

## Undergraduate Research Symposium May 17, 2013 Mary Gates Hall

### Online Proceedings

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#### SESSION 2P

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#### MCNAIR SESSION - ECONOMIES OF EXPLOITATION, CULTURES OF RESISTANCE

*Session Moderator: Sonnet Retman, American Ethnic  
Studies*

**295 MGH**

*3:45 PM to 5:15 PM*

\* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

##### **Behind the Veils of Industry: The Filipina Mail-Order Bride as the Ultimate Western Male Fantasy**

*Merzamia (Mimi) Cagaitan, Senior, English, Comparative  
History of Ideas*

*EIP Scholar, Mary Gates Scholar, McNair Scholar,  
Presidential Scholar*

*Mentor: Michelle Liu, English*

Despite its negative associations with criminalized activities such as human trafficking, sex tourism, and prostitution, the modern mail-order bride industry continues to flourish – facilitating thousands of international marriages between “American men” (a category that includes all “Caucasian” or “Western” men) and foreign women (the majority of whom originate from Latin America, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia). While there are legitimate factors tying the industry to the aforementioned criminal activities, my research will not dwell upon (nor will it altogether dismiss) a victim discourse in considering the life experiences of marriage migrants. Instead, my research will seek to recast women’s role in this international marriage-scape as agents who, despite institutional and structural limitations on their mobility and quality of life, manage to achieve forms of women empowerment through strategic participation in the international marriage market. In particular, I focus on women marriage migrants from the Philippines, a country of origin which, in being “formerly colonized by the United States, and currently neocolonized by U.S. corporate capital, best illustrates how colonial and military dominations are interwoven with sexual domination to provide the “ultimate Western male fantasy.” Part of an orientalist discourse, this “fantasy” posits Filipino women as politically passive, sexually exotic, and domestically compliant. My research utilizes the theoretical frame-

works of Intersectionality and of Social Construction to examine how this “fantasy” combines sexualized racial stereotypes with racialized gender stereotypes to the harm of particularly Asian (and Asian Pacific American) women. Despite the various harm this colonial sexual mythology engenders, case studies, a literature review, and content analysis reveal Filipino marriage migrants to be empowered women who are strategically, creatively, and, oftentimes, successfully, utilizing the same colonial fantasy to their economic, social, and national advantage – a counter-narrative marked by processes of self-construction, participation in hypergamy, and the production of a corollary female fantasy.