

# Migration and Masquerade: Gender and Habitus in the Philippines

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*Globalization recreates translocalities from what were previously imagined as isolated, peripheral communities. In the Philippines, a remote indigenous community incorporates new practices of gender brought by female circular migrants from urban 'abroad'. Women 'doing gender' at a village fair map a novel habitus, re-shaping senses of self and place. Their performances of gender mark changes in everyday gender practices and the lived experiences of locality.*

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The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices.... These practices can be accounted for only by relating the objective structure defining the social relations of the production of the habitus which engendered them to the conditions in which this habitus is operating... (Bourdieu, 1977:78.)

Migrant bodies move from one place to another, but migrants may take a sense of place with them. They carry the history of their original locality with them and transform that history simultaneously.

Bodies are sites of incorporated histories (Butler, 1997), sites of inscription through deportment, dress, gesture and style. History is inscribed on the body through the habitus that creates and sustains the 'taken-for-granted' worlds of subjects. Bourdieu's definition of habitus, given above, is a tool of enormous analytical power and complexity. For my purposes here, it can be distilled down to the concept of habitus acting as a bodily history. Habitus-as-bodily-history works as a practical sense of place, producing the embodied rituals of everyday life. The productive relation between place and habitus is reciprocal. The daily, bodily practices that produce the material features of places also generate the historical structure of feeling that is habitus. The place of 'home', for example, is produced materially through the bodily practices that sustain its landscapes. Discursively, 'home' is constituted through emotions, gestures and customs emerging from labor and the resulting culture that

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attaches meaning to work and bodily dispositions. Thus the practices that produce bodies are mutually constitutive with those that create localities.

In this article, I apply this theorization of habitus to a case study of gender practices in an indigenous village in the northern Philippines. Here, female circular migrants coming and going from contract jobs overseas bring new practices of gender home from urban 'abroad'. The social relations of the production of habitus are now produced through the incorporation of the imaginings and experiences of this migration. Under these conditions, I argue, habitus becomes translocal. In order to explore the local understanding of this change I have selected an example of autoethnography to analyze. Contextualizing my example with data drawn from two years of ethnographic fieldwork, I show how women doing gender at a village fair map this novel habitus. Their performance creates a commentary on the ways female migration is reshaping senses of self and place. In doing so, they locate the gendered body as a key site for the reconstitution of a practical sense of local culture. Building from on this ethnographic vignette, my analysis explores a continuum of intention between mimicry (intentional imitation) and mimesis (unintentional imitation), to elaborate the ways that this novel, translocal habitus is expressed and developed in bodily performances.

## SCENE

Asipulo is a village in the province of Ifugao, in the mountains of Northern Luzon. The village is classified as a 'cultural community'<sup>1</sup> with members speaking one of several indigenous languages. People learn Filipino and English, the national languages, through the school system, radio and print media. Approximately 14 hours from Manila, the town Center is accessible only by jeepney down a gravel road. There is no telephone service and electricity only arrived in 1996. Yet the indigenous Filipino people from this village understand themselves as world-travelers and global subjects, rather than 'tribal minorities'.

In May of 1997, I observed people performing as Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) in a Municipal Fiesta. The performers were local women masquerading as migrants. On the stage of the Asipulo Municipal Hall, these women were doing a globalized version of gender by parading new clothes from 'abroad' in a 'fashion show'. Through their performance, local ideas of feminine charm, economic potential, beauty and the performances of a distinctive form of 'OCW' femininity became mutually constitutive.

The performance began with the entry of several women dressed in satiny eveningwear and sunglasses who paraded across the stage. They moved languidly and suggestively from left to right and posed at the side. Next came a group of women in 'new' versions of the 'native uniform'—the *tapis* and blouse—moving with arm gestures taken from indigenous dance. These women joined with the first group and struck similar poses. Then all the performers moved to center stage,

dancing the 'contemporary' style of the first group. Suddenly, another woman appeared on the stage in a men's tennis outfit, accessorized with a racket and a heavy (shoe polish?) beard. This white-clad man/woman sauntered to center-stage and put her hands on her hips, surveying the scene. S/he then chased the 'models' around the stage, making lascivious motions with her hips. The assembled audience greeted their performance with cheers and riotous laughter.

Through their performance, these enterprising local women were eroticizing their bodies in two registers. The fashion show is both an active reference to the future—new fashions being what you all will be wearing in the future—and the indigenous past. Their skit thus historicizes gender, giving it a past and a future. By wearing both the locally prestigious native *tapis* and the beautiful foreign dresses, they were positioning themselves as desirable women, in both 'traditional' and 'modern' or 'local' and 'global' terms. Performing themselves as 'the best of the local' in conjunction with the global referents of fashion and sport, these women interpolated local gender practices into the global, mapping for the audience a global realm where the local and tradition are desirable. Through their performance, they positioned Asipulo women as modern actors and desiring subjects as well as desirable partners.

The Health Worker masquerading as a 'western' man was performing a global masculinity in a displaced drag performance, far away from the nearest tennis court. The interaction between the women and the 'white man' maps the local as desirable. This genders the community's relation to the perceived global realm through heterosexual romance and lust. In his glamorous OCW realm these foreign masculinities are represented as met and accommodated by local actors. OCWs as performed here were glamorous, wealthy and in control of flows of foreign money and, perhaps, foreign sexualities. Because the woman playing the man was still recognizably female, this performance also showed local women in the role of 'white men'—coming and going as leisured and rich. Thus, the skit anticipated a future where women would have this 'western, masculine' prestige and freedom.

On stage, in this liminal space of public theater, the Health Workers borrowed the subject positions of OCWs (and foreign men) for themselves. This suggested that the discursive contribution of OCWs to local gender practices might well be more important than the actual economic contribution of migrant women to local households. Autoethnography—speaking back to representations of Ifugao as backward and unsophisticated—was a key aspect of the skit. The performance of femininities and masculinity was intended to communicate local familiarity with broader discourses on gender found in the media and located in representations or experiences of 'abroad'. By celebrating the global elements in community life, it incorporated the imagined experiences of local migrants.

## MIGRATION AS GLOBALIZATION

These contemporary practices of gender are produced under a changing set of social relations created by migration. It was not incidental that the money for the

construction of the Fiesta stage came from the Asipulo-Hong Kong Benevolent Association. This group is comprised of Hong Kong-based female overseas workers from the Asipulo municipality. By doing domestic worker abroad, they give the community the grounds, both economically and materially, for celebration. If we understand globalization as a situation where the power relations that affect the production of locality are fundamentally translocal (Appadurai, 1994), these women are key actors in globalization.

Female circular migration for employment abroad has been supervised, monitored and coordinated by the Philippine State since the 1970s (Tigno, 1996). Representations of the worker pool made by Philippine government agencies rely on tropes of docility, obedience, beauty and English education to market Filipina labor (Tyner, 1996a). These images of Filipina femininities also coincide with sexually defined representations used to attract tourism in the 1970s and 1980s (Tyner, 1996b). There is a particular demand from employers for labor recruited from 'the provinces' because *probinsyanas* are perceived to be less interested in socializing and consumer culture, while more docile, and energetic in cooking, cleaning and childcare (Tyner, 1996).

This construction of rural femininity and its market value explains the prevalence of recruiting drives for overseas contract work, both real and fake, in provincial communities such as Asipulo. These stereotypes apply to women from Ifugao Province in Hong Kong. Returnees told me that employers and agencies associated workers 'from the north' of the Philippines with strength, industry and simple expectations.

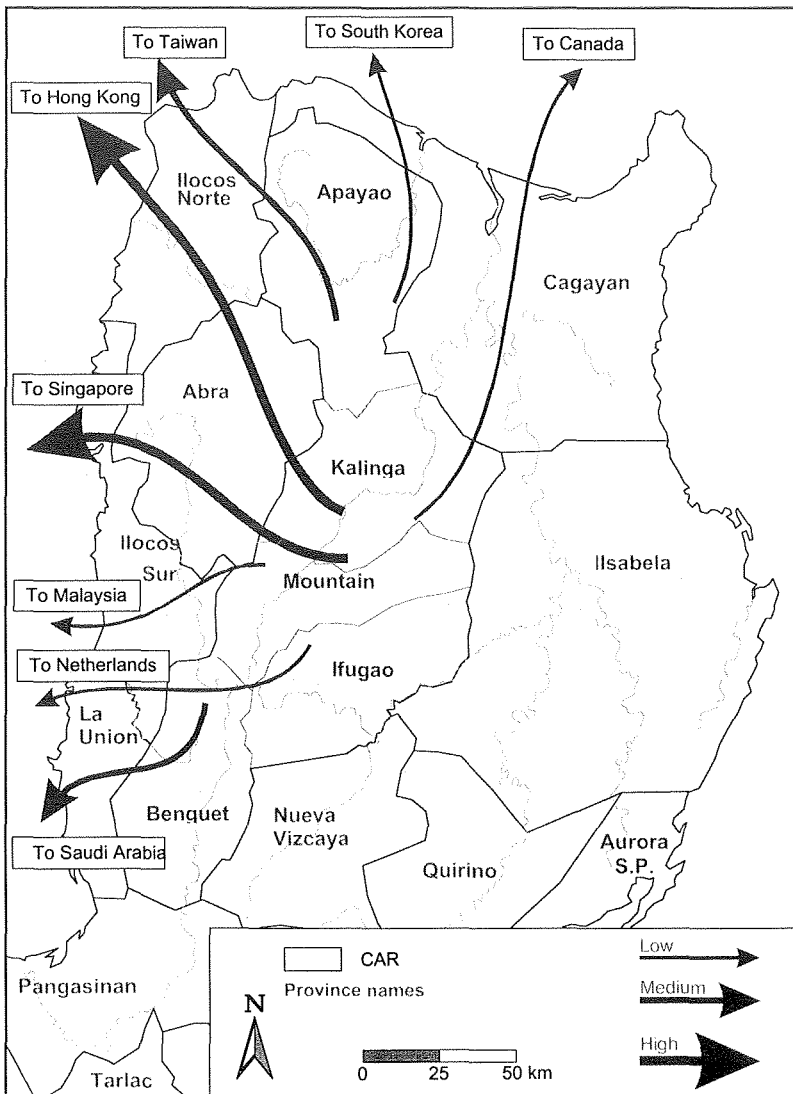
In less remote areas of the northern Philippines, some communities are shaped by female out-migration. In the Ilocos, one village surveyed had thirteen percent of the adult working population overseas, with seventy percent of those migrants female, and sixty-two percent of households reporting migrant workers (Pertierra, 1994). In Asipulo, a sample of one neighborhood suggested there are far fewer workers abroad, approximately 2 percent of working age women. Sixteen of one hundred sixty-seven households surveyed (of a total of 1994 Asipulo households) reported OCW remittances, often carried directly by friends or family every few months. Table 1 shows the locations of the women from these households.

Table 1: Location of Female OCWs from Asipulo.

Location of Employment	No. of Individuals
Hong Kong	8
Singapore	3
'Saudi'	2
Taiwan	2
Malaysia	1

During the period of my research (1995–1997), destinations for female migrants from the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) in the northern Philippines varied (Figure 1). Circular migration for contract domestic work in Singapore and Hong Kong was most common. Other women I met had traveled to ‘saudi’—the nations of the Arabian Gulf—as well as Taiwan and Malaysia. I heard reports of women who had found contract work in factories in South Korea. As well, some women had gone to the Netherlands as ‘au pairs’ or Canada, to work s ‘live-in’ caregivers.

Figure 1: Flows of OCWs from the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Philippines.



## REMITTANCE ECONOMIES AND LANDSCAPES

OCWs remit money into their home communities through their families. The money is often invested in material goods—the construction and renovation of houses and stories, and the purchase of agricultural implements, cars and motorcycles. Returning workers bring appliances, clothing and toys as gifts. Remittances from overseas are used as capital for new commercial agricultural crops, particularly where men farm without the labor of female partners. Sometimes OCW money goes to buy supplies for starting up a business such as a tailor shop, woodcraft shop, etc. A community with many workers overseas can be distinguished by the newness of its houses, cars, and exotic appliances, as well as commercial crops. Thus the circular migration of female OCWs to and from ‘abroad’ transforms rural landscapes in material ways.

Female circular migration also changes the local landscape in terms of discourses on gender and labor. Rural families use remittances to invest in cultural capital through spending on weddings, funerals and education. Sending other family members to urban schools for post-secondary training is one of the remittance goals of many OCWs. Ironically, education often leads to new rounds of migration when new graduates find themselves un- or under-employed. Many female graduates are unable to find a job commensurate to their qualifications in their home community or in Philippine urban centers. Some chose to take contract domestic work overseas, leaving husbands and children to join friends or siblings working abroad.

Though the manual labor of domestic work would be considered low status in the country, its performance abroad is refigured because of the income it brings. Returnee OCW can indulge in patterns of local consumption that increase their status, re-validating this manual labor in the overseas context. Movies, radio and TV shows, popular music and the press glamorize and sometimes distort the reality of migrants working overseas. Migrants themselves are the best advertisement for the values of migration. Where sun-browned skin marks a farmer, returnees are often just as proud of their lighter-colored complexions as they are of their new clothes, accessories and appliances. The distinction the Fiesta performers made between traditional and modern feminine habitus actually maps more closely on to local class processes than it does to any coherent local history of femininity, despite the ‘past’ that their performance invokes.

Migration breaks with ‘the past’ by creating expectations of entry into ‘modernity’ and ‘the future’ through travel ‘abroad’. Though migration for contract work is undertaken on the understanding that the migrant will return home when the contract expires, it is often an entry point to living overseas. Some OCWs can expect to stay ‘abroad’ for many years on continual contract renewals. They can also find work abroad for their friends and family members still in the Philippines. Such networks of migrants bring groups such as the Asipulo-Hong Kong Benevolent Association into being. It seems there is always someone going ‘abroad’, someone working there to receive them, and someone on the way back home to bring news, money and

gifts. Circular migration thus produces translocalities; it creates one community that can imagine itself as circulating in an imaginative hyphenated space of Asipulo-Hong Kong.

Other OCWs may have the opportunity to remain abroad through marriage to foreign nationals. It is this subtext of the romance and seductions of ‘abroad’ that is seen in the interactions between the ‘white man’ and the local women as performed in Asipulo. Canada and the Netherlands were considered ‘good’ countries for trying to become ‘a permanent’ [resident].

## GENDERED HABITUS AND TRANSLOCAL IMAGINATIONS

The imaginative work that recreates the community as translocal is important. The same process creates new gender practices and life choices for local women. In Asipulo, I found the discursive value of female OCWs belied their relatively small number.

In interviews and casual interactions, people I spoke with expressed pride in the women who have been ‘abroad’. The cultural capital they had accumulated by going abroad—fairer skin, a particular style of presentation, distinctively imported clothes, make-up, etc.—was considered very important, both for the women themselves and for what it indicated about the abilities, resources and sophistication of the community. In discussions with local people about women’s migration, it was clear that women were negotiating new, locally recognized forms of femininity through overseas work.

This new femininity incorporates an idea of female self-actualization through travel. In describing his niece, returned from Singapore and planning to go to Taiwan, one older man explained to me: “How can we keep her here, now that she has seen those far places? There is no more for her to do, except more adventures there”. His niece was a 27-year-old mother of three. Though married, she carried a passport stating her marital status as ‘single’. Her remittances from Singapore had provided the capital for her husband’s market gardening and supported her extended family while they looked after her children.

Another young OCW I met had just returned from her first contract. She was in Asipulo in order to recruit ‘girls’ for her ‘auntie’s’ maid agency in Singapore. She explained the lure of overseas work for young women in these terms:

What’s left for them here, anyway? They get married in high school, have their babies... There’s no money, there’s nothing here. What can they do? They are already wives, mothers but it is still *kurang* [lacking]. Always looking somewhere for food, for money. No nice things, no respect. So they like to go abroad. It is something new for them. There is money...but there is also new friends, new places to learn.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally, femininity in rural Ifugao has been closely linked to women's 'domestic' work, which spreads beyond the house and into the agricultural landscape. Female labor and feminine agricultural knowledge are intimately involved in the major subsistence crops of rice and vegetables and have a prominent role in the production of coffee and vegetables for cash. While men have traditionally hunted and traveled beyond the boundaries of the community, women have tended the fields and gardens. Women's work in cultivating the crops and maintaining the fields, glossed in English-language as 'cleaning' is what creates 'home', inscribing evidence of inhabitation in the landscape and producing locality. A desirable woman, in 'traditional' terms, is one who 'knows what to do' to provide for her household and herself.

The construction of local femininity as 'knowing what to do' proves flexible and adaptable, and is being reworked into a rationale for migration overseas. Under 'knowing what to do' comes the feminine responsibility of making ends meet. As one female respondent put it: "If the pot is empty, I'm the one to fill it". Another returned OCW told me: "When I see our rice pot is empty, I'm the one to find for our needs, so I went to Hong Kong". Metaphorically comparing the household budget to the cooking pot locates her overseas work within feminine domestic responsibilities to make ends meet. She constructs her migration in terms consonant with femininity as 'knowing what to do' as well as the roles of 'dutiful daughter' or 'self-sacrificing mother'. Thus the ambitions of younger women in the community extended beyond marriage and family to travel, adventure and material wealth, following the example of OCWs.

Seeing other communities and households funding the good life through female outmigration, local people imagined their own versions of 'abroad'. Many non-migrants themselves would like to have the option of leaving for elsewhere. They envied those women overseas who sent home gifts to earn the gratitude and respect of family and friends, returning only briefly as glamorous visitors. Their imaginations had impacts on the structure of the Asipulo as a community. The production of locality 'requires the continuous construction, both practical and discursive, of an ethnoscape (necessarily non-local) against which local practices and projects are imagined to take place' (Appadurai, 1999:209). In Asipulo, the local understanding of femininity, migrants and migration construct this ethnoscape.

## ADULATION AND AMBIVALENCE

While the figure of the OCW is celebrated, the actual returnees themselves are treated with ambivalence. Sometimes they are welcomed as heroines. At other moments, reviled as mothers who have abandoned their duties and resented for their wealth and supposed stinginess.

This ambivalence was most evident in the comments and conduct of women who did not work abroad. The actual performers of the skit at the Asipulo Fiesta make



an interesting example. In their capacity as Community Health Workers, I had interviewed five of them on women's agricultural work. In those discussions, the Health Workers expressed a political interest in maintaining/redefining an Ifugao farming femininity as 'housewives'. They defined themselves as 'housewives' against overseas workers who had left the community to seek employment. One Health Worker explained to me that, "instead of looking everywhere for money, we stay here and care for our children". Others pointed out that returnees from 'abroad' were "lazy to go back to farming", preferring to find higher-status work or take another overseas contract.

When these same Health Workers gathered the props for their performance, they borrowed the glamorous clothes from returned OCWs. Even those women who complained to me about the poor 'family values' and laziness of returnees wanted to masquerade in the fancy dresses! The obvious enjoyment taken by the Health Workers involved in the skit seemed to contradict their critical comments on OCWs. They showed envy in OCWs high-status clothing and pride in the sophistication 'their' OCWs' international travel had brought to the community. For them OCW femininity was a desirable set of practices, if only on the stage. Their desire to imitate OCWs during the Fiesta, though perhaps in a satirical way, seemed to blur into a widespread mimesis of OCW practices of femininity, offstage, by other community members.

Reading this performance of OCW identity against the life experiences described by returnee respondents revealed discrepancies. The 'real' experiences of migrant women do not match up with this hyped-up performance on the local stage. In talking with me, returned OCWs did not assess themselves, on the whole, as rich, beautiful, and well dressed or in control of their sexualization and interactions with foreigners while abroad. This slippage between the real and the represented woman created alienation for returnees.

One of the returnee OCWs I talked with had invested some of her savings to become a local distributor of Tupperware. Her investment failed because many people took the containers on credit but never paid their debts. When I asked her neighbors about this, they argued that, since she was "already rich from abroad", she did not need their money. Tupperware, for her, they claimed, was "just a sideline". She, however, told me that she had staked her savings on the venture and was now considering taking another contract in Singapore, much as she disliked the idea of leaving her children again. Her other option, to run a small *sari-sari* store from her house, would also be doomed: "If you don't give credit, they won't buy anything, but if I give credit, they say 'never mind, she's OCW already', and then it's only credits and never money. People are jealous here; they don't want to know how hard it is, abroad".

What was clearest about the status of returned female migrants was their transformation: returned female OCWs do not return to farming. They conceptualize themselves as having a different identity than their pre-departure farming selves. Several of these women expressed that their reluctance to farm came, not from

within themselves, but from the sense that the rest of the community would think of them as ‘failed’ in their plans if they returned to agriculture. Several of those who had returned without investments told me that they would plan to go abroad again rather than do manual labor. Much of this resistance to agricultural work has to do with the way manual labor is marked on the body. Cultural interpretations of status and personal worth are attached to women’s bodily demeanor and style of self-presentation.

## HABITUS AND BODILY DISPOSITIONS

A key element in the habitus is the dressage or habits of demeanor that Bourdieu (1977) calls bodily hexis. A series of attitudes, emotions and characteristic postures, it is an individual expression of habitus-as-history. Hexis incorporates unconsciously absorbed cultural norms, the additive effects of particular work postures, and intentionally developed postural habits. In Ifugao, women who farm are thought to have a distinctive hexis. As one man explained to me: “Ifugao women walk...strong. Manila women and OCWs, they walk sexy”. The ‘style’ of farming women is referred to as ‘*koboy*’ [cowboy]. This feminine hexis is associated with physical capability, but a lack of knowledge or education. In other words, the *koboy* hexis marks a ‘traditional’ indigenous habitus.

Returnees from abroad were conscious of the way that the migration process challenged and changed this bodily demeanor. Here are one OCW’s comments on her migration from Ifugao to Hong Kong.

I was really *koboy* then—working in the fields, rough hands, dark skin.  
I took the Home Economics course, yes, but we never saw appliances.  
I had been to Manila maybe once, with my friend. Hong Kong was like...I was dismayed.

She associates her *koboy* style with a lack of knowledge of the ‘modern’. For her, this modernity is located in the Philippine capital of Manila, as well as Hong Kong. The style marks her by class and ethnicity, both in the Philippines and abroad. It also makes her less attractive to the modern, global realm as seen through local eyes. One man explained to me that he liked his wife working overseas because farming work was so heavy, labor in the fields would make her ‘old’ and ‘less beautiful’.

In this social context, ‘knowing what to do’ involved cultivating the style of OCWs in hopes of joining their ranks. Young women I met were cultivating themselves as future OCWs by avoiding agricultural labor. They chose subjects such as nursing and teaching for post-secondary study in the hopes of qualifying for overseas hiring. Religious activities, cultural events and Manila-based media provided them with information on the style of youthful beauty and educational attainment thought

necessary to go abroad. In response, and in anticipation of future remittances, households modified cropping systems and labor allocation to free up young women to pursue these activities. These anticipatory, strategic changes in femininities mark the slippage from mimicry to mimesis of OCWs. Here, female labor choices and bodily demeanor are now being overdetermined by the possibility of overseas work.

Just as migrant women learned a different 'style' while abroad, their return contributed to this transformation of feminine stylistics at home. The hexis of younger women changed from the *koboy* style of their mothers as they created different histories of experience for themselves. Sometimes this personal transformation was a result of intentional self-cultivation. Women read fashion magazines, imitated the deportment of Manila-educated college classmates and bought skin-whitening products. In other contexts, it was an unintended adaptation to the return of an OCW relative or enrollment in an urban post-secondary course. The performances of 'modern' femininity produced by these would-be migrant women wavered on the unstable, shifting boundary between imitation and mimesis.

## HABITUS, MIMESIS AND IMITATION

Butler explains habitus as "a bodily understanding...not reducible to the practice of self-consciously following a rule" (Butler, 1997:34). Imitation, the self-conscious discipline of one's bodily patterns to conform to an external model, is then an element of habitus, but not its sum. Mimesis, on the other hand, can operate beyond the conscious intention of the subject. As my analysis of the Fiesta performance suggests, a pattern of behavior that begins as imitation can become mimicry and then be understood as an element of the 'self'. Interpretations of the habitus are always unstable, relying on chains of citation and speculation on a subject's conscious intent.

Women's bodies are dressed up for prestige and dressed down for labor, they change with use, they age, and they move. Meanings and cultural norms are attached to each of these activities and transformations. In response to a positive reception, a practice of femininity might slide from imitation to mimicry. Yet this change would not necessarily require a conscious decision. At the body cultural norms are both created and incorporated but the process is only partially directed by the subject's intention and within her control. The body is the site for the renegotiation of habitus, a place where multiple and contradictory histories brought into tension and, perhaps, resolution. Bodies express transformations of the habitus.

Returning to the scene on the stage of the Municipal Hall in Asipulo, are the performers mimicking or imitating OCWs? If the Health Workers are engaged in mimesis, they are showing the 'modern' side to their feminine habitus. They demonstrate that they, too, possess these attractions and skills on an innate level. They also can walk the sexy walk and wear the clothes, even if they don't send the money back. Or perhaps the performers intend the skit to satirize OCWs and are imitating

their self-presentation in order to mock them. This would be an attack on the presumed values of OCWs.

As ethnographer of this scene, it is not appropriate for me to position myself to arbitrate feminine authenticity by policing the mimesis/imitation distinction. Instead, my goal here is to highlight that, whether mimicry or imitation, the performance attempts to accommodate and reconcile different practices of gender, while demonstrating the mastery of the performers over them. Either way, the decision to perform this skit indicates a self-awareness of a changing habitus.

## CONCLUSION

Both practices of local and global are gendered. By reworking the stylistics of the gendered body women bring one realm to intersect with the other. In doing so, they redefine the lived meanings of 'place' and 'home'. Asipulo is now structured as and imagined to be a translocality. Through the mobile bodies of women, the community occupies a space of circulation between Ifugao and Hong Kong. OCWs themselves and their community's imaginative constructions of them both move through material places and imaginative hyphenated spaces, layering each on top of the other until the boundaries that might separate them blur. The material landscape and cultural norms of Asipulo emerge from both social and economic relations and imaginative suppositions in all these sites.<sup>3</sup> Asipulo, being 'home', becomes seen as a resource of people and skills for a global labor market. As women leave and return to the community, the place and the practices of gender are transforming each other, changing the practical sense of place in gendered terms.

## NOTES

1. 'Cultural community' is the official Philippine government designation for the 'tribal' communities of the indigenous northern Philippines. See [http://www.ncca.gov.ph/phil\\_culture/ncca-people.htm](http://www.ncca.gov.ph/phil_culture/ncca-people.htm) under the Ifugao link for a listing of the 'Northern Cultural Communities' into which the Ayangan-speaking Ifugao people of Asipulo municipality, Ifugao province can be mapped. The Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR) is the group of northern Philippine Provinces that are the traditional lands of these Northern cultural communities.

2. This is a direct quote in English with the Ilocano term chosen by the respondent translated.

3. The same processes are undoubtedly happening, in somewhat different ways, in the site that is Hong Kong, but that lies beyond the purview of this particular research project.

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