it was only those Canadian citizens born in Canada who have an unlimited right to stay in Canada. Everyone else, which would include most of Alice's supporters, would be subject to deportation if they committed any "wrongdoing" in the eyes of Immigration.

It took almost three months for the decision of the Immigration and Refugee Board to be released. The board member upheld the deportation order. She noted inconsistencies in Alice's evidence. She also stated that Alice failed to disclose her misrepresentations to Immigration after her break-up with John. She discounted the support letters and evidence that Alice was a contributing member of Canadian society because of inconsistencies in the documents. She also stated that Alice could easily reintegrate into life in the Philippines. She found that Alice was not genuine in her expressions of remorse for having misrepresented



herself. Based on all these findings, the board member decided there were no humanitarian and compassionate grounds to allow Alice to remain in Canada.

The news was a blow for Alice and for her supporters. Alice was forced to face the real possibility of being deported and losing custody of her daughter. Alice later lost her appeal to the Federal Court of Canada and lost custody of Rowena. But with continued support from around the world, she fights for her right to stay in Canada. But at the same time, she has made preparations to return to the Philippines.

### **Perlita**

Perlita was born in a small town in the Philippines that relies on copra and fishing as its main economic activities. Born into a large family, Perlita started but never completed her degree in business administration. She ended up working as a secretary for one year in Manila, before leaving for Hong Kong where she was able to secure employment as a domestic worker through her aunt. She ended up working in Hong Kong for 10 years for the same employer. Actually, she worked for two families in one household. Given the proximity of Hong Kong to the Philippines, she was able to return frequently for visits with her family.

On one of these visits, she married a Filipino man. After one week of living together, she returned to work in Hong Kong. She was not able to return to the Philippines for two years. At that time, she hoped she could stay permanently in the Philippines with her husband. However, after one month he abandoned her.

She returned to Hong Kong to work after the failure of her marriage, never changing her marital status on her immigration papers from single. In Hong Kong, she was encouraged by her sister, a domestic worker in Canada, to submit her name to a “friendship” office in British Columbia. She was given the name of a man, Keith. They began corresponding. At that time, Keith was already in his 50s. Through their correspondence, Perlita learned that Keith was a Canadian citizen of German descent. Perlita only found out later that Keith had been married four times before and already had four children.

Perlita continued to correspond with Keith. She was also encouraged by her sister, who arranged for her to work for a Canadian family, so Perlita could meet Keith. Perlita’s application to come to Canada under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) was successful and she immigrated to Canada. Perlita hoped she could eventually obtain Canadian citizenship. She continued to declare her marital status as single on her immigration documents.

Immediately, she found employment caring for two young children. She worked for them for 21 months, falling three months short of the mandatory 24-month, live-in requirement under the LCP. The reason she fell short of the 24-month requirement was because Perlita was already eight months pregnant by Keith. In fact, after her first year with her employer, she had moved in with Keith. Perlita knew this would jeopardize her status under the LCP,

but Keith insisted she live with him. She gave birth to a daughter two weeks after leaving her employment as a domestic worker.

One month after the birth of her daughter, Perlita and Keith were married. Perlita never returned to work because Keith would not let her work outside the home. Keith insisted he could provide for them through his business. Ironically, this business was registered in Perlita's name. Keith had registered the business in her name even while she was under the LCP, as his previous business had shut down because of tax evasion charges levied against him by Revenue Canada (now known as the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency). Perlita would later find out that Keith twice tried to register the business in her name, but the application was rejected because she was not present. However, Keith travelled to another town where he successfully got around the rules and registered the business under her name despite her absence.

Perlita finally obtained landed immigrant status as the spouse of a Canadian citizen. This same year her first marriage in the Philippines was annulled. Perlita gave birth to her second daughter.

This was also the year that the grave physical abuse of Perlita began. Even before their marriage, Perlita had felt emotionally and verbally abused by Keith. He controlled all aspects of her life—her mobility, her access to friends and even her access to money. He would verbally and emotionally demean her in front of her friends. This control had already led to a suicide attempt while still employed as a domestic worker. But now, the abuse escalated to physical attacks. She was kicked in the back and hit twice in the face, leaving bruises. He held a gun to her head and threatened to shoot her. In one horrifying incident, he pressed his knee against her chest, cutting off her breathing—in full view of the children.

Like many other abused women, Perlita attempted to leave her husband on many occasions. She sought refuge with her sister and friends, but the fear that he would report her to Immigration always prevented her from going through with her decision to leave him. Perlita knew Keith could give information to Immigration that could have her deported. Keith knew she was previously married in the Philippines, but that she had declared her status as single. Keith knew they had gotten married before her first marriage was annulled. Keith knew she had lived outside her employer's home while still under the LCP. Keith also knew the business would show up as registered in her name, while she was still under the LCP. Perlita felt trapped. Every aspect of her life, including her options to flee, were being controlled by Keith.

Perlita called a women's organization one time for help. An appointment was set up for her to speak with a counsellor, but she backed out, because she feared a reprisal from Keith. Eventually, just as they were about to move to another province, Perlita took the children with her to a shelter. Perlita describes the moment almost like an epiphany. She knew in the deepest part of herself, that if she did not take this chance, she would never be able to leave Keith.

Perlita sought help from the Philippine Women Centre. They advised her to move in order to ensure her safety and that of the children. She had heard about the Centre's involvement in Alice's case, another woman who was facing deportation for failing to declare her marriage in the Philippines.

Perlita was distraught when she first came to the PWC. During her last telephone call to Keith, he said he had already made good on his threat to report her to Immigration. Perlita knew from her counsellors that an immigration officer was looking for her.

Besides the problems with Immigration, Perlita also knew her husband did not remit anything to Revenue Canada for the business that was in her name. But, most of all, Perlita was concerned about keeping custody of her two daughters. For now, Perlita's story has a happy ending. The PWC assisted in finding a good lawyer to represent her in the family law proceeding. She was granted sole custody of her two daughters. The court took into account Keith's record of abuse against his previous four wives. This record of abuse was bolstered by the testimony of Keith's own children from the earlier marriages. She is now in hiding, for her protection and that of her children.

But will Keith's next wife be so lucky?

### **Lanie**

Lanie, a quiet but strong woman with eyes that sparkle with laughter, was born in Mindanao (the large southern region of the Philippines). After working for two years in Singapore as a domestic worker, she completed another two-year contract in Hong Kong. While in Hong Kong, a friend introduced her to a man in Canada who wanted to become "penpals." He was recently divorced and had a son from his previous marriage. Lanie permitted her friend to give the man her address in Hong Kong. Of course, Lanie knew—even though no one said it openly—that this "penpal" arrangement was an informal method for introducing her to a foreign man looking for a Filipino bride. Despite having worked abroad for so many years, Lanie was still looking for a better and more stable life. Perhaps Canada offered this, and so she agreed to write to him.

For the most part, their letters were unremarkable. They talked a little about themselves and what Canada and Hong Kong were like. Eventually, he asked Lanie to marry him and she agreed. Taking some time off from her work in Hong Kong, she returned to the Philippines where her fiancé met her family. They were married and she returned to Hong Kong to complete her contract.

Lanie's husband continued to write her in Hong Kong, saying he had already applied to sponsor her to Canada. After a few months, Citizenship and Immigration Canada wrote saying the application had been refused, because of a bureaucratic mix-up: there was no marriage contract on record at the local municipal hall. What were they going to do? Lanie's contract in Hong Kong was almost finished and it might take some time for the paperwork to be straightened out. Her husband convinced her that the best solution was to get married again and resubmit the documents. Consequently, they were married again in the

Philippines, but this time Lanie stayed behind with her family. Eventually, the approval from Immigration arrived but Lanie hesitated to rejoin her husband. She had been away from home for so long and it was hard to face another adjustment. But, she had already committed herself to this path.

Lanie entered Canada, heading directly to her husband's small town. She was immediately thrown into an abject situation. Not only was the town much smaller and more isolated than she imagined, but her husband's trailer home on the outskirts of town was filthy and in disarray, with plastic bags strewn everywhere. It took forever to get the house in order. She was also unprepared for her husband's behaviour. Of course, she expected their reunion in Canada to include intimate sexual relations. But, she did not expect the short, cold and unfeeling act that they "shared." It left her feeling empty and used.

Lanie also found that, although her husband was working a regular graveyard shift, he was not willing to give her any money. It seems that the "marriage" did not include any financial support. Luckily, with her experience as a domestic worker, she was able to find baby-sitting work.

Despite having work, Lanie was bitterly disappointed with her life in Canada. Things had been better for her in Singapore and Hong Kong, where she was earning more and, at least, she knew the boundaries of the employment relationship. Here, she had to negotiate a marriage that did not fit within the expected parameters of love, partnership and support. She felt confused and lonely, finally begging her husband to allow her to return to the Philippines to see her family. She ended up using her own savings to finance a short trip home, two years after arriving in Canada.

Soon after returning to Canada, Lanie became pregnant. She gave birth to a son, Tony. Fortunately, Lanie had a good relationship with her husband's parents. But, it was only after Tony's birth that they revealed to her that her husband had been accused of sexually molesting his first son. From that point on, Lanie never left Tony alone in her husband's care. She had already noticed his awkwardness with Tony. Now, she understood. She was, therefore, forced to bring Tony with her everywhere she went.

Even after Tony's birth, her husband's attitude toward finances did not change. He still refused to give her any money, not even for food or the needs of the baby. He never offered to give her a ride anywhere, forcing her to take the bus with the baby in the deep winter weather to her baby-sitting job.

Despite her husband's tactics, Lanie, in her own quiet way, was able to fight back. She proudly recounts how she would carefully time her and Tony's meals. As soon as they were finished eating their breakfast, her husband would arrive expecting her to cook him a meal. She would simply say to him: "We ate already. We're not hungry anymore." This forced her husband to cook for himself. In this way, she also made sure the food she bought with her own money was consumed by them and not by her husband.

Once Lanie met Gigi and the other women from the local Filipino community group, she was able to break out of the forced isolation she'd been trapped into by her husband. Even though it angered her husband, she often stayed overnight at Gigi's house. If her husband scolded her, she would simply not listen to him. Lanie and Gigi (who both spoke the same dialect) would stay up late at night and share their frustrations and hopes, their coping and resistance strategies. Lanie often talked with Gigi about leaving her husband and moving where, at the very least, she could rebuild a life for herself and Tony in relative freedom.

Lanie was able to go to Vancouver along with Gigi and two other women. She brought Tony with her for the long drive. When they arrived at the Philippine Women Centre, Lanie was happy to know about the existence of a place where Filipino women could gather. Along with the other women, she excitedly looked through the native arts, crafts and T-shirts the PWC had for sale. They rarely got any items from home. By buying some clothing and other small items, Lanie and the other women were, in a way, re-asserting their identity as Filipino women. Lanie was also very proud to introduce her son to the women at the PWC. At that time, he happily played with Alice's daughter and smiled openly at the unfamiliar faces of the PWC members.

The trip to Vancouver was Lanie's first experience outside of her husband's town since arriving in Canada. It was an exciting visit with the women joyfully planning their visit to the Filipino grocery and bakery and their "girls' night out." PWC members offered to babysit their children, so the women could take some time off for themselves.

Despite this happiness at being away from their oppressive home and work environments, the women were also open about their situation. When asked if they were willing to host the PWC for a short visit to share their experiences, they readily agreed, even offering their homes as places for the PWC members to stay.

During the PWC's visit, Lanie shared her story and actively participated in the meetings scheduled with other members of the group. So strong was her enthusiasm and desire to learn that she defied her husband and ended up staying—with Tony—over at Gigi's house for the entire weekend. She felt it would be good for her to receive support from other Filipino women, to hear about their struggles and learn about their educational and organizational work. She realized that she was not alone. The sharing and discussions that took place over the weekend, which sometimes lasted well into the night, were great sources of learning for all the Filipino women.

The last meeting between their group and the PWC ended up taking place at Grace's house during her husband's 50th birthday party. She had entered Canada as a domestic worker, then married and had a daughter with her new husband. Like Alice, Grace also had four children in the Philippines she wished to sponsor. At first, the birthday party seemed an unlikely environment for Filipino women to share their experiences. The Filipino women gathered in a circle to introduce themselves and talked about the history of their migration and their current situation. While the overwhelming majority of the women had only recently come to Canada (within the last seven years), the commonalties in their experiences were striking. With the exception of two members, they all came to Canada as

domestic workers or mail-order brides. They were all professionals who could no longer work in their area of expertise in Canada. Many still had children in the Philippines they wished to sponsor. Others had recently sponsored their children, but were finding it difficult, as were their children, to readjust to each other after so many years and having to ask the children to adjust to their mother's Canadian husband or to new Canadian siblings. The women, including Lanie, were eager to hear the stories of Filipino women in Vancouver. The two groups shared their approaches to grass-roots education and organizing, looking for ways to support each other.

At one point, when the discussion was getting very intense, one of the host's children (actually a young man in his 20s) barged into the circle and started introducing himself to everyone. The reaction of the Filipino women was immediate. They clearly and calmly explained to him that a meeting was going on and that he should not disturb them. After he left, the women muttered in Tagalog, "They're always treating us like that. No respect."

After the meeting finished, Lanie's husband arrived with his first son. He sat with Lanie for a while and was introduced to the PWC members. He remarked to Lanie that now that she knew women in Vancouver, he supposed she would soon leave him. Lanie ignored his remark, knowing secretly that it was true. He looked a little surprised when Lanie told him that she was going to go to Alice's house along with the PWC members. Surprisingly, he offered her a ride home. She said she would call him later.

After a late dinner, Lanie asked one of the PWC members to give her a haircut. When asked how she would like it done, Lanie replied: "I want it different." As her long hair was being clipped off, Lanie was asked why she did not leave her husband. She really wanted to, since she had no feelings for him and had lost all hope that things would improve for her. The only thing holding her back was Tony, who received a lot of support from her in-laws. Lanie's experiences in Canada, while not including physical abuse, should still be characterized as a form of violence. Out of economic necessity, she moved abroad to work as a migrant worker and ended up as a bride of a Canadian man. As she moved through the roles of domestic worker to wife and mother, her options constricted and her situation worsened. While she still remains in her husband's town, it is her involvement with her group and her connection to other Filipino women which she says will give her the strength to make the decision she knows she will eventually make—to leave her husband and build her own life.

### **Teresita**

*My husband and I wrote to each other for about four years. I met him through an agency in Mindanao. Three of my friends and I sent applications and pictures, but I was the only one who received a letter. There were about 30 people from different countries who wrote to me. I wrote all of them back—three of them were from Quebec. I think I chose my husband because he was the only one who patiently wrote to me even though he's older than I am. Also, I thought before that he is a good person because he sends money to me and when I call him, he pays for it. Then, when I lost my job, he*

*supported my family by sending me \$200 every month. Because he was so good to me, I agreed that he could sponsor me as a fiancée. I suggested that we get married in the Philippines because that's what my parents want, but he didn't want to go to the Philippines because it's expensive and I am going to Canada anyway. I agreed to come and I processed my papers. He paid for everything, including my hotel and cellular phone expenses. I agreed, but my parents didn't know that we were getting married in Canada. Every time I go to Manila to process my papers, I always tell my parents that I'm just taking care of some things, until I left the Philippines for Canada, my parents still didn't know. They only found out that I'm already in Canada when I got here. My mother kept crying, but they can't do anything about it anymore.*

*I arrived here and we got married. I made the arrangements. I contacted the priest and then he introduced me to some Filipinos who are active in the parish and attend mass every Sunday. I actually met them through a get-together at the church. From then on, they were the ones who helped me with my wedding—like buying my wedding dress and other things. The wedding was fun and simple, but I was very sad because my family was not present. My husband is lucky because he is the first man in my life. I mean, I had a boyfriend, but I was a virgin when I got married. I believed that I should give my virginity only to my husband.*

*When I arrived here, I was really nervous because I didn't know anyone. Of course, I don't know what's going to happen to me here. I just said whatever. My husband and his young daughter picked me up at the airport. I knew that he had a child from his previous relationship. He mentioned that in his letter to me. When he said that to me, I lost interest. I didn't write for three months but he continued to write. He even asked his daughter to write saying that she wants me as a wife for her daddy.*

*At the start of our relationship, we were okay, but as time passed, we began having arguments. My husband didn't want me to send money to my family in the Philippines. We have so many arguments when it comes to this issue. He can't understand why I want to help out my parents. Luckily, I got a job because he is not giving me any money at all. He said that I don't need any money because there's food in the fridge and he's buying me whatever I need.*

*After three months of marriage, our fights became more frequent. One day, he hit me. One time, he grabbed the phone and I bumped my head. There was a time when he threw a chair at me and it hit my arm. When this happened, he apologized and he said that he didn't mean it. I went to the doctor who recommended that I contact a social worker. I called a social worker and she talked to me. They didn't come to the house but I contacted them when I needed help. Sometimes, I call other Filipinos who live near my place. They are the ones who give me advice in terms of what I should do. Sometimes, I'm*

*confused about whether or not I should leave him. I am afraid of what he might do to me. Sometimes, he says that he'll report me to Immigration if I leave. Many offer me their help if I decide to leave him, but I'm still confused. Some people say that I should stay and be more patient and endure the situation because he'll eventually change. But right now, I also have fights with his daughter because she doesn't respect me and she even gets involved in my fights with her dad. She doesn't live with us but she's always here on weekends.*

*Lately, our situation is the same. We're still fighting a lot. There are times when he kicks me out of the house and he said that he doesn't want me to come back anymore. I didn't leave though because I am afraid he'll have me deported. Even though he insults or vilifies me, I bear with it and ignore every insult he says to me. I just stay in my room. I don't have a job right now because we went to the Philippines last December.*

*I was happy to be able to visit my family and that I was able to bring my husband. My family couldn't accept my husband because of his bad attitude and personality. My eldest brother almost hit him because of the way my husband treats me. He's verbally abusive to me even in front of my family. My parents didn't want me to go back to Canada because they found out what kind of a person my husband is. I told them that they don't have to worry because I am eventually leaving him. My mother kept crying and crying but I have to go back to Canada because nothing will happen to us if I stay in the Philippines.*

*Many people advise me to leave my husband but nothing extremely bad has happened to me yet. But for now, I'm still not ready. My husband is retiring from his job. I recently passed my driver's licence exam. I drive and pick him up from work because his licence is suspended for driving under the influence of alcohol. He doesn't drink anymore.*

*Hopefully, I'll find a job before he retires because I don't want to be with him all the time at home. He nags all the time. I prefer to work at an office so I can practise my profession from the Philippines. But I don't know because I don't know how to speak French. I want to learn French but the school that gives free French lessons is really far from where I live. It's a good thing I already know how to drive. Before, I had to walk to go to work or to visit my friends. There are no buses that go to our area. Sometimes, when I baby-sit late at night, I walk for about two hours instead of taking the taxi because I don't want to spend that much on cab fare. I know it's not safe for me, but I have to do it because I really need the money. I feel sad sometimes because I live really far from the city and my friends. But right now, at least I drive, but I still can't go that far because I don't know my way to the city. If I'm with someone else, I'm fine, but I'm still scared to drive alone.*



*I know that my husband will not change, but I'm praying that he'll still change. If I only knew that my life in Canada would be like this, I would not have come. I told my friends in the Philippines not to get into this kind of situation because you really don't know who your husband will be especially when he's a lot older, just like my husband. My husband is as old as my father. That's why I told my friends not to be like me or not to do what I did. I wish I listened to my parents and I wouldn't be in this situation. I know that someday I'll have the courage to leave my husband. At the moment, I'm still unsure of what to do because I still don't have a job.*

## **6. PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS**

The total number of participants in this study was 40. The research was based on stories of Filipino women gathered from five provinces. The majority of the stories were from British Columbia. The following data highlight aspects of the demographic profiles of the Filipino mail-order brides who participated in this survey.

### **Age**

The participants ranged from 23 to 52 years of age, with the majority (27 percent) being between 36 and 40.

### **Present Immigration Status**

Forty-two percent of the women are Canadian citizens, while 35 percent have landed immigrant status. Five percent of the participants are still under the Live-in Caregiver Program and another five percent have ministerial permits to stay in Canada. The women who are holding ministerial permits do not include the women who have a visitor's visa (10 percent) or the other three percent who hold other citizenship status.

### **Residence/Geographical Location**

A majority of the women (52 percent) live in the rural areas of Canada, while 48 percent of the participants live in major urban areas.

### **Number of Children**

The data gathered for the number of children was divided into men who have children from a previous relationship (16 percent), women who have children in the Philippines (12 percent), couples who have children together (51 percent) and couples without children (21 percent).

### **Employment**

The data show that 48 percent of the participants are unemployed. These women remain in the home caring for their own children or their husband's children from previous marriages. Some of the women are also left to take care of the husband's parents or relatives. Those women who are employed (52 percent) remain in service-sector jobs, such as baby-sitter, domestic worker, chambermaid or store clerk, in addition to doing household chores.

### **Number of Years in Canada**

Thirty-seven percent of the women came to Canada five to nine years ago. The greater number of participants immigrating during this period corresponds with Citizenship and Immigration Canada's implementation of the Live-in Caregiver Program. Twenty-nine percent came 10 years ago or more. A number of the women came two to four years ago

(23 percent). Eight percent came one to two years ago. Three percent came less than one year ago.

### **Means of Entry to Canada**

The majority of the women (54 percent) entered Canada under the sponsorship of a husband. Twenty percent of participants came to Canada as domestic workers through the LCP and FDM programs. Three percent entered as independent immigrants; five percent of the women were sponsored by a relative, and a surprising 18 percent entered as visitors through several immigration consultant agencies.

### **Family Abroad**

Sixty percent of the women do not have any family in Canada or abroad. This fact may contribute to their feelings of isolation. Forty percent of the women have family members abroad but very few relatives in Canada.

### **Marital Status**

Data gathered for participants' marital status were divided into men previously married, women previously married and no previous marriages. Forty-seven percent of the men had previous marriages, 20 percent of women had previous marriages and 33 percent were never married (both for the men and the women).

### **Length of Marriage**

The length of marriage for more of the participants is five to nine years (32 percent), with 29 percent of participants married two to four years and 28 percent married 10 years or more. Eight percent have been married one to two years, and three percent less than one year.

### **Residence in the Philippines**

An overwhelming number of the women (83 percent) are from the rural areas of the Philippines while 17 percent are from Metro Manila.

### **Educational Background**

The educational background of the women reflects a highly educated, highly skilled group of women. Seventy-nine percent of the participants hold a university degree, 16 percent are vocational graduates, while only five percent are high school graduates.

### **Residence before Canada**

Eighty-two percent of the women lived in the Philippines before coming to Canada. A total of 18 percent worked abroad in Asia and other parts of the world as migrant workers.

### **Age Difference**

The data gathered regarding the participants' age difference with their husband is surprising. While the majority of the men are older, 49 percent of the women are 10 to 20 years younger than their husband.

- 21 per cent are younger by two to four years;
- 13 per cent—five to nine years;
- 3 per cent—one to two years; and
- 11 per cent—less than one year.

In addition, three percent of the women have husbands who are over 20 years older than they are.

## 7. FINDINGS

### The Women's Situation in the Philippines

To uncover and appreciate the reasons why Filipino mail-order brides come to Canada, it is essential to understand the role and position of women in Philippine society and culture.

*Nela: I'm a teacher in the Philippines, but it's hard to find a job. Without a job, I'm selling dinoldol (a Philippine delicacy) in the hacienda. Some people joke that I'm a teacher in dinoldol.... My parents have no farm of their own, they just rent and cultivate, like that. What's the sharing? Only one third of the harvest is for them.... When I was in high school, my mother sent us to work Saturdays and Sundays in the sugar plantation.*

*Jane: How much did you get paid?*

*Nela: Only two and a half pesos per day. That was in the 1980s. Then my mother said that I must work as a helper so I can pay for my tuition fee. So, I went to the city.*

*Maita: How old were you then?*

*Nela: I was a teenager. There it was very hard. I would pump the water tank for the whole day, then I would get some kangkong (a leafy vegetable) for the pig. It's so far and I just walk to go there, back and forth. Then, I have to go to the market. I will walk again. It is really a great sacrifice for me, especially since I was always starving. The food I ate is always measured...and my salary is 140 pesos per month. Well, maybe if I did not sacrifice that time I would not be here (in Canada) anyway.*

*Jane: How is your situation with your husband now?*

*Nela: He's really good. I was already more than five years here, then we decided to build a home. So, we moved there.*

*Jane: So you really built your own home?*

*Nela: Yes. He is even the one who looks after my parents (in the Philippines). We sent money to them and built them a home. But, other White people here they...*

*Jane: Maybe, he's good because his business is good!*

*Nela: Yeah! But sometimes his business is not so good, but we still send money. So, my parents are not working anymore. They just stay at home.*

Jane: *Anyway, they must be too old to work.*

Nela: *We just look after their needs, so I am really thankful.*

Jane: *So, you have to really assert your needs, right?*

Nela: *You know what. Some people say that you have to cook for your husband. I said, I'm not like that. Sometimes, I don't cook for him. But if he's working, I have to cook for him because he's working for all of us. Not only for me, but also for my parents in the Philippines. So, I have to give him a favour too. Like give and take. I don't want to abuse the goodness of my husband, too, for who will look after our family?*

Maita: *How about the allowance of your children, their needs?*

Nela: *He is the one (taking care of that). What I'm sending to the Philippines is from me. Anyway, if I can just send them around \$200, it's okay.*

Jane: *So what do your parents say?*

Nela: *They're happy. You know what, maybe if I had not gone here to Canada, they might be dead already. Our life there (in the Philippines) is really so hard.*

Nela's experience helps to illustrate three major themes.

- Economic hardships and poverty in the Philippines draw these women to emigrate to secure a better future for themselves and for family (in Canada and the Philippines). Women are responsible for the economic survival of their entire family. But, ironically, the only way they can ensure this survival is through marriage and dependency on a foreigner.
- Their subordinate position as women within the feudal structures of the typical Filipino family reinforce their subordinate position in the family in Canada.
- Many of the women came from areas in the Philippines known as sex tourism destinations.

### ***Poverty and Economic Hardship as the Main Push Factor***

Most of the women in this study left the Philippines as young women. In two cases, they were teenagers when they first met their future husband. Notwithstanding their youth, almost all the women (with the exception of the two who were teenagers) are highly educated. In fact, many were already working in the Philippines in various occupations, although some, like Nela, were unable to find decent jobs or were laid off from their jobs.

Despite being educated and having job experience, the difficulty associated with living in a developing country, such as the Philippines, is a strong theme running through the women's stories. Most of the women came from the rural areas of the Philippines and, therefore, most of the families occupied a lower economic position. Many of the women came from large families (more than five children).

Given their familial economic situation, these women and their family members hope to find their salvation in the greener pastures of the West. And one of the easiest ways for women to leave the Philippines and enter another country is as a foreigner's bride. Once abroad, almost all the women continue to support family in the Philippines. In some cases, they are still the principal breadwinners for their family in the Philippines. This is especially true for the women who were single mothers at the time they met their future husband. These single mothers are supporting children from previous relationships that have been left behind in the Philippines, who they hope to sponsor to Canada in the future. Tragically, some women were not able to support their family financially because the Canadian husband strictly controlled finances.

Only one family did not want their daughter to emigrate. In fact, the woman was already in Canada before she told her parents the truth about her marrying a Canadian.

***From a Feudal Family in the Philippines to a Feudal Family in Canada***

Another major theme emerging from the stories of their life in the Philippines is their subordinate position in the family and in Philippine society in general. Many of the women were subjected to strict family controls, especially the younger women and those from the rural areas. Many would not have gone through with the marriage without parental approval. The most common advice given by the parents was that the women should proceed with the marriage because the husband seemed "nice" and had a good job in Canada.

Harsher family controls were exercised when a woman hesitated to go to Canada. For example, Gigi had deep misgivings about marrying her husband. She was only a teenager. She wanted to back out of the marriage at the last moment, and was even crying the night before her wedding. However, her father scolded her saying: "You are bringing shame to this family. If you don't go through with this marriage, I will kill you." This illustrates the deep patriarchal view of the family and the role of women. Despite being educated or having work experience, marriage is still key in terms of securing a woman's future in life.

The women carry these feudal and patriarchal beliefs and attitudes to Canada. In fact, the Canadian husbands precisely target Filipino women to become mail-order brides because of the stereotypical image of the Filipino woman as the perfect, traditional wife. Some women struggled to overcome their own beliefs.

*Vicky: What I learned after five years is...I learned how to voice what I want to say. Wow, I have learned. I am pretty good now...speak out about whatever you feel to your husband. Be open although this is not how we were taught to behave in the Philippines.*

### ***Sex Tourism Destinations in the Philippines as a Target***

A striking number of the women were from Cebu and Mindanao. This is a significant finding because these are two areas being developed by the Philippine government as sex tourism destinations. In fact, on one Internet Web site featuring mail-order brides, these two provinces are specifically identified. A man desiring a mail-order bride can click on his country of choice, but when it comes to the Philippines, he can even narrow it down to the province of choice. As the reputation of these provinces as sex tourism destinations grows, the demand for mail-order brides from these areas will likely increase. In the case of Mindanao, the area is also highly militarized, fuelling the displacement and economic hardship—a further incentive to go abroad.

### ***Filipino Mail-Order Brides: The New Way to Pay the Debt***

It is interesting to analyze how the historical roots of women's oppression in Philippine society have been deepened by the distortion of the Philippine economy by imperialism and globalization. The historical practice of sending peasant women to work for the landlord to pay off family debts has been "modernized." Now, Filipino women are employed as migrant workers, or become prostitutes or mail-order brides in foreign countries to help pay off family debts. More critically, the remittances of these women help to pay off the Philippines' massive foreign debt. Hence, Filipino women are being commodified to help pay debts to industrialized nations and international financial institutions which are responsible, in the first place, for the distortion of the Philippine economy and culture, and the consequent poverty and unemployment.

## **The Transaction**

### ***Shopping for a Bride: Commodifying Filipino Women***

The Web site introduces itself to its male viewers with a guarantee of its services. It boasts that for a quarter of a century this American man and his Filipino wife have been providing quality service to men who would like to correspond with, meet and marry Filipino women. Thousands of Filipino women are listed, including a picture and a similar-sounding, formulaic, four-sentence biography that usually mentions the woman's love of family life and desire for a good husband. You can even pick which part of the Philippines you want your wife to be from: the Web site features 607 women from the tiny island of Cebu, 307 from Luzon, 750 from Mindanao, and an incredible 1,040 from the Visayas.

The Web site plays on images of Asian women to sell its inventory. Asian women offer Western men what they believe they cannot find in a Western country: a traditional woman. One Web site explains.

And as you meet many sweet girls of the Philippines as penpals, you will begin to enjoy friendship, love, romance and sex with a new partner. If you want to enjoy the happiness of a traditional relationship, you will find that Filipinas naturally share your values. They are very supportive of their mates in all things; marriage is viewed as a lifetime commitment. Your age will not be a problem. Filipinas generally appreciate older men. They want a man



who is accomplished and stable. In traditional Filipino culture, a man is expected to make the family decisions.

This image of Filipino women as traditional, subservient and docile is juxtaposed with the stereotypical views of Western women as career-oriented and independent. One Web site even goes as far as to say that Western women cannot be satisfied in their marriages.

This one Web site makes the thorough commodification of the mail-order bride very clear. The intimate relationship between husband and wife becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, and the Filipino woman becomes a package deal to be picked out and purchased by a willing and paying customer. This process of inspecting goods is sealed with the transaction of money, and the couple is married. Mail-order bride package tours are even offered for US\$3,295 including a ring, video coverage and the reception.

### ***Becoming a Mail-Order Bride***

Becoming a penpal is a common practice in the Philippines. Women, usually young, write to other Filipino men in the country as well as to foreigners. Some become penpals with no intention of marrying a foreigner. But sometimes this innocent fancy becomes a reality. Some may be serious about going abroad to marry and leave the country, while others are chosen by men who visit the Philippines with the intention of finding a bride. Nevertheless, marrying a foreign penpal is common throughout the Philippines, from the small rural villages to the bigger cities.

A woman will publish her name in “international papers” or friends and family will submit the information to catalogues that advertise the woman’s attractiveness and willingness to marry. The woman does not have to pay for submitting her name. Often, women or their friends enter their names without a real expectation of marriage.

Ana became a mail-order bride and married a Canadian man with cerebral palsy. Her fate was secured by her friend who owns a business which “matches” Filipino women to American men. There is also the story of Lisa whose friend submitted her name to an agency after Lisa’s relationship with a Filipino man ended. The women get many responses, ranging from five to 60 interested men. Emy had five potential husbands, but she had no control over who she would marry; it was up to the men to make the choice.

*My first letter wasn't to my husband...maybe I wrote to five, here in Canada. There was an older man over 55 years old, and there was a younger one the same as my husband's age.... So it's my husband who wrote to me every month and the other one, a German, was very interested in me but I told him that I just had a baby.... My husband...he chose six girls, the other girl just wanted to open a business right away. And the other one just wanted to come over (to Canada). Well he wrote five or six girls...and one of them was me.*

Nela was chosen out of 60 women.

*I was so frustrated that he had 60 penpals in the Philippines...yes, 60. There's even one close to our place. He told me that one used to ask for money from him and he didn't like that. But me, I didn't ask for money...maybe because I just told him the truth, so what happened is that he told me that it was time for me to get a passport.*

Her husband even tested her family when he went to visit her in the Philippines.

*So, he just placed his money on the table.... He said to me: "You know, Nela, if your mom steals that money, I'm not marrying you."*

For her honesty, Nela was picked and he took her as his bride to Canada. Nela's story shows the immediately unequal and commodified relationship between husband and wife. From the beginning, it is the man who has the power to choose while the woman adapts in an effort to make herself appealing.

### ***The Process***

The men freely scan the photos and descriptions, but to go further in the process they must pay a fee for the address and the right to correspond with the women. Men select their potential brides and screen them through an exchange of letters. Sometimes, the men travel to the Philippines on their own without the aid of an agency, but with the express purpose of finding a wife. Anne's husband went to the Philippines as a tourist after a Filipino friend of his told him to try Filipino women as potential wives. His friend asked him to deliver a package to his cousin while he was there. He delivered this package and met his future wife. He left the package at a small retail booth that Anne was taking care of. He settled on her as his wife and stayed at the store for the whole day. During his trip, he married her.

The men often have their personal criteria for their bride to meet, from age or height, to religious and moral beliefs. One man wrote to over 600 women from Asia and continued to receive letters even after his marriage.

### ***The Correspondence***

On average, the women and men exchange letters from one to three years. The letters usually include biographical data, such as age, place of birth and a family overview. Sometimes, men also send their photos on request. But often, the photo and information are not true to reality. Nika agreed to marry her penpal on the understanding that he had a stable income, since he stated that he owned 20 taxis and ran a successful taxi service. The photo he sent was taken years before, thus concealing his true age.

Once the men have chosen their bride through this selection process, the proposal is usually expressed by letter or phone. Like their letters before, these proposals are rather uneventful as the man expects the woman is ready and willing to marry him. One man wrote to his penpal, Emy, that he would be visiting her. He showed up unexpectedly and decided that she would be his wife.

*Emy: So then we went home and there he proposed but it's not really a formal proposal, he only asked me if I would be willing to go to Canada and I said yes.... I didn't even understand that he was proposing marriage.*

### ***Sealing the Deal: Marriage***

When the men settle on their choice and they agree to be married, the ceremony usually takes place in the Philippines, as it is easier and less expensive than if they were to be married in Canada. Usually, the men stay in the Philippines for up to seven months to arrange the marriage and sort out the necessary documents. Once all documentation is finished, the marriage is finalized. The man then usually returns to Canada to arrange to sponsor his new wife.

## **The Women's Situation in Canada**

### ***Twenty Years of Domestic Work***

Over the last 20 years, Canadians have come to know Filipino women as domestic workers; during this period, thousands have entered Canada in this capacity. This incredible recruitment is designed and encouraged by Canadian immigration policies. With this systematic entry of Filipino women as domestic workers, Canadians are conditioned to accept Filipino women in this role. First with the FDM and now with the LCP, this uncritical acceptance has become entrenched in the minds of Canadians.

Canadian immigration programs to bring in Filipino women to do domestic work play a major role in fuelling the growth of the mail-order bride industry. For the women, the restrictive conditions of the LCP create conditions that push them to enter mail-order marriages. For the men, the LCP provides a ready pool of women and brings to life the stereotyped Filipino woman—fuelling their desire for a Filipino wife.

### **From domestic worker to mail-order bride**

Limited choices characterize the lives of Filipino women, forced out of the Philippines because of grinding poverty, who are tied to the LCP on entering Canada. They have little choice but to leave the Philippines because of poverty. They have little choice but to enter Canada through the LCP because live-in domestic work is the labour niche they fill. And they have little choice while in Canada because the harsh restrictions of the program determine their access to housing, employment and, ultimately, their socio-economic position and future.

Given these limited choices, Filipino women are placed in desperate situations. Because of the live-in requirement and their temporary status in Canada, many of the women face isolation and hopelessness. Even after fulfilling the requirements of the program, they are effectively de-skilled—trapped in a cycle of poverty. On average, a Filipino domestic worker earns a gross monthly income of \$700. On these meagre wages, the women must survive and still send money back to family in the Philippines. These conditions propel women to consider mail-order marriages as a way to escape their severely disadvantaged position. Marrying a Canadian man means a step away from poverty and offers more stability. For this reason, it is not uncommon for Filipino domestic workers to get involved

in relationships with—and even marry—their former male employers. It is also for this reason that many domestic workers enter dating services and agencies in search of the stability promised by marriage to a Canadian man.

Nina, a former live-in caregiver, sees herself as assisting Filipino women when she sets them up in her dating service. She firmly believes that when she marries off one of her women to a Canadian man, she has done her duty to help Filipino women by giving them stability and a better future.

From domestic worker to mail-order bride, is a common story among the women. Lanie was a domestic worker in Singapore and Hong Kong. For years she slaved away in these foreign lands doing backbreaking work for her employers. Then came an opportunity to get away from doing domestic work and move to Canada. All she had to do was say yes to the man she met in the mail after her name was submitted to a “penpal” office in Hong Kong. The other Filipino women there always talked about Canada—the land where they could settle and become citizens! Lanie decided to say yes. From being a domestic worker, she became a mail-order bride and moved to Canada to be with her new husband.

Lanie’s story illustrates the limited choices the LCP offers Filipino women. Instead of opting to come to Canada as a live-in nanny doing the same drudgery she did in Singapore and Hong Kong, she could become a mail-order bride. However, Lanie’s life actually took a turn for the worse with this move. Instead of freeing herself from domestic work, she now does the same work—cooking, cleaning and caring for other people’s children. She does part-time baby-sitting, plus her own household work, to support herself and her son.

The requirements of the LCP also limit choices. The lives of three sisters in Ontario have been shaped by the restrictiveness of the LCP, leaving them no choice but to become mail-order brides. Emma became a domestic worker seven years ago. She also wanted to bring her two sisters to Canada. However, despite Emma’s efforts, her sisters could not meet the LCP qualifications. As they could not come through the LCP, the sisters got married to Canadian men. The sisters are now blaming each other for the difficulties they are encountering. The stress and strife of their predicament broke Emma; she is currently in mental rehabilitation.

This transition from domestic worker to mail-order bride continues like a vicious cycle. Once married and in Canada, it is common to see mail-order brides encourage their sisters and family to come to Canada as someone’s penpal. If they do not come as a mail-order bride, then they come as a domestic worker through the LCP.

Nela married a Canadian man 12 years ago. Although their marriage has not been perfect and she experienced extreme isolation early on, she feels more settled now and has “grown to love” her husband. With her experience in mind, and the help she has already offered her parents, Nela put her younger sister’s name in the local paper advertising her availability and willingness to marry. For Nela, her decision to marry and move to Canada has meant the survival of her family.

*They're happy, you know what, maybe if I had not come here to Canada, they might be dead already.*

Unfortunately, her sister Nika's experience in Canada took a wrong turn, when her new husband became verbally and physically abusive. Nela says it is none of her business to interfere in her sister's marriage.

There is also the story of Michelle from a resource-based town. Michelle became a mail-order bride over 20 years ago. She managed to cope and integrate herself into Canadian society, so she now assists Filipino women who want to come to Canada. She says that she "helps" other women to come under the LCP. Some of these women end up marrying Canadian men. Michelle is no longer in contact with these women. She believes they are ungrateful. But she is also unaware of her own role in perpetuating and legitimizing the exploitation of Filipino women.

### **Fuelling the demand**

Ellen explains why her husband searched for a Filipino woman to be his bride.

*[My husband] he says he likes the skin of Filipino women, he's travelled all over the world looking for a wife...lots of his friends are married to Filipino women. He says that they serve their husbands and look after them.*

Filipino women are in high demand for the "traditional" qualities they stereotypically embody. In the media and popular culture, Filipino women are portrayed as "oriental butterflies." We only need to look at how Web sites sell the image of Filipino women to their prospective buyers.

Women from Asia are gentle. They don't bust your chops, when you are home a little late, or forget an anniversary.... Women from Asia are charming. They are petite, soft, and gentle. It is such a pleasure to spend time with a woman who is charming and derives pleasure from talking and listening to what you have to say.... Women from Asia value marriage. They do not believe in divorce.... Women from Asia value tradition.

This oriental butterfly image of Filipino women is steeped in contradictions. On the one hand, the women are seen as subservient, quiet, caring, family-oriented, fragile and deeply Catholic. Yet they are also exotic, sexually promiscuous gold diggers. They are sold in contrast to Western women. One Web site expresses this contrast.

Western women do not appreciate men. They do not value traditional family life. The goals of modern women are not sufficiently met by marriage.

For almost 20 years now, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (through the FDM and LCP) has been bringing Filipino women to work and live in the homes of Canadians. The women are forced to live in the homes of their employers caring for their children, cooking and cleaning. It is not hard to see how this modern-day slavery brought by the LCP feeds on the

typical image of Filipino women as submissive, caring traditional women, who would be happy to serve their husbands. The LCP has instilled in the consciousness of Canadians a concept of Filipino women as subservient nannies and loving caretakers. Much of their identity is shaped by their socio-economic position as a segregated pool of cheap labour, as domestic workers and as service-sector workers. A research project, “Filipina identities: geographies of social integration/social exclusion in the Canadian metropolis” (McKay forthcoming) confirms that this social construct of Filipino women is framed in the consciousness of Canadians. The growth of the mail-order bride industry capitalizes on this social construct in the minds of Canadians, especially Canadian men.

This particular connection between the presence of Filipino women in Canada as live-in caregivers and the growth in the number of Filipino mail-order brides is especially evident in the smaller rural towns that have had a history of Filipino nannies in the area. It is common to hear the women tell of how their husbands heard from friends (who either have Filipino wives or domestic workers) about how good Filipino wives are. A small transportation hub in British Columbia has had a visible presence of Filipino domestic workers. This small city formerly housed a live-in caregiver agency. The agency brought in Filipino live-in caregivers in the 1980s and early 1990s but has since closed down. This influx of Filipino domestic workers breathed life into the stereotypes of Filipino women and stimulated a growing demand among the male population for Filipino wives. As one husband proclaims: “[M]y friends who had Filipino women told me Filipinos make good wives!”

The channel of entry that the live-in caregiver agency offered for Filipino women just a decade before laid the groundwork for the entry of Filipino women as mail-order brides in this isolated city. The growing number of Filipino mail-order brides in this town and surrounding area demonstrates the direct impact of the LCP. Government policy that constructs an image of Filipino women as domestic workers, fuels the growing demand among Canadian men for Filipino wives.

Thus, the growth of the mail-order bride industry cannot be separated from the use of Filipino women in Canada as domestic workers. The image of Filipino women as caregiver and nanny has become entrenched. At the same time, this practice of bringing Filipino women to Canada to do domestic work perpetuates the oppression and underdevelopment, as many are forced to move from domestic worker to mail-order bride.

### ***Role in the Family***

As mail-order brides, these women define their identity and purpose through their family life. Even if the women are highly educated or worked outside the home in the Philippines or in Canada, they are principally defined by their roles as wife, mother, caregiver and, in some instances, sexual plaything. As the term “mail-order bride” connotes, these women are commodified and packaged as the perfect “wife” from the very moment they meet their future husband. Thus, their identity in Canada is constructed through their roles as wife and the so-called “natural” extensions of being a wife—being a mother, caregiver, domestic worker and sexual partner. In some cases, even the role as a breadwinner or contributor to the family income is framed as an extension of their duty as a wife—not as a question of their self-development as women.

The women's experience shows that their day-to-day reality of being a woman in Canada is strictly tied to the most backward notions and concepts of a woman's role in the family and, ultimately, in society. Despite having migrated to an industrialized country that has formally recognized women's equality in the law and public policy spheres, these women find themselves relegated to household work. What exacerbates their marginalization, isolation and disempowerment is their status as women of colour from a developing country.

In analyzing the women's role in their family life, several themes emerged.

- Their role as a wife and their relationship with their husband is rigidly defined by traditional notions of a woman's place in society. These women are being kept in the home, both literally and figuratively. These notions are reinforced by the husband's racist and sexist attitudes and, in some cases, the attitudes of the husband's family. Overall, inequality and dependence mark the relationship.
- Their role as a mother to the children of their husband (including those from previous relationships) is also strictly maintained.
- Their role as a caregiver and domestic worker is seen as a natural part of the role as a wife.
- Their role as a sexual partner was pronounced. While being maintained as the perfect traditional "wife," the women's sexuality was also exaggerated and considered exotic.

#### **A relationship marked by inequality and dependence**

Lynn: *How was your relationship in the beginning?*

Ellen: *Good. Because he's not the kind of guy who fights. He's very simple. He's not always cranky.*

Lynn: *Were there any issues or points of tension that surfaced?*

Ellen: *It's usually when he's got a problem at work. And, also when I was pregnant—I was cranky.*

Lynn: *How is your relationship with your husband now?*

Ellen: *The same. He treats me good. I love him so much. Before, I did not love him. It developed. Because he's so old. And, I had to adjust to the Canadian style.*

Many of the women say they were not really "in love" with their husband at the beginning of the relationship. Two of the women, who were teenagers at the time of their marriage, say they had no idea what love really was—they only experienced "puppy love."

This initial view of their relationship is not surprising because many of the women hardly knew their husband before the wedding. It is only a lucky few who were able to meet their husband more than once or for more extended periods beforehand. Most of the women ended up writing to their husband or calling them over the telephone.

Therefore, many of the women spoke about a period of adjustment in their developing relationship with their husband. Of course, in any relationship, there will be adjustments as you get to know each other's attitudes and beliefs and learn how to communicate with one another. However, in these relationships, which are more akin to transactions where the wife is "bought" by the husband and where the parties do not even really know each other, the adjustment can be extremely difficult. The impacts of this period are manifested in depression, loneliness, homesickness and abuse (see section below on abuse).

*Clara: When I had my son, Joshua, it is hard because all the responsibility is mine. But I was able to meet others in the Filipino community and they supported me. My husband is more responsible because he's been married before. He knows how to cook. But the first three years (of our marriage) were very hard.*

It is interesting that many of the women seem to have taken it upon themselves without any question, to adjust to their husband. They attribute the need for adjustment to the fact that their husband is something "other" than themselves (i.e., a Canadian with a different "style," "attitude" or culture, older, and more experienced in relationships or through previous marriages).

Very few of the women mention any efforts by their husband to adjust and accommodate the wife's needs and perspectives. Only Nela's husband ended up hiring a cook for her because she did not know how to cook and he had to leave her alone in the house when he worked. However, the cook was a Canadian man who ended up smoking in the house and cooking food very different from Nela's Filipino cuisine.

Instead, many of the women identify points of tension that surfaced when they tried to assert their needs and perspectives. Most often, the tension related to:

- sending money back to the Philippines for their family;
- trying to sponsor their children left behind in the Philippines;
- wanting to go back to the Philippines for a visit with family and friends;
- having to take all the responsibility for young children;
- not being allowed to work outside the home;
- conflicts with the husband's children from previous relationships;
- not being allowed to contact other Filipino women in the community; and
- dealing with their husband's vices (such as gambling and pornography).



In many cases, the tension was never resolved and the relationship deteriorated into an abusive one (see section below on abuse). In some cases, the relationship seems to fall into a kind of “stalemate,” where comfort with the status quo is reached. This is especially true if there are children. These relationships do not seem to grow, in that the woman’s development and growth as a dignified and empowered human being seem to stall. Only in rare instances is the loving companionship of equal partners who respect and help each other to grow achieved.

Most of the women, especially those who had experienced abuse, expressed dissatisfaction with the relationship. Many felt some regrets about having entered into the marriage. Some also expressed the desire to leave the relationship.

However, many of the women also viewed their relationship as “okay” or “good.” These women felt they had to “stick with the relationship” because it is a lifelong commitment. Certainly, religious and cultural beliefs about marriage figure prominently.

### **Becoming mothers**

*Jane: Do you know how to cook at that time (upon arrival in Canada)?*

*Ana: No. I don't know how to cook, I don't know how to do this, nothing! I know how to boil water in a kettle. But wait, I'm lucky because my husband is French Canadian and he knows how to cook. As for me, I'm the best baby-maker in the world!*

Almost all the women interviewed had children very soon after arriving in Canada. In fact, some women already became pregnant or had their children in the Philippines while waiting for immigration papers to be processed.

Having young children compounded their isolation and depression. Many of the women did not even have time to deal with improving their relationship with their husband or with their adjustment to living in Canada. Instead, they were staying at home full time to take care of young children. In some cases, they were even taking care of their husband’s children from previous relationships. Many of the women experienced emotional difficulties during their pregnancy and immediately after giving birth. They felt burdened by the responsibility for taking care of the children. None mentioned that their husband helped them look after the children. The women usually had no extended family to rely on for child-care assistance or advice. Instead, they sought support and comfort from other Filipino women in the community. None of the women mentioned they had accessed baby-sitting services or subsidized child-care centres.

### **Caregivers and domestic workers**

A small portion of the women ended up playing caregiving roles for a significantly older husband. In one case, the husband’s eyesight had deteriorated to such an extent that his wife was always calling out to him and reassuring him that she was still in the room with him. Ana’s husband, for instance, suffers from cerebral palsy.

Almost all the women played a large role in the domestic upkeep of the home. While some women said they did not know how to cook, it may be that they do not know how to cook their husband's preferred cuisine (i.e., they are not familiar with cooking for Canadian tastes). Most women were solely responsible for the household work, as are many women generally in Canadian society.

In some extreme cases, the women ended up being treated like a slave by their husband's children from previous marriages. One woman ended up going on "strike," refusing to clean up after her husband's two university-aged sons. In Joan's case, she went from domestic worker to the wife of her employer, so her husband's children never accorded her the respect or status of a wife. They still treated her as the domestic worker, leaving their clothes lying everywhere in the house despite being in their 20s and perfectly capable of cleaning up after themselves. In these cases, the woman was almost in a worse position than if she was the domestic worker. At least, as a domestic worker, her status as an employee could be asserted. However, as a wife, it was assumed that domestic responsibilities were hers alone.

### **Exploiting the women's sexuality**

Many of the women stated that they were virgins on marrying. Of course, this stems from the feudal culture, with its religious underpinnings, that predominates in the Philippines. Some women shared that their first sexual experiences with their husband were not fulfilling. However, the majority of the women did not comment on their sex life.

Some of the husbands, from the very beginning though, were obviously sexually exploiting the women. For example, Maria's husband even asked her to send him nude photos of herself when she was still in the Philippines. She agreed, thinking that this was a way to attract and keep her husband, since she did not feel she had strong abilities in cooking and other household chores.

Some husbands are addicted to pornography, especially that available on the Internet. Maria's husband made her watch this pornography with him. When she tried to express her feelings about it, he would laugh at her and say that he could not understand her English. Maria had to resort to clipping an Ann Landers column from the newspaper and giving it to her husband saying:

*This is the way I feel.*

After that, the husband did not force her to watch pornography with him anymore. When members of the research team visited his house, he expressed pride in his computer skills, which Maria later revealed were primarily being used to access pornography on the Web.

Some women also told us that the husband of another mail-order bride was posting nude photographs of his wife on the Internet. However, the woman never confirmed this in her sharing with us.

Consequently, the contradictory stereotypes of Filipino women as virgins who “are good enough to marry,” while being perceived as sexually exotic partners, further define the Filipino mail-order bride.

### ***Their Economic Situation***

A distinctive commonality uncovered when examining the women’s situation was their lack of paid work. As soon as the women arrive in Canada, their identity as a mail-order bride has already defined their role as a wife, mother and caretaker. This relegates them to domestic tasks inside the home. If a woman receives a monetary allowance from her husband, she is expected to be grateful for it. Those who do not receive any money are forced to make do with the bare necessities of food, clothing and shelter. The women who do participate in the work force are employed in either domestic-related or low-paying, service-sector jobs. These are mostly non-skilled occupations that hardly contribute to their development and may even exacerbate their de-skilling and underdevelopment.

In some cases, there is great pressure to work in their husband’s business. The women have little choice but to conform, since their entire life is heavily dependent on their husband’s income. Working in their husband’s business usually means providing unpaid labour that is demanding and stressful. In one case, a woman in a rural town endures the strenuous workload on the family farm.

For the majority, their full potential as skilled and highly educated women is not realized. Especially despairing are those whose university degrees and professional backgrounds in the medical, educational, science and business fields are not recognized and, therefore, not used. Their development is stalled as their skills waste away since their duties confine them to traditional homemaker chores.

Obtaining paid work is achieved only with a struggle. The principal basis for marrying a foreigner is to escape from poverty and, possibly, to acquire a better life. Thus, some Filipino mail-order brides look for work to be able to send money to their family in the Philippines if the husband cuts off financial support for the family. For some mail-order brides, employment is a coping mechanism, a way of leaving the confines of the home and being as far away as possible from the husband. Obtaining work is also an assertion to free themselves from any dependency on their husband’s income, gain financial stability and achieve a degree of freedom.

### ***Experiences of Abuse***

Tragically, many women experienced various forms and degrees of abuse. For this study, we chose to modify the following broad definition of “abuse” used by Dr. Baukje Miedema and Dr. Sandra Wachholz (1998: 10-11) in a study on abused immigrant women in New Brunswick.

An attempt to control the behaviour of a wife, common-law partner or girlfriend. It is a misuse of power, which uses the bond of intimacy, trust and dependency to *maintain* the woman in an unequal, powerless and unsafe position. It is using force to make her participate in activities against her will.

This abuse can include verbal abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse and physical abuse (emphasis added).

Our modifications of the original definition are designed to capture more specifically the situation of Filipino mail-order brides. In the original definition, abuse by extended family members and “spiritual abuses” were included to honour the experiences of the immigrant women interviewed.

A significant modification is the use of the word “maintain,” rather than “to make the woman unequal.” It is our analysis that the Filipino mail-order brides are already in an unequal, powerless and unsafe position from the very beginning of the relationship with their future husband. By virtue of their position as poor women from a developing nation, they are already vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In fact, the women’s experience shows the husbands use abuse in all its manifestations to maintain and perpetuate their unequal and invisible status in Canadian society.

### **Deception and lies**

In some cases, the women were lied to and deceived by their future husband about their economic stability in Canada and their previous marriages. For example, Nika’s husband told her family in the Philippines that he had a business in Canada operating 20 taxicabs. It turned out that he was supporting himself through welfare fraud. She thought he had only been married once before, but it turned out he had had four wives. He “wooed” her parents by promising to send them money from Canada. Nika even met a stranger on her arrival who told her that her husband was “a real con artist.”

Because many of the men are very familiar with the conditions of poverty in the Philippines, they are able to craft their lies to entice the family and woman to consent to the marriage. This is a very important starting point in pinpointing the seeds of abuse. If marriage is thought of as a contractual relationship, the husbands in these cases grossly misrepresented fundamental terms of the contract. In contract law, the woman would be entitled to rescind or repudiate the contract. Not many of the women have left and divorced their husband.

### **Economic control**

As stated previously, the main reason the women come to Canada is to escape poverty and to help their family financially. While some were able to achieve this goal, a significant number were not.

Many of the women were not allowed to work outside the home and were not given any financial support by their husband. In Lanie’s case, she was not given money for any household needs, even her newborn baby’s diapers.

In many cases, the most frequent reason for arguments and tension cited by the women was the desire to send money back to family in the Philippines. This form of control insidiously seeks to cut off the Filipino mail-order bride from her very lifeline—her family. Economic control—extending to the family in the Philippines—is a significant controlling tool.

Another significant form of economic control was forcing the women to work in self-owned businesses. For example, one woman was made to work on the family farm. Perlita's husband even registered the business in her name without her consent to avoid liability for unpaid taxes. Economic dependency acts as a solid basis for the Canadian husband to exercise other forms of abuse and control over his wife.

### **Emotional control**

A good number of the women expressed a sense of isolation (whether in rural or urban areas). This spawned homesickness, loneliness and depression. In some cases, the women had to be put on anti-depressant medication.

These feelings of isolation and despair were often perpetuated by a husband exerting emotional or verbal control. For example, some women were ridiculed or insulted by their husband because they did not know how to speak English. One woman was repeatedly told she was "stupid."

Women were denied access to friends, information and social services. One woman was not allowed to watch television or even look at the phonebook. Some husbands also perceive other Filipino women (and men) as possible sources of support for their wife. The husbands, therefore, seek to maintain the women's isolation and cut them off from the community. The husband can also play upon the fear of the women that the Filipino community, especially in the rural areas, will "gossip" about their situation. For example, Lanie's husband commented to her after meeting the research team from the Philippine Women Centre: "I suppose you'll leave me now that you know Filipino women in Vancouver."

A very predominant fear, as expressed by Teresita, is that they will be reported to Immigration and deported. The women had no access to information from Immigration about their rights as a spouse and are, thus, unable to discern the truth in what their husband tells them. Not one woman received any orientation from immigration authorities either in the Philippines or in Canada about her rights. They only knew that the husband had signed a 10-year sponsorship agreement for them.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada gives this fear of deportation prominence in select cases. For example, Alice's case was clearly used by Immigration to remind the Filipino community of the omnipresent threat of deportation. The relentless pursuit of Alice by Immigration and the portrayal of her as a liar scheming to stay in Canada can only be explained as a form of social control over the Filipino community—an intimidation tactic used to silence the community.

Thus, the abuse exercised by the husbands is reinforced by the systemic control of powerful institutions such as Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The message to the Filipino mail-order brides and the Filipino community is that you are disposable commodities that can be sent back to where you came from. Women who were not the first wife know this lesson all too well. Being the fifth wife does not give you confidence and security that your husband will not leave you. In fact, the husbands sometimes would denigrate their previous Filipino

wives to their present wife, such as Ellen's husband's statement that his first Filipino wife "couldn't stand one guy."

### **Racism**

To grasp the racism Filipino mail-order brides face daily requires a comprehensive view of racism. Aside from the personal racism of name calling, slurs and harassment, Filipino mail-order brides are further marginalized through systemic racism embedded within the immigration and legal systems.

Systemic or institutionalized racism refers to the established laws and relationships that reflect the dominance of White-skinned people. This form of racism plays out in Canadian institutions and deeply affects the lives of Filipino mail-order brides by ensuring and justifying their underdevelopment as women, workers and overseas Filipinos.

The stigma of racism contributes to their subordinated position as mail-order brides. They are expected to fulfill duties and demands perpetuated by stereotypes placed on Filipino women. The demand for cheap labour is fuelled by the LCP as administered by the Canadian government. Besides the racism inflicted by husbands and in-laws, Filipino mail-order brides encounter racism in the community. In one case, the neighbours of a mail-order bride in a rural town constructed a high fence because they did not want to have to deal with her, let alone look at her.

Since Filipino mail-order brides are regarded as mere commodities, the government has concluded that they are expendable. Filipino mail-order brides are vulnerable to abuse since they are often threatened by deportation if they try to assert their rights. The police and legal system criminalize the women, refusing to understand the exploitative conditions they are confined to, and failing to respect and protect them. One primary example is Alice, who after fleeing her abusive husband, ultimately lost custody of her daughter and faces the threat of deportation.

The experiences of Filipino mail-order brides must be understood in the global context of the mail-order bride industry. Although a good number of women went through an agency, who or what facilitates their entry is not the issue, because the phenomenon of Filipino mail-order brides is an emerging social construct within Canadian society. Thus, the trafficking of women from the South to richer countries of the North is itself a form of systemic racism, making the Filipino mail-order brides more susceptible to all forms of racism in the host country.

### **Access to services**

The topic of access to services was not adequately touched upon in the interviews. Individuals from a few social-service agencies were interviewed, but not in depth as the focus of the study is the situation, needs and perspectives of Filipino women. However, some initial conclusions can be drawn about the women's experience in accessing services.

First, even though they can be classified as newcomers to Canada, none of the women mentioned having accessed settlement services. Thus, the women were cut off from

community organizations and other agencies that could have acted as important sources of information about their rights in Canada.

Second, only four women accessed transition houses and other support services for battered women. The others who are being physically abused and who are still in their relationships have not yet even reported the abuse to the police. There is a general perception among the women that leaving the husband and exposing their abusive situation would stigmatize them. This general belief is predominant in the Philippines. Vicky expressed her feelings.

*I didn't go to a transition house because then it would seem that my problem is so big.*

Third, women who have left their husband are often further victimized by the legal system, either having to struggle for child custody and support (as in Perlita's case) or having to fight to stay in Canada (as in Alice's case). Thus, this fear of further suffering and victimization at the hands of the legal system can also prevent Filipino mail-order brides from reporting abusive situations.

Finally, the women's strongest source of information, support and encouragement came from other Filipino women. This is further detailed below in chronicling the women's individual and collective forms of assertion and resistance against their oppressive situations.

### **Assertion and resistance**

Despite the women's incredibly marginalized position both within the marriage and within society, there is also a will to resist. Their fighting spirit is ingrained in daily life. For the women pushed out of their country into a foreign place with a foreign man, they have no choice but to cope, assert and resist oppression.

There is a fluid movement as the women assert themselves within the marriage and as Filipino women in Canada. Their assertion and resistance moves between their individual struggle with their husband and their collective struggle against oppression and exploitation as women and as overseas Filipinos.

Coping is the first step the women take as they adjust to life in Canada and the new role as a mail-order bride.

Maria found herself in an isolated area in the dead of winter, a one-hour drive away from the closest sign of civilization. She lived in a cabin with her new husband. The cabin had no heat or running water. She felt far from home.

*It's really a hard life,*

she repeats again and again. She felt alone and inexperienced in caring for her new baby boy. Every morning, Maria made the trek down to the frozen lake to fetch water, bucket by bucket, for their daily needs. She felt totally isolated and had a hard time dealing with her

husband's verbal abuse. Adding to her depression and humiliation was her husband's obsession with pornography. He constantly surfed the Internet for pornographic sites, favouring those featuring Asian women and girls.

Gigi had a very difficult time adapting to her new role as a wife, as a new mother and as an immigrant woman in a totally different environment than the provincial setting she came from in the Philippines. A new life was thrust upon her when she was still a teenager.

*I cried and cried.... I didn't want to get married, I was only a baby...but my family said that I would bring shame to the family if I didn't get married....*

She ended up moving around small rural towns with her new husband. Gigi was completely depressed. The birth of her daughter did not lift her spirits, but instead her depression intensified as she was left to care for her daughter and her home while her husband could not find steady work. Suffering from full-blown depression, she felt like she had nowhere to turn.

Maria and Gigi's stories are snapshots of the incredible desperation and isolation Filipino women experience as mail-order brides. But as their stories resonate with the terrible segregation of Filipino mail-order brides, they also echo the resistance of the women.

Maria's depression began to lift when she met another Filipino woman in the parking lot of a grocery store. The other Filipino woman was also married to a local Canadian man. They immediately began talking to each other. They began meeting without their husbands so they could freely share their challenges away from their husbands' watchful and critical eyes. Then one day, her friend had the courage to leave her abusive husband and has since found the strength to fight for custody of her daughter, and against her deportation, with the help of other Filipino women involved in different organizations. Maria has also found strength in this and her growing ability to assert herself. She says:

*It feels like I have power.*

Maria was able to gain control of the family's finances, unlike before when she continually had to ask her husband for money for the family's expenses. She always carries with her a brochure of a women's shelter in her town in her wallet. On the brochure, she has circled the words "criticizes or humiliates you," almost as a validation of her experience and as a testimony to her right to assert herself with her husband. Maria has also been able to talk to her husband about being disturbed over his pornography fixation. She surfs the Net with him now. Sometimes her husband tells her: "You intimidate me." She says:

*That's good.*

Slowly Gigi began asserting herself as well. Through her own strength, she began demanding that her husband contribute financially to their young family. Through her own ability to work as a nursing aide she became stronger. She gained even more strength when she began meeting with other Filipino women in the same situation as her. As they shared experiences, she began to see commonalties. Gigi has since found strength in this collective



empowerment, as the women find support in each other. Through their sharing, they see the larger forces that shape their lives and the roots of their oppression. Gigi is one of the founding members of the Filipino organization in her town and is constantly encouraging other women to share their stories.

The Filipino women in these stories found strength through collective unity. Their stories are similar to those of other marginalized women who have resisted abuse, oppression and exploitation. This level of collective action had a direct influence on the women's ability to assert themselves within a relationship. There are many forms of assertion, as in the case of Lanie, who taught her young son to speak her dialect. In doing so, she took a stand against her husband's control. But the women are able to assert themselves on an individual basis when they find strength in collective support and in the collective struggle.

**Collective resistance as overseas Filipino women:** The women of Victoria exemplify this collective strength. Their organizing efforts also reveal the challenges they face in their collective empowerment. The Filipino community has a long history of 30 years of organizing and forging a place within the larger Victoria community. The Victoria Filipino-Canadian Association (VFCA) was born out of the vibrancy of the community and is proud to have a cross section of the community as members. Victoria is also the home of many Filipino mail-order brides. The women have actively involved themselves in the organizing efforts of the VFCA. This community involvement has helped them break their isolation, as they seek support from other women in the same situation as well as from the larger Filipino community.

Emy married a man in British Columbia who chose her from a catalogue. She quickly faced the realities of being a mail-order bride.

*There was a big adjustment to each other. We didn't have that pressure yet in the Philippines, but when we were already here, we were responsible to shoulder our bills, we have to pay this and that. Life here is tough, things are getting harder, especially the time when I had no job at all. Day to day, I can feel the pressure financially. Although we stayed at his brother's place, we were paying \$500 a month. Our relationship became complicated, so we often had fights. Somebody reported that we were often fighting so then him and I ended up in a transition house plus we have a little daughter.... Oh! Well, he's the one who has a problem because he doesn't talk. He just keeps it to himself, until later on you just hear him yelling! Yelling with the kids, with the baby. He just kept saying that the baby was crying all the time, but I said no! She is a good baby. She's not crying all the time. She's a good girl, it's you who have a problem. You make things a big deal.*

Emy had to struggle with her husband in order to instill some stability in their lives.

*You know, so I have to move out because I'm so stressed, so worried and I was pregnant again. Sometimes I had high blood pressure. So I told him I don't care if you want to stay here...but I really can't take it anymore. I want*

*to move out...I can live in Canada! We lived together again but there's a condition that he should really find a job, even at least part time, so that we don't feel so bad, that he can provide for our basic needs!*

Emy's assertion and strong will has made her a leader among Filipino mail-order brides. The organization has also given them an opportunity to seek support from the larger Filipino community as the community also learns about the realities of these women. The women have found security in connecting with other Filipinos. However, Emy's story also shows the limitations a Filipino organization has in dealing with the situation of mail-order brides.

Emy, recognized as a leader in the community, has women come to her for help. She began allowing other women who wanted to escape from an abusive husband into her home. On one occasion, she was helping a particular Filipino woman. Then the estranged husband began coming to the house. One time, he was at her door and Emy had to stop him from coming into her house because his wife was in a room upstairs.

Emy and her children's lives are at risk as she stands up for the rights of Filipino women. The Filipino communities do not have the appropriate resources to deal with the growing problems of the emerging population of Filipino mail-order brides. Yet, despite this substantial challenge, women continue to find empowerment through collective unity and action with other Filipino women and the larger Filipino community. As women and as overseas Filipinos, their voices can and will be heard through these collective efforts.

## 8. TOWARD FILIPINO WOMEN'S EQUALITY, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

### Policy Analysis, Recommendations and Actions for Change

Based on the project findings, a clear picture of the marginalized position of Filipino mail-order brides has emerged. Despite being in an industrialized country that recognizes women's equality, their situation within their relationship and within Canada is marked by inequality, underdevelopment and the lack of peace, security and dignity. The following recommendations for policy development and actions for change for community empowerment are, therefore, within this analytical framework.

We have chosen to focus on five policy areas: immigration, violence against women and trafficking of women, their economic situation, human rights and the legal system. These policy areas effectively shape and influence the conditions of Filipino mail-order brides in Canada. The policy areas either contain significant existing policies (such as the Live-in Caregiver Program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada) or are areas in which policies must be developed.

Each section provides a brief analysis of the policy area as it affects the women's situation, followed by our recommendations for policy change and development. We have also chosen to include a section, "Actions for Change," primarily directed toward community empowerment and development, and the further strengthening of research and documentation, education, advocacy, services and organizing work among the women themselves. This section recognizes the community-based nature of the study and our belief that solutions to improve the situation of Filipino mail-order brides in Canada must be community-driven.

### Immigration

For Filipino mail-order brides, their situation in Canada is first determined by immigration policies. As foreign brides of Canadian men, their status in Canada is primarily defined by their immigration status. Most of the women in this study came to Canada as a spouse. In other words, they were sponsored by their husband as a member of the family class (as defined by the *Immigration Act*). A minority of the women came to Canada as fiancées.

One of the hallmarks of the social construct of the women's identity is that they are foreigners within Canadian society. Even after obtaining their permanent residence or Canadian citizenship, their identity as foreigners and as Filipino women is maintained, deepening their sense of vulnerability.

Filipino women face a long and arduous process in coming to Canada as mail-order brides. In fact, the sponsorship process is largely out of their control, as it is the husband who applies to Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The women do not have any rights within the sponsorship process. For those married in the Philippines, the marriage is not a guarantee for entry. Many face lengthy delays as their papers are processed. One woman feared her husband would abandon her during her pregnancy, as her application had not yet received

approval. Others faced scrutinizing interviews by immigration officials. One woman had to get married twice as officials lost the paperwork from the first marriage.

Once the application is approved, the women do not receive any information about their rights in Canada. On arrival, dependent sponsorship sets the context for further exploitation. Tied to their sponsor for 10 years under the terms of the sponsorship undertaking, they are systematically subjected to a subordinate power relationship. The sponsorship undertaking implies that the husband alone is responsible for the woman. This discourages women from applying for social services and benefits. In fact, if a sponsored person accesses social assistance or welfare, the government can sue the sponsor for recovery of the support. Along with the fear of deportation, husbands are able to exploit the women's marginalized position to keep them in line, leaving them to endure a continuous cycle of violence and abuse. The threat of deportation is also a powerful deterrent since these women, mostly from low-income, rural areas, do not wish to return to the Philippines, especially if they are supporting family back home. Because the women remain isolated, they are unable to access sources of information to determine the options open to them.

Also, the women's experiences of both personal and systemic racism are evident in their dealings with immigration officials and immigration policies. The arbitrary decision-making power of Citizenship and Immigration impacts greatly on the status of these women as women of colour from a developing country and as Filipinos.

Filipino women under the Live-In Caregiver Program face a similar situation. The women are segregated to domestic work, with little or no opportunity for development. Required to live in the employer's home for 24 months, the women are left isolated and vulnerable. Extremely isolated and carrying only temporary immigration status in Canada, many Filipino domestic workers marry their employer hoping to improve an already vulnerable and marginalized position. The men, however, take advantage of this situation.

To fulfill the need for cheap labour in this era of globalization, the demand for domestic workers in Canada is increasing. The entry of Filipino women as mail-order brides will intensify as they provide the "package deal" as a wife, nanny and housekeeper. Thus, the conditions that Filipino women experience through this process will subject them to further abuse and exploitation.

In fact, the recently proposed Bill C-31, *The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* will do little to alleviate the women's vulnerability. While the sponsorship undertaking period has been reduced to three years, the women will remain tied to their husband, fearful of deportation because of their vulnerable status.

### ***Recommendations***

While the following recommendations are primarily aimed at Citizenship and Immigration Canada, we also recommend that other departments support policy research, analysis and development efforts to provide a comprehensive view of the issues faced by Filipino mail-order brides in Canada. For example, federal and provincial departments responsible for the status of women should support a gender analysis of immigration policies (such as

measuring the prevention of violence against women). The Department of Canadian Heritage and provincial ministries of multiculturalism should support an anti-racism analysis of these policies. Human Resources Development Canada and the provincial ministries of labour should analyze immigration policies in terms of the labour market segregation of marginalized groups.

1. Support further community-based research into the inherent link between the Live-In Caregiver Program and the growing phenomenon of Filipino mail-order brides in Canada. This work should build on the research already completed by Filipino women's organizations, such as the Philippine Women Centre, into the impacts of the Live-in Caregiver Program and the policy recommendations therein.
2. Conduct analysis of current, new and proposed immigration policies, particularly Bill C-31, and the potential impact on mail-order brides. Use a comprehensive and integrated analytical lens, including gender-sensitive, anti-racist and labour market methodologies. For example, are there ways to reduce the vulnerability of these women by freeing them from the sponsorship undertaking itself?
3. Implement a mandatory training program for all immigration officials (including visa officers in posts abroad), emphasizing the need for gender sensitivity and awareness of personal and systemic racism.
4. Provide plain language information to Filipino women when they are still in the Philippines about their rights as women, as people of colour and as workers in Canada. This information should be provided as soon as the husband's application for sponsorship has been submitted, so the woman has sufficient time to review the information. The information should be developed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in consultation with grass-roots Filipino women's organizations, such as the Philippine Women Centre and its network, which have experience in advocating for Filipino mail-order brides. The information needs to be comprehensive, including sections on the prevention of violence against women and human rights.
5. Provide information about Filipino women's organizations particularly the Philippine Women Centre and its network, and other service/referral agencies to Filipino mail-order brides at the airport on their arrival in Canada.

### **Violence Against Women and the Trafficking of Women**

As the project findings show, Filipino mail-order brides are vulnerable to all forms of violence, including physical, emotional, economic and social abuse. This vulnerability stems from a subordinated position as commodified women, from a developing country, who have been purchased and brought to Canada to help in the domestic upkeep of their husband's household. Their vulnerability deepens on arrival in Canada, as the women remain isolated from their community, fearful of reprisals from the husband and lacking important support networks. In fact, the experiences of Filipino mail-order brides with violence are only beginning to surface.

The prevention of violence against women is a stated priority for the federal and provincial governments. However, the violence faced by Filipino mail-order brides and the multiple barriers they must overcome in addressing this situation highlight numerous gaps in the conceptualization, development and implementation of programs to prevent violence against women.

Conceptually, a broad view of the forms of abuse must be taken. For example, Filipino mail-order brides are extremely vulnerable to economic control, particularly the threat that support to the family in the Philippines will be cut off. Additionally, violence against women should not be narrowly viewed as a result of unequal relations of power between the two sexes. Instead, a more systemic view of the forces shaping the women's vulnerability to violence must be taken.

The failure of existing prevention programs to address the specific situation of Filipino mail-order brides must be pointed out. Despite the existence of such programs, even in rural areas of Canada, Filipino mail-order brides still experience myriad forms of violence. Moreover, they are not reporting the abuse nor accessing support services. This confirms the earlier findings of the Philippine Women Centre and the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women in the 1998 study, *Echoes: Cries for Freedom, Justice and Equality: Filipino Women Speak* (funded by the B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality). In the Echoes project, Filipino women, service providers and police were interviewed about the situation of Filipino women—including mail-order brides, in a small town in British Columbia. Relevant findings from the Echoes project include women being unaware of the services available, significant language and cultural barriers to their accessing services, and women fearing retaliation from their husband. One of the most significant findings of the Echoes project was that the women's fear of retaliation is exacerbated by their experience with the very systems that are supposed to help protect and support them. For example, in Alice's case, her stand against her abusive husband led him to report her to Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Moreover, the level of awareness of police officers and other service providers on the issue of violence varies. A police officer, for example, may view domestic violence as a private issue supporting the belief that men have the right to control women. The Echoes project found that stereotypical and racist attitudes and assumptions of passivity and submissiveness of Filipino women underlie the difficulty service providers, police officers and other agencies are having in reaching out to this extremely vulnerable group of women. Additionally, the service providers interviewed for this study and the Echoes project do not have specific violence prevention programs that take into account the special vulnerability of this group of women.

Mail-order brides often find their husband is a stranger on coming to Canada. It is ironic that the women's history and status are revealed from the time they submit their application and pictures to an agency, yet the history and status of the husband remains unknown until the woman arrives in Canada. Alarming, some stories revealed serial sponsorship, some women being the third or fourth mail-order bride. Histories of serial sponsors must be monitored to ensure the protection and safety of the women.

In this study and in the Echoes project, a major contributing factor to the abuse and violence perpetuated against mail-order brides is the absence of governmental regulation of the Canadian men who go to the Philippines in search of a Filipino bride. For instance, it is Citizenship and Immigration Canada policy that sponsors are eligible to sponsor a family class member even if they are on parole, probation or serving a suspended sentence. This policy, in itself, puts the women at a greater risk of violence. While Bill C-31 calls for limitations to be placed on sponsorship privileges for persons convicted of domestic violence, this still would not have assisted the women who experienced abuse in their relationship. Many of the husbands were never previously convicted of domestic violence. In fact, in Alice's case, her husband was charged but never convicted of assaulting her.

### ***Recommendations***

6. Status of Women Canada and the provincial ministries responsible for the status of women should support further community-based research into the different forms of violence experienced by mail-order brides in Canada with a view to developing new policies and correcting gaps within existing policies that are specific to this group of women.
7. Citizenship and Immigration Canada must limit the sponsorship privileges of men who are serial sponsors and are at risk of committing violence against a wife. As an alternative, Citizenship and Immigration Canada should develop a method of monitoring these men, such as a public information act, and provide this information to the Filipino mail-order bride on receipt of her husband's application for sponsorship.
8. Information about the specific needs of Filipino mail-order brides should be provided to service agencies jointly by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Status of Women Canada. This information should be based on further community-based research and be reviewed and distributed in consultation with the Philippine Women Centre and its network.
9. Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Status of Women Canada/provincial ministries responsible for the status of women should support further community-based research into mail-order bride agencies and other entities that support the international trafficking of women. The growth of a full-scale, mail-order bride industry must be prevented or the goal of prevention of violence against women will be impossible to achieve.

### **The Economic Situation**

The majority of Filipino mail-order brides are highly educated, highly skilled individuals with impressive professional backgrounds. Yet many women remain economically dependent on their husband's income. Even those who have entered the paid work force find themselves de-skilled and segregated in domestic-related, low-wage, service-sector jobs. While women's equality and development is a stated priority for Canada, there is a lack of recognition that economic security is fundamental to the attainment of women's equality. Economic security for Filipino mail-order brides is necessary to help reduce their isolation,

dependence and vulnerability. However, no policies exist in the economic and labour areas to help support these women's struggle for equality and development.

### ***Recommendations***

10. Status of Women Canada, the provincial ministries responsible for the status of women, Human Resources Development Canada and the provincial ministries of labour need to support further community-based research into the economic situation of Filipino mail-order brides. In particular, their de-skilling and underdevelopment in Canada must be explored more fully.
11. Human Resources Development Canada and the provincial ministries of labour should support community economic development programs and employment-bridging programs for Filipino mail-order brides. These programs should be developed in consultation with and implemented by the Philippine Women centre and its network.
12. All concerned government departments and ministries, educational institutions, unions and community-based organizations should work toward the recognition of the prior education and skills obtained by these women in their country of origin. This would help diminish the impact of de-skilling and facilitate the settlement and integration of these women into Canada as empowered members of society.

### **Human Rights**

The issue of human rights of Filipino mail-order brides cannot be narrowed to civil and political rights. A comprehensive view of human rights, such as the right to livelihood, education, health care and housing, must be understood before one can comprehend the human rights violations inflicted against Filipino mail-order brides.

A human rights model that encompasses the individual and collective experiences of Filipino mail-order brides needs to be developed and international human rights standards taken into account.

### ***Recommendations***

13. The Canadian Human Rights Commission and provincial human rights commissions should support further community-based research into the human rights situation of Filipino mail-order brides, particularly whether their social, cultural and economic rights are being respected and promoted.
14. The federal government must ratify the *United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights and Welfare of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*. The ratification of this important international instrument will help provide a legal and political framework that respects and promotes the rights of temporary workers and others in Canada who are vulnerable because of their immigration status.



## **Legal System**

The main point of contact for Filipino mail-order brides with the legal system occurs when they seek assistance in dealing with an abusive husband. As explained in the project findings, only a few of the women have actually left their relationship. A few remain with their husband, trapped in a cycle of poverty and abuse.

However, the experiences of the women who have interaction with the legal system are illuminating. Negotiating the complex legal system is difficult for anyone, but the experiences of Filipino mail-order brides show that they are often further victimized by a system that is supposed to uphold their fundamental human rights as women. This victimization is a result of their extremely marginalized position in Canadian society.

Police and other institutions that enforce criminal law are supposed to be sensitive to gender and domestic violence. However, as many studies have shown, in reality, police and others in the legal system sometimes act as a barrier, rather than as a promoter, of justice. In *Echoes: Cries for Freedom, Justice and Equality: Filipino Women Speak* (GAATW and PWC 1999), interviews with police and law enforcement officials revealed that the stereotype of the Filipino woman as docile and submissive affected the way the police responded to complaints about domestic violence. The husbands also led the police to believe that the wives were hysterical, “crazy” women.

Coupled with the barriers created by the attitudes of the police are the experiences with authority systems that Filipino women bring with them from the Philippines. In the Philippines, domestic violence is still considered a private matter; police and the legal system do not often respond to, or act on, reports of domestic violence.

Filipino mail-order brides are also apt to deal with the legal system in resolving family law matters. From the women’s perspective, the main issue in family law proceedings is the custody of their children. Many of the women must fight their husband on this matter. In Alice’s case, she lost custody of her child to her ex-husband, despite a history of abuse and neglect, because of her pending deportation from Canada. In Perlita’s case, she was only successful in receiving temporary custody of her children because her husband’s children from his previous relationships confirmed the abusive nature of their father.

When it comes to other family law matters, such as child support, spousal maintenance and division of matrimonial property, we do not yet have enough data to see if the women are being accorded their full rights and entitlements under the law.

Rather than being respected as women who have survived abuse and fought for their dignity and that of their children, Filipino mail-order brides find they are excluded and marginalized by a legal system that is supposed to accord them justice.

## ***Recommendations***

15. The federal and provincial attorneys general should implement mandatory training programs for police officers, other law enforcement officials and those in the legal

system, emphasizing gender sensitivity and awareness of personal and systemic racism programs. The particular situation of trafficked women, including Filipino mail-order brides, must be addressed. Support for these programs should be given by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the federal and provincial departments and ministries responsible for the status of women, the Department of Canadian Heritage and the provincial ministers responsible for multiculturalism.

16. The federal and provincial attorneys general, provincial legal aid societies and law foundations should support the development of public legal education programs for Filipino mail-order brides addressing their basic legal information needs. These programs should be designed and delivered by the Philippine Women Centre and its network.
17. The federal and provincial attorneys general, provincial legal aid societies, law reform commissions and law foundations should support further community-based research into the interaction of Filipino mail-order brides with the legal system, particularly the family law system. For example, are they left in a better economic position after their divorce? Is their contribution to the marriage being recognized?

### **Actions for Change**

Despite their severely marginalized position, the women are also resisting. They assert themselves with their husband in demanding equality; they assert themselves collectively in demanding their legitimate rights and welfare. Across Canada, the women are coming together with other Filipino women and the larger Filipino community to seek support and empowerment.

In March 1999, over 100 Filipino-Canadian women gathered at the historic Filipino-Canadian National Consultative Forum, Towards Filipino Women's Equality, in Vancouver, British Columbia. The Philippine Women Centre organized this national gathering with the support of its national network. This forum served to deepen the understanding of the situation of Filipino women in Canada and developed recommendations and concrete actions for change. This gathering serves as a testimonial to the strength of Filipino women and their wealth of knowledge and experience that should be supported.

As the crisis in the Philippines worsens, the number of Filipino women becoming mail-order brides in Canada appears to be increasing. Programs and foreign aid flooding into the Philippines through development agencies need to be examined critically for their role in limiting the choices of women in the Philippines. With these choices becoming increasingly restrictive, one can expect the further underdevelopment of Filipino women and, therefore, further vulnerability to trafficking.

Thus, the need for support in their struggle as women and as overseas Filipinos in Canada for their genuine equality, peace and development is urgent. As such, the following actions for change are directed toward community empowerment and development. Concerned

government agencies and funding organizations should support the community's efforts in finding collective solutions to improve their situation.

### ***Research and Documentation***

18. Continue further community-based research and documentation into the situation of Filipino mail-order brides through funding in the following areas:

- situation of children of Filipino mail-order brides;
- serial sponsorship;
- legal implications of fiancée sponsorship;
- mail-order bride agencies (in Canada and in the Philippines);
- the explosion in the number of mail-order bride Internet sites and the need for regulation;
- prostitution of Filipino women;
- dating services in Canada;
- international arrangements that promote and profit from the trafficking of Filipino women;
- trafficking of women as an inherent part of globalization;
- deportation of Filipino women from Canada; and
- commodification and feminization of migration of Filipino women.

19. Conduct needs assessments among Filipino mail-order brides to identify their demands for services. These assessments should be conducted by the Philippine Women Centre and its network, and designed along a participatory action research model. The assessments also need to identify the appropriate service-delivery model and take a comprehensive view of community-based services.

### ***Education***

20. Conduct public education through creative and cultural means (i.e., theatre, visual arts, etc.) to bring out the issues and struggles of Filipino mail-order brides to the Filipino community and beyond.

### ***Organizing***

21. Form a national co-ordinating committee for Filipino women in Canada (co-ordinated by the Philippine Women Centre) to help support the efforts of Filipino mail-order brides and to advance the struggle for peace, equality and the development of Filipino women nationwide.

22. Continue to link with Filipino sisters in the Philippines and worldwide to understand the global situation of Filipino women and formulate appropriate recommendations and actions for change at the international level.

***Policy Advocacy***

23. Lobby different government agencies and other institutions to develop appropriate policies that support the struggle of Filipino women, demanding implementation of this study's recommendations, in particular.
24. Continue to support and participate in GABRIELA-Philippines' Purple Rose Campaign, an international campaign to end the trafficking of Filipino women.
25. Implement the forthcoming recommendations arising from the July 2000, Women's International Solidarity Affair in the Philippines, hosted by GABRIELA-Philippines, which specifically tackled the issue of sex trafficking of Filipino women and children.
26. Reassess Canadian development programs in the Philippines by agencies and government bodies, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and their role in perpetuating the underdevelopment of Filipino women.

## WHERE HAVE ALL THE WOMEN GONE?

By Charlene Sayo

*They're* swept away  
In a savage Diaspora  
Forever banished from  
Their homes in their own land  
Except for a lucky few who  
Return first class in splintered  
Rest In Peace boxes

*Mothers*, daughters and wives  
Of an entire nation exiled  
Since birth to an inherited  
Life sentence of economic shackles  
Their existence commodified  
Their bodies objectified  
Their voices denied  
Steadily trafficked through seedy  
Roads, intersections and freeways of  
The Labour Export Policy  
The Live-in Caregiver Program and  
Mail Order Bride destinations  
Licensed to agencies, pimps, husbands  
and  
Middle class families  
Who vilely impose their  
Supreme malicious liberties  
On Third World women  
Who bear no  
Importance  
Third World women  
Who bear no  
Importance

*Third World* women  
Like Veronica Vasquez  
Whose virginal 19 years was  
Violated and stolen  
By her blue-eyed  
Serial rapist husband  
To secure the security of  
Her perishing family  
In the barren province of  
Valenzuela  
*Veronica Vasquez*

Can't fathom  
Where she has gone  
Nor grapple with the  
Promised splendour that  
Never arrived  
As her wheyfaced husband  
Pleasures himself in the  
Remains of Veronica's once  
Stirring body  
Climaxing on a breathing  
Cadaver who begs to be  
Waken from the  
Pillaging nightmare  
That does not cease  
The Pillaging nightmare  
That does not cease

*And* still you ask,  
Where have all the women gone?  
Polishing silver in  
West Van homes from  
Dusk 'till dawn  
Caring for babies that are  
Not their own  
Listening to their children's  
Strangeness over the  
Cold hard phone  
Serving the needs of others  
Until their bones crack dry  
Disposing their cheap labour  
Until there's nothing left to buy  
Stripping in Japan  
For the golden yen  
Selling their sex to  
Foreign gentlemen  
Chasing pipe dreams that  
Will never come  
Working, hoping, praying  
Until their bodies are cold and numb  
Execution in Singapore  
Was *it* for slaving Pinay maid Flor  
100 bloody slashes was vanquished upon  
Sloven Sarah B.

'Cuz killing your employer  
 To avenge your rape  
 Ain't allowed in Saudi  
 Failed by their homestead who  
 Refuses to set them free  
 Packaged, priced and exported  
 deliberately  
 Struggling in alien countries  
 That offer no opportunities  
 Burdened by debts that  
 Chain their histories  
 Living through their  
 Ancestors colonized miseries

***Sarah Balabagan***

Sylvia Banaag  
 Gloria Barlaan

Milagros Bordador  
 Flor Contemplacion  
 Marites Decardo  
 Evelyn Flores  
 Edna Fojas  
 Anita Fuggan  
 Eleanor Jasereno  
 Heidi Juperatum  
 Maria Fe Ocampo  
 Susan Remerata  
 Maricris Sioson  
 Sarah Tabar  
 Emilita Villa  
 Commodified, objectified  
 Vilified, denied  
 Mysteriously died  
 And still you ask,  
 Where have all the women gone?

## **APPENDIX: GUIDELINE QUESTIONS**

### **In the Philippines**

- How did you meet your husband?
- Why did you decide to marry a foreigner/Canadian?
- Why did your husband decide to marry a Filipina?
- How long did you and your husband correspond?
- What do you think a “good” marriage is?
- What are your ideas of marriage?
- How were you both able to “develop” a relationship by correspondence?
- How did your family/friends react to your marriage plans?
- How was the wedding?
- How did you picture your life would be in Canada?
- Did you have any reservations about coming here?

### **In Canada**

- What did you think of Canada?
- How was your relationship in the beginning?
- Were there any issues (points of tension) that surfaced?
- How did you deal with them (sources of support—agencies, friends)?
- Did you tell your family in the Philippines about your problems?
- How did you meet other Filipinos?
- How did they react to your marriage?
- How is your relationship with your husband now? Why has it become like this?
- Do you have recommendations for other women, community groups, government agencies?
- Do you work? Do you want to work?
- What type of work do you do?
- What happens to the money you make?

### **Other Information**

- Socio-economic background (including of husband, education, occupation, etc.)?
- Other siblings abroad? Their occupations?
- Send money home to the Philippines?
- Plans to sponsor family here?

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Export processing zones are areas where multinational corporations can operate under special laws. This special regulatory environment includes exemptions from wage and pollution control laws, provisions banning strikes and union activities, and freedom to remit 100 percent of profits earned to their home base of operations. One export processing zone in the Philippines is known as the CALABARZON, covering five provinces. Another name for export processing zone is regional industrial corridor.

<sup>2</sup> To protect the women's identity, names have been changed and all identifying information was removed from these stories.

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Louise Langevin and Marie-Claire Belleau

\* Some of these papers are in progress, and not all titles are finalized.