

Migration, Racialization, and Gender: Comparing Filipino Migration in France and the United States



The Philippines is a major player in international migration. In 2013, almost 10 percent of the Philippine population lived abroad and approximately half of those were contract workers. Although the Philippines is not unique in supplying labor overseas, the nation's highly institutionalized labor-export process and the occupational diversity of its overseas labor force distinguish it from other labor-exporting countries.

Filipinos have immigrated to the U.S. and France as workers (often through governmental programs or labor brokers), family members of immigrants, internationally adopted children, and spouses/fiancées of national citizens. The scholarship on Filipino migration to the United States and France shows that the experiences of migrants to both countries are highly racialized, gendered, and classed processes. However, France and the United States have handled issues of migration, labor, intimacy, and race in dramatically different ways, resulting in distinct histories, migration policies, and migrant experiences.

This Matrix Prospecting Team is conducting an unprecedented comparative, transnational analysis of issues of contemporary migration and the racialization of migrants to France and the United States. The team is led by Catherine Ceniza Choy, Professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, and Gwenola Ricordeau, Associate Professor of Sociology at University of Lille, who share research specializations in migration, gender, and race/ethnic studies in their respective countries, and who both have specialized interests in Philippine migration studies.

The team brought together scholars from the fields of art practice, ethnic studies, Southeast Asian studies, sociology, Asian American studies, and other relevant domains. The group engaged with representatives from outside organizations, including Oakland-based Filipino Advocates for Justice, and they organized a one-day symposium on “Philippine Diasporas: Race, Gender, and Intimacy,” featuring a keynote by Ricordeau and a series of panel discussions.



RESEARCH GOALS

- Compare the experiences of Filipinos migrating to France and the United States, examining their treatment and integration in the receiving countries.
- Raise new perspectives on the invisibility and racialization of Filipino migrants in both countries.
- Expand the findings of this analysis to make a broader epistemological contribution in the field of migration studies.



Images from “Flor 1973-78,” a 2008 project by Jenifer K. Wofford, commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission. This six-poster project imagines six years in the life of the fictional Flor Villanueva, a young woman who has emigrated from Manila to San Francisco. This graphic novel-as-public art situates Flor in a variety of settings both in San Francisco and Manila in the 1970s, with captions of her thoughts about both personal and political developments of the era. The illustrations were hand-drawn in ink, then colored and laid out in Photoshop. The posters were installed in kiosks along San Francisco’s Market Street, where pedestrians were able to follow Flor’s story, year by year, block by block.

“Despite the significance of Filipino migration to France and the United States, Filipino migrants continue to be stereotyped as foreign-labor competitors and model minorities, commodified as human resources, or dismissed as invisible migrants,” the researchers explained in their proposal. “More in-depth study of the larger contexts that facilitate their migration, their treatment and integration in the receiving countries, and the migrants’ experiences is needed. Although there is an emerging critical mass of transnational scholarly work on the racialized and gendered experiences of overseas Filipino migration to specific countries, comparative transnational studies, such as the one we are proposing, are rare. The collaboration will raise new perspectives on the invisibility and racialization of Filipino migrants.”

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