

## Abstract

This project looks into older Filipina migrants' experiences and meaning-making around ageing in Japan to explore the intersections of gender, age, and migrant status. Using a poststructuralist approach to language together with a framework based on Sikolohiyang Pilipino (indigenous Filipino psychology) and feminist psychology, I used individuals' stories about their bodies and experiences of growing older to examine larger social discourses around gender, ageing, and migration. Japanese and Philippine societal views on Filipina migrants and on ageing were found to shape women's ideas, choices, and decisions around growing older as migrants in Japan. The women interviewed crafted positive subjectivities through the embodiment of the good wife and mother, the good migrant, and the modern retiree, even as they struggled with their unique set of constraints--- limited, diminishing opportunities and resources as ageing migrants in Japan, language difficulties, and the demands to help support family in the Philippines. This study argues that social inequalities as expressed in policies, programs, and everyday practices, not individual will or skill, determine to a great degree how well we achieve a 'successful' ageing.

## Introduction

To many observers, Japan and the Philippines is a study in contrast. Whereas Japan is widely-known to be a wealthy nation, with an ageing population and a diminishing labor supply, the Philippines is often described as a poor nation, with a youthful population and surplus labor. This strong contrast defines how migration is framed as a solution to each country's unique set of challenges: in Japan, some sectors are proposing that migration will boost a flagging economy (Burgess, 2014; Hayward, 2015) and provide the skilled labor needed by an ageing population (Onuki, 2009); in the Philippines, the state is seen promoting migration as buoying the economy through remittances (Ordinario, 2012), and simultaneously solving the problem of unemployment (Guevarra, 2009). In discussions around migration, the migrant is imagined to be sexless – often referred to in the plural as a homogenous collective, and taken to be potentially male or female. They are also imagined to be youthful— well within what is regarded as the 'productive years' of one's life. However, data suggest that the Filipino migrant tends to be female (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2012; Ogaya, 2006). The Philippines has noted larger numbers of women than men exiting the country either temporarily or permanently since the 1990s (Parreñas, 2008; Rodriguez, 2009); and, Japan has been recruiting a disproportionately larger number of Filipino women than men for roles and jobs that are considered feminine, for example, as wives to Japanese men in rural areas, as 'entertainers' in nightclubs (Nakamatsu, 2005; Suzuki, 2000), and, more recently, as nurses or careworkers (Onuki, 2009). Moreover, while preferred, new migrants will tend to be 'youthful', settled or long-term migrants (such as some Filipinas in Japan) are ageing in their host country. What social discourses and material conditions allow more Filipinas to be more 'desirable' or 'employable' and how do these discourses and conditions shape Filipina migrants' ageing in Japan?

I am interested in the discursive space these women occupy, the material reality that these discourses produce, and the subjectivities they craft and negotiate within these discursive and material limits. I ask: What discourses on migration, ageing, and being Filipina are relevant to ageing Filipina migrants in Japan? What positive and negative meanings are available to them to make sense of their ideas, choices, and decisions around ageing as migrants in Japan? How do women work with or against these larger societal views to create positive identities for themselves? To answer these questions, I utilized a methodological framework that draws from two areas of critical psychology – Sikolohiyang Pilipino (SP) and feminist psychology. Using these two areas of critical psychology allowed me to investigate the gendered and cultural dimensions of the experience of older Filipina migrants. Ultimately, I am

concerned about how larger social forces shape or define individuals' well-being which, to a large extent, is regarded in mainstream psychological research on ageing and migrants as being well within the power of individuals to secure. I depart from such analysis and assert that the social inequalities based on gender, migrant status, and age (to name a few) that define both Philippine and Japanese societies produce discursive and material realities within which older Filipina migrants experience and make sense of their ageing.

### The context of older Filipina migrants' life in an ageing Japan

#### A brief history of migration in Japan

Japan has a long history of recruiting and deploying migrants to meet its needs for establishing political and economic power in Asia. In this section I will provide a brief overview of Japan's engagement with migration as a political and economic strategy, establish that Japan has always had such despite widespread views about conservatism regarding migration and foreigners, and discuss the recent debates regarding the proposal of greater immigration as a solution to the 'crisis' presented by ageing and population decline in Japan. I focus particularly on the highly gendered nature of Japan's migration experience, and use it as a backdrop for discussing the history of Filipinas' migration to Japan.

Japan is often presented as a fairly homogenous country with a very conservative immigration policy necessitated by a culture wary of foreigners (see Sassen, 1994) associated in the public discourse with deviance and criminal activity (Shipper, 2008). Japan's representation as a non-immigration country has been observed to result in immigration policies that seek to control incoming migrants as a source of labor rather than as potential citizens (Hirowatari, 1998 in Douglass & Roberts, 2000). Scholars are finding this image to be inaccurate, and propose a more nuanced view of Japanese culture and immigration policy. Japan has been using foreigners as cheap labor for most of its history --- for example, male Chinese and Korean workers and craftsmen prior to the Second World War and women for the sex and entertainment industry from the 1970s (Douglass, 2000; Douglass & Roberts, 2000), Nikkeijin for manufacturing and construction work during the economic boom of the 1980s (Shipper, 2008), and the use cheap overseas labor in manufacturing to maintain competitiveness in a globalized economy (Douglass & Roberts, 2000). Such 'use' of foreign labor is seen to result from and result to a persistent (but incorrect) assumption regarding the homogeneity both of Japanese society and of foreign workers; while Japanese in the post-Second World War era and during the height of the economic boom perceived their society to be an ethnically homogenous, middle-class one, foreigners were positioned as class, cultural, and ethnic other (Lie, 2000). Foreigners, especially from neighboring countries in Asia, were lumped together despite large differences in terms of their social status, educational background, and work experience in their country of origin (Lie, 2000). Of course, Japan was and is not homogenous and immigrants are not all the same. Even while immigrants from poorer nations have become equated with poverty and low-paid, 3K jobs, other (typically white) foreigners originating from North America and Europe were regarded as 'elites' and represented modernity, high culture, and glamour (Lie, 2000).

Men and women (both Japanese and immigrants) have tended to perform strongly gendered roles, such that men have a wider range of options for paid work (different depending on their educational background or training, but also migrant status and ethnic background), while women have been more closely associated with work or social roles considered feminine (e.g. as 'office ladies', careworkers, mothers and wives, sexual entertainment---- will discuss this further in a later paragraph) (Douglass, 2000). In other words, Japan can be seen to have raced and gendered labor niches, where foreigners (but I would suggest, Japanese, too) are categorized hierarchically according to their race, gender, and

migrant status (Shipper, 2008). Shipper (2008) suggests that at the top of the hierarchy are *zainichi* (Japan-born) foreigners and *nikkeijin* (foreign-born Japanese) who, because they are understood to have some Japaneseness in them, have better jobs, pay, and working conditions than other foreign workers<sup>1</sup>. Asians (South and Southeast) have stricter skills requirements and have more severe limitations on their employment conditions and mobility (Shipper, 2008). All of these foreign workers without permanent residency can become more vulnerable if they overstay their visas and become illegal workers who have even more limited job opportunities and cannot access public health insurance or subsidized health care (Shipper, 2008). In Japan, as elsewhere in the world, foreign workers have increasingly been relied on to perform work that has to do with the reproduction of society (i.e. carework in its various forms, including the production and processing of food, keeping homes and public spaces clean, caring for the sick and elderly, provision of sexual services); a lot of these jobs fall under what is termed 3K (*kitsui*, *kiken*, *kitanai*) jobs in Japan that Japanese tend to reject. At the same time, following trends in other more classically popular migrant destination countries (e.g. the United States of America and Canada), Japan began to use a point system for immigration in 2012 that promises privileges to highly-skilled foreigners (Ministry of Justice, 2015a, 2015b); it may be said that Japan has stepped onto the global stage in competition with other countries for highly-skilled migrants from all over the world (Chiba & Yamamoto, 2015).

Especially remarkable about Japan's engagement with immigration is the very limited roles or jobs that foreign women are required to fill. Douglass (2000) argues that Japan is unique among all the countries in the world for having recruited a large number women, Japanese and foreigners, for sexual purposes throughout its history--- from imperialist expansion into Asia from the Meiji era, to the Second World War, and on into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Up to the 1980s, women continued to migrate in large numbers to Japan for work as hostesses, erotic dancers and prostitutes despite the growth of women's migration to perform other occupations (as domestic workers, nurses, and other service providers) in Europe, the United States, and Asia (Douglass, 2000). Douglass' analysis (2000) points to patriarchy and racism in Japanese society which structures family life and work life such that less prestigious, less desirable, and less stable jobs are performed by women and by foreigners. With Japanese women's advocacy pushing for changes that allow more of them greater and more stable employment opportunities, especially in urban centers, the sex industry turned to foreign women from poorer countries to supply its needs. The shifting of such gendered burdens on foreign women is also observed in the marriage market in depopulated, rural areas (Yoshihide, 2002). Several studies (Nakamatsu, 2005; Umeda, 2009; Yoshihide, 2002) describe marriage migration targeting rural-based Japanese men as being the outcome of changing economic and social realities (including feminist stirrings) that have opened up possibilities for Japanese women outside of marriage or, at least, outside of one considered to be restricting. The 'marketing' of foreign women as ideal (or acceptable) wives and mothers by marriage-introduction agencies for Japanese men is an interesting study. Foreign women are promoted as good potential wives because of their adaptability (to Japanese culture and a rural way of life), their sexual availability (of Russian and Eastern European brides) and fertility (of Asian brides), and their representation of 'old Japanese values' (i.e. patriarchal family system) where women are submissive and devoted to their

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<sup>1</sup> For certain, it is possible for foreigners belonging in these categories to occupy high-status, high-salary jobs as highly-skilled professionals. After all, immigration privileges are promised to foreigners who can demonstrate exceptional skill or talent that makes a significant social, economic, scientific or cultural contribution (Ministry of Justice, 2015a, 2006). However, the data indicate them to be generally holding low-paid, contractual jobs (Douglass, 2000).

family (Nakamatsu, 2005). Foreign wives perform tasks crucial to the reproduction of the Japanese family, most notably the *ie* (ancestral households) in rural areas. In these areas, some wives work for free in their husband's family farms, others do paid work in small factories, while still others have found work as hostesses in bars (Faier, 2008; Suzuki, 2003; Umeda, 2009; Yoshihide, 2002); their options for employment tend to be severely limited by their limited proficiency in Japanese (Japan Women's Watch, 2009). In terms of the foreign workers' hierarchy, these foreign wives are imagined to be located somewhere in the middle as, while their living and working conditions are not as restrictive as foreign students or English language teachers (Shipper, 2008), their stay is conditional upon their performance of their 'duties' as spouses; it is not clear what duties are referred to here, but the law is clear that if a foreigner on a spouse visa is found not to have engaged in 'spouse duties' for 6 months, the visa can be revoked and the individual deported (Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, 2014). Because of such a policy, foreign women are more vulnerable to domestic violence (Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, 2014).

And so, while the popular image of Japan may be that it remains a largely homogenous country with strict immigration laws, it has, in truth always allowed immigration as part of its economic and political strategy. Japan's immigration-related policies, laws, and practices are shaped by gender and race inequalities such that foreigners are taking on jobs and roles that Japanese have gained the power to refuse. In fact, increasing income inequalities between Japan and other countries, greater involvement of government and non-government organizations in sustaining (if not increasing) flows of migrants to Japan, the decreasing cost of air travel (Douglass & Roberts, 2000), rising cost of labor in Japan and the need for more workers in economic activities that cannot be exported (Douglass, 2000), and the flexibilization and contractualization of labor with the rise of neoliberal economic policies are predicted to lead to further labor migration to Japan (Ball & Piper, 2002). Already, enterprising businesses are using existing immigration loopholes pertaining to Nikkeijin and trainees to obtain cheap(er) foreign workers for various jobs that have not enough takers among the local workers (Chiba & Yamamoto, 2015; Coulmas, 2007); spouse visas are reportedly used to bring in foreign women as cheap labor ("Trafficking in women to Japan for sexual exploitation: A survey on the case of Filipino women," 1997); and some foreigners arrive as tourists or students and overstay their visas to take advantage of increasing casualization of employment (Douglass, 2000). More and more, in addition to costs and risks bound up with the influx of foreigners that have commonly dominated discourse around immigration in the past, the benefits and promises of immigration are being brought into public discussion (Coulmas, 2007). Indeed, even among the various ministries in Japan there is a diversification of discourses around foreigners, who are constructed not only as potential threats to security (by the Ministry of Justice), but also resources for economic growth (by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) and as human beings with rights (by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare) (Chiba & Yamamoto, 2015).

Other than the above reasons, another compelling factor often cited as necessitating greater immigration in Japan is population decline and ageing. In both popular press and critical scholarly work, Japan is foreseen to become inevitably more dependent on immigration as it struggles to meet the challenges presented by a rapidly aging society (Burgess, 2014; Coulmas, 2007; Douglass & Roberts, 2000; Hayward, 2015; Yoshida, 2015). The increase in those over 65 and the longevity of Japanese elderly means an increasing welfare burden on its working population, as well as a more urgent need for low-cost health services and health workers (Douglass, 2000; Lai, 2007), as changing economic and social realities mean that care is less likely to be performed by family for their elderly members (Lai,

2007). More elderly persons are living alone than with their families in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Japanese who were caring for their elderly family members indicated they felt the burden was too much; daughters and daughters-in-law, who traditionally had the responsibility of providing care for the elderly in the family, are trying to find ways or providing care without having to live with them as they juggle dual roles of worker and family caregiver (Coulmas, 2007; Lai, 2007).

As a solution to the increasing cost of care, Japan instituted the Long-term Care Insurance (LTCI) in 2000 which created a private, contractual relationship between the various service providers and the insured clients (Coulmas, 2007; Onuki, 2009). The LTCI was implemented in order to reduce spending on the elderly through the integration of medical and nursing care and welfare services (Coulmas, 2007). Consistent with neoliberal economic policies that have characterized Japan since the Koizumi administration (Coulmas, 2007), this program creates a market-oriented relationship where clients have choice over cost, type, and quality of services to avail of, and service providers strive to provide the best service at the most profitable margin possible (Coulmas, 2007; Lai, 2007; Onuki, 2009). More importantly, a review of the program in 2005 has led to changes that, for the purposes of ensuring financial viability (i.e. reducing the cost to the government), charge more costs<sup>2</sup> fully to the client, and shifts from service to supporting self-help<sup>3</sup> (Lai, 2007); in effect passing on more costs and more responsibility to the individual who needs care. The Japanese public welcomed such a move as the position of 'state beneficiary' carried a stigma, implying one is not cared for by family; the new system, wherein individuals are mandated to make compulsory payments, transforms one into a citizen entitled to public care because of one's contributions (Coulmas, 2007). Such neoliberal policies which shift the state's role from provider to facilitator or mediator and elderly individuals from beneficiaries to paying clients coincides with a larger global shift towards 'successful', 'active' or 'positive' ageing that views ageing as a time of increased opportunity and possibilities, and of individuals having greater control and responsibility over the quality of their ageing (Cruickshank, 2003; Davey & Glasgow, 2005).

As Thang (2010) observed, while a strong expectation of reciprocity and interdependence within the family exists in many Asian countries (Japan included) which continues to shape common practices and public policy, there is also a steady movement toward an 'active ageing' discourse that views the growing population of elderly as a resource, as having better health and financial resources than ever before, and as able to continue to contribute through paid work, volunteering, and caregiving within their families. In Japan, older adults have been found to be actively participating in community activities, and are seen as being able to help meet the labor shortage<sup>4</sup> caused by the "demographic time bomb" of an ageing society (Lai, 2007, p. 113). The age at which one is qualified for pensions has already been increased (changed from 60 to 65 in 1995), and age of retirement is predicted to increase in the future (Coulmas, 2007). Additionally, the market is taking advantage of the burgeoning demographic of the elderly, affluent boomers, by tapping into the so-called 'silver market' and encouraging continued (if not greater) consumption into old age (Coulmas, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> These are charges for accommodations, meals, and utilities (referred to as 'hotel charges') in special nursing homes.

<sup>3</sup> For example, better oral care, strength training, training to prevent falls and accidents, preventative nursing care.

<sup>4</sup> That said, job opportunities for older people tend to be limited to more vulnerable, part-time jobs for women (Douglass, 2000). More women than men who want to work but cannot find any say they need the money (Japan Women's Watch, 2009)

Another solution being explored is the import of care workers from neighboring poorer countries, such as is already being done in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore (Lai, 2007). A wide range of 'imported' care-related services are being explored and tested, such as nursing (Onuki, 2009), caregiving ("Filipino health workers benefit from Japan's ageing society," 2006), and domestic work (Matsuoto, 2016). Indeed, it is becoming clear that the international transfer of the care burden happening in Japan is part of a globalized 'care chain' (Hochschild, 2000) where economically more powerful women in developed countries pass on their care burden to ethnically-different and economically-disadvantaged women in poorer countries.

It is extremely important to highlight the gendered nature of the 'solutions' being proposed, as the problem of hyper-ageing Japan is gendered as well--- women tend to outlive men and will experience ageing differently than men. They are more likely to have to care for their elderly husbands, more likely to be widowed, perform more house chores and yet also tend to have better social integration than men (Coulmas, 2007). For women, particularly the divorced, poverty incidences will be higher because of poorer and more insecure employment opportunities during their youth; they are also likely to be living alone on an income less than 70% of that of elderly men who live alone (Japan Women's Watch, 2009). And with the shift from a three-generation ie, to nuclear families, it is elderly women who have cared for their own parents or in-laws who will more likely receive care through formal, public or private agencies than their own families (Coulmas, 2007). A 2007 report from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare indicates that 71.9% of all family caregivers are women, and that over half of these are over 60 years old (Japan Women's Watch, 2009). Gender, as a powerful structuring force affecting who gives and receives care, and who has the resources to purchase or secure them, is important to include in any analysis of the challenges of ageing in Japan and the strategies (which includes immigration) employed to meet them.

In sum, I have argued here that migration has always been employed strategically in Japan throughout its history to satisfy its economic and political needs. In addition to these needs, cultural particularities and gendered processes shape both policies regarding immigration and the everyday realities of migrants. Different opportunities, challenges, and outcomes are possible for migrants depending on how closely they resemble the ideal migrant that Japan imagines --- highly-skilled and employable, highly assimilable, ethnically similar or desirable (i.e. white). A largely unspoken assumption is that migrants are expected to be youthful, or within what is termed as the 'productive years' of one's life; unlike in other countries, there is little discursive and material space in Japan for medical tourists (Connell, 2013; Turner, 2013) and migrant retirees (Gustafson, 2008) who are typically encouraged to contribute to the local economy through consumption rather than through their participation in the job market. Instead, the issue of ageing and migration intersect in Japan in a very particular way --- Japan is envisioned to need migrants to fill the diminishing labor market and contribute to taxes, as well as to fill in care-related jobs for a growing elderly population. Interestingly, both migration and ageing are popularly constructed in Japan as having great social and economic costs, hence the alarmist (or cautionary, at the very least) language often employed in discussions of these issues. That said, counter discourses are gaining ground --- the benefits of migration are beginning to be highlighted (e.g. as providing much needed labor and careworkers) together with discussions of Japan's responsibility to ensure migrants' better social integration, and the elderly are coming to be seen as potentially contributing to solutions to the problems of an ageing society (e.g. through continued employment and consumption).

### Filipinas in Japan: Providers of premium care labor

Japan is often described as facing “collapsing population growth below replacement, severe labor shortages, rising dependency ratios, welfare systems going broke, and rapidly aging societies,” (Douglass, 2007 in Piquero-Ballescás, 2009, p. 78). In contrast, the Philippines is often regarded as a young population with a “burgeoning excess of labor” (“Trafficking in women to Japan for sexual exploitation: A survey on the case of Filipino women,” 1997, p. 22) and severe employment problems. Juxtaposed in this way, it would seem that labor migration from the Philippines to Japan would be a ‘natural’ solution to the problems of both countries. I will attempt to argue in the brief space I am allowed that, far from being ‘natural’, the current contours of Filipino migration into Japan is shaped by globalization and neoliberalization, by inequalities between the two countries, and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and age.

Filipino migration in Japan is largely feminine, with women migrating from the Philippines in large numbers during Japan’s economic boom in the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s as entertainers on temporary work visas, some settling as wives to Japanese men (with some recruited specifically as brides to Japanese men in rural areas). This coincided with the feminization of Filipino overseas worker deployment--- from the mid-1980s, over 60% of all new hires were women who were recruited as domestic workers within Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, and Overseas Performing Artists (OPAs) in Japan (Ogaya, 2006). In the 2005, following a report from the UN identifying Japan as a Tier 2 trafficking destination, restrictions on granting OPA visas were heightened and the number of Filipinas working as entertainers decreased sharply; the bursting of the bubble economy in the 1990s resulted in the closure of many businesses, further limiting employment opportunities for Filipina entertainers (Piquero-Ballescás, 2009). In 2006, Japan and the Philippines ratified the JPEPA which is aimed at alleviating Japan’s needs for care workers, and for the Philippines’ needs for expanding the market for its prime export --- skilled laborers (Onuki, 2009). Prior and parallel to this policy move are efforts by enterprising businesses and concerned NPOs to fill the care labor gap through the recruitment of Filipina mothers of Japanese children both from the Philippines (who, as mothers of Japanese nationals may be given the right to reside and work in Japan) and from those already residing legally in Japan (Takahata, 2015). From a little over 12,000 registered Filipinos in 1985, the population as of 2011 has grown to over 209,000 individuals, with over 99,000 having permanent resident status, nearly 40,000 with long-term resident status, and over 38,000 carrying the status of spouse or child of Japanese nationals (Takahata, 2015). Many of these permanent and long-term migrants are women who have married Japanese men. According to the data, the population of Filipina migrants in Japan is ageing (Piquero-Ballescás, 2009); majority are now in their late 40s, and they are very well-dispersed all over the country, unlike other migrants who may be concentrated in specific areas where they can find work; as of 2010, the only two cities where there are no Filipino residents are Yubari City and Rumoi City in Hokkaido (Takahata, 2015).

Throughout the ebb and flow of Filipina migrants in Japan, they have been cast in very specific, feminine social roles or economic niches. They mostly work in poorly-valued (even if not always poorly-paid) occupations where mostly women are employed --- club hostesses, chambermaids, bento factory workers, and are under great social pressure to perform their roles as good mothers and wives if they are married and/or have children (Faier, 2008; Parreñas, 2011). In simplistic terms, Filipinas are viewed as falling under one or the other of two extremes--- as wife/whore or, a related dichotomy, as

victim/exploiter (Fuwa & Anderson, 2006; Nakamatsu, 2005; Suzuki, 2000, 2003)<sup>5</sup>. Under such limited and limiting constructions, Filipinas in Japan struggle with finding other forms of employment and integration with Japanese society. In addition, Filipinas must surmount the challenge of adjusting to Japanese culture and way of life, learning the Japanese language and gaining literacy in it (Ofreneo & Samonte, 2005; Parreñas, 2011; Umeda, 2009). All these difficulties together render Filipinas some of the most vulnerable foreign migrants in Japanese society. With a higher divorce rate than the national average (Suzuki, 2003), higher likelihood of being a victim of domestic violence (Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, 2014), and with a typically large age gap with their husbands meaning they will be more likely to be widowed (Yoshihide, 2002), I predict they are also more likely than Japanese to find themselves in poverty as they grow older.

Certainly, scholars, activists and Filipina migrants themselves counter such negative and limited constructions and fight for better opportunities for them. Typically, extensive field work, involving close association with Filipinas and their families, observations of interactions in their homes (sometimes including that in the Philippines), workplaces and communities, forms the basis for arguing that even while exploitative relations exist in the *ie*, the workplace and in the labor migration process, women exercise their agency in different ways and navigate complicated legal and social processes to produce the best possible outcomes for themselves and their families (Faier, 2007; Parreñas, 2011; Suzuki, 2003). These in-depth portraits of Filipinas and their lives as migrants in Japan show mothers negotiating a positive, moral identity while continuing with higher-paying work as a hostess (Parreñas, 2011); we find former hostesses who met their Japanese husbands at work challenged notions of their marrying only for money by asserting that there is love between them (Faier, 2007); we hear of organizations of Filipino wives making a more positive image of Filipinas through community-based activities (Shipper, 2008; Suzuki, 2000); and observe that older Filipina migrants are re-training as caregivers and as English teachers as these jobs are not only seen as expanding their narrowing job options but also as having a better social standing than working in bars (Ballescás, Ballescás, Teshigawara, San Jose, & Watanabe, 2007; Bartashius, 2015; Lopez, 2012; Onuki, 2009). While I understand the necessity and value of highlighting women's agency, I must also caution against its uncritical valorization<sup>6</sup>. Women's agency must always be contextualized against the complex network of power relations which limit the options they have and constrain the choices they can make. A more nuanced analysis of agency must bring to light how it can be subverted as an integral element of a neoliberal subjectivity to produce individuals who are enterprising, self-governing, wholly responsible for their own success and so, their own suffering. Such an analysis has shown agency and a neoliberal subjectivity to have important, potentially devastating consequences for migrants (Walsh, 2011), women (Chen, 2013), and the elderly (Pond, Stephens, & Alpass, 2010), who are all enjoined to take full responsibility for securing the best outcomes for themselves and contributing productively to a society marked by multiple inequalities.

In the last decade, with mounting pressure to supply care labor for an ageing populace, both the state and private enterprises have turned to Filipinas in Japan and in the Philippines as a suitable supply. Filipino (men and women, but especially women) are discursively constructed at the level of official

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<sup>5</sup> A more complex analysis of the discursive maneuvering of the image from prostitute to wife-material by marriage brokers was carried out by Nakamatsu (2005). Suzuki (2003) complicates the picture of the rural Japanese farmer's Filipina wife as a passive victim by looking at their struggle to obtain economic autonomy and establish themselves as sexual subjects.

<sup>6</sup> This should not be taken to imply that the previously cited studies do.

Philippine discourse and at the level of everyday interaction with clients as being ‘naturally’ skilled, even ‘gifted’ at carework (Lopez, 2012; Onuki, 2009); and for Filipinas already in Japan, caregiving is framed as something they have already been doing as hostesses in bars and as wives and mothers (Lopez, 2012; Takahata, 2015). It is not just states, but non-state actors—business enterprises and non-profit organizations--- that are involved in the support and encouragement of further Filipina migration as caregivers into Japan (Piquero-Ballescás, 2009). The agency that Filipinas (in Japan and in the Philippines) can exercise in their pursuit of carework as employment in Japan should be understood in the context of the Philippines’ active deployment of particular images of the Filipinas in order to ‘market’ them as ideal labor migrants (Guevarra, 2009; Tyner, 2004), of a large network of businesses that seek to profit from them (Piquero-Ballescás, 2009), as well as the gender and ethnic inequalities in Japan that relegate carework to women and severely limit job opportunities for migrants (Douglass, 2000; Douglass & Roberts, 2000). As Lopez (2012) warns,

Any real opportunities that will arise from foreign residents or care workers who enter Japanese society should be predicated on a range of choices rather than the imposition of constituted categories. In other words, if foreign residents from previous moments in Japan’s recent history are to be productive members of Japanese society, they should be allowed to choose the direction in which they move, as opposed to being fitted into a category that labels them as care worker. (p. 265)

The migration of Filipinas in Japan, and the conditions of their stay, have always been severely limited by their construction in the discourse as being especially suited for feminine roles and occupations. Following social theorist Michel Foucault, I argue that these discourses find expression in women’s bodies, as the power that produces and is produced in discourse “seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people” (Foucault, 1980 in Sheridan, 1980, p. 216). The body, then, is an important locus for analyzing the workings of power. As other migration scholars have found, examination of an embodied mobility brings a deeper appreciation of how access to, options for, and the costs of mobility are different for different bodies (Dunn, 2010; Silvey, 2005). Research on Filipina migrants in Japan, even while they have not explicitly used embodiment as an analytic lens, have shown the body to be important for understanding their particular struggles, constraints, and strategies for survival. Hostesses use and tend to their body as capital (Parreñas, 2011) in their work; it is regarded as a sign of (or a means for displaying) success (for instance, see Faier, 2007 for participants’ remarks about observing returning Japayuki to have grown beautiful; Parreñas, 2011; Suzuki, 2000); and in rural communities suffering more acutely from population decline, Filipina brides’ bodies are valued for their capacity to bear Japanese children at the same time that marketing strategies by marriage-introduction companies minimize concern over their ethnic difference by avoiding mention of their skin color (Nakamatsu, 2005). In short it may be said that Filipinas’ bodies are valued for their femininity and ability to perform reproductive labor (of all kinds), but are also tagged as ethnically different. It becomes relevant to ask: within this context, where migrants are regarded cautiously but also increasingly as a necessity, where youth is a premium, and where Filipinas are associated with specific social roles and jobs, what possibilities for a positive subjectivity and embodiment are available to ageing Filipina migrants?

## Methodology

Sikolohiyang Pilipino and feminist psychology are both critical psychologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009; Paredes-Canilao & Babaran-Diaz, 2011) in that they agree that research is political; that language is a bearer and producer of culture and ideologies; that context and culture are crucial to understanding individuals; and that the power gap between researchers and participants must be addressed. Critical psychology is interested in power – how it operates, how it is used by, for, and/or against individuals (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). Both Sikolohiyang Pilipino and feminist psychology have extensive critiques of how the human sciences in general, and psychology in particular, have been used to oppress groups of people (e.g. women, the Filipino underclass). The use of these two within the methodological framework is to ensure that the study employs a critical approach to the gendered experiences of ageing Filipina migrants and the role that culture plays in the meanings they make out of those experiences.

For this study I used an indigenous Filipino method developed by Sikolohiyang Pilipino scholars for gathering large volumes of qualitative data called *pakikipagkwentuhan* (Orteza, 1997). *Pakikipagkwentuhan* is a method akin to a semi-structured interview often used in qualitative studies interested in subjective views and meaning construction rather than verifying ‘facts’ (Hugh-Jones, 2010; Riessman, 2008). The method is culturally-derived, and as such, as a process of exchanging stories or information, is familiar to Filipinos. For this project, I conducted *pakikipagkwentuhan* with 9 women, ranging in age from 48 to 67, from five different prefectures in Japan. *Pakikipagkwentuhan* topics covered migration to Japan (reasons, means, initial impressions, etc.), bodily changes over time, and plans for the future, with special attention to participants’ reasoning or meaning-making. The data was expected to provide insight on widely-circulated social discourses on migrants and ageing among individuals, but also the presence of alternative or opposing discourses. The specificities of Japan’s cultural, political, and economic landscape, as well as the Philippines’ cultural and state discourses around migration and ageing are expected to shape meanings, subjectivities, and material realities for Filipina migrants. In order to appreciate more fully the circumstances of the participants, who produced the data for the study, I provide a brief description of some key demographic information (employment status, marriage and family status, educational status) about the group below.

All but three women were still employed (some part-time) during the interviews. Only one participant had stayed as a full-time housewife after marriage. Jobs currently and previously held included: entertainer, small-business owner, factory worker, caregiver, English teacher, and interpreter. Many were also active as community volunteers. Three had previously worked as entertainers in bars around Japan, where they had eventually met their Japanese husbands. All participants have children, and all but one was married or previously married to a Japanese man, while one participant is married to a Filipino Nikkeijin. Three are currently divorced. The lowest educational attainment was second year high school; majority had a college degree, and one had a post-graduate education. In recruiting participants for the interviews, I was specifically interested in getting as diverse a group as possible within the time constraints I had. This is in line with the objective of obtaining a variety of experiences and discourses around ageing and migration. And while this group, because of its limited size and the sampling employed, cannot represent the views of the wider population of Filipinas in Japan, I would argue that they would be familiar, and be shared among this group as well. The utility of this sample is found not in its representativeness, but its ability to produce data that has salience and resonance to other Filipina migrants, which is a diverse group in itself.

Transcripts of the *pakikipagkwentuhan* form the dataset for the study. Thematic analysis (as outlined by Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to the data with a poststructuralist approach to language in order to

produce an analysis that makes connections between individual subjectivity and larger social discourses. A poststructuralist approach means that language is not taken to provide access to an individual's internal state or disposition, nor a reflection of an external, objective reality; instead, both—one's subjectivity and reality are constituted in language (Potter & Wetherell, 1998; Weedon, 1997). According to poststructuralism, language is the realm within which "actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested" (Weedon, 1997, p. 21). What this implies is that individuals (say, ageing Filipina migrants) do not exist 'objectively' outside of history and culture, but instead are constituted in discourse (e.g. in media, in political debates, in popular, everyday discourse) at a specific moment and place. An interest in language means an interest not in accessing the truth that talk is presumed to provide, but in a truth crafted within a particular context for a particular purpose. Within this view of language and power, subjectivity or our sense of ourselves is constructed in and through language (Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1997). Individuals, rather than having a fixed identity or 'essential' self, occupy different subject positions made available to them by the cultural repertoire of discourses so as to manage their moral location within social interaction (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2010). To conceive of subjectivity as a fluid, unstable product of competing discourses opens up the possibility of new forms of subjectivity arising from shifts in the wide range of discourses that constitute it (Weedon, 1997). The analysis will take participants' responses to be a product of cultural resources and the powers that shape subjectivity rather than an expression of ideas, memories, or dispositions 'extracted' from individuals. As well, they are conceived as a product of individuals' capacity for making sense of their experiences within the relations of power and for negotiating their own agency and constraints. The analysis will look at broad patterns as well as variations within and across individual accounts so as to capture the resonances of discourse at the individual level with those at the larger social or institutional level and to identify the spaces opened up for rejection and resistance of these more dominant discourses.

### Results and discussion

The above discussion of the context Filipina migrants find themselves in in Japan highlighted the specific challenges they might have as women, as ethnically different, and as older people in Japan. Seen to be ideal for fulfilling certain roles in Japanese society, Filipinas have a very narrow path within which to walk and establish themselves as acceptable, if not good, members of this society. The participants' stories acknowledged the difficulties of living and growing old as migrants in Japan, but also tended to emphasize the individuals' smarts and hard work that have led to their triumph. Below I divided the discussion into three sections, to look at the different ways in which a positive subjectivity might be crafted --- through embodiment of the good wife, mother and daughter-in-law, embodiment of the good migrant, and embodiment of the modern retiree. Each 'role' or 'persona' was derived thematically from participants' stories about life, work, and their future, as well as from existing literature. Each section below will discuss the significance of such a role, how it is embodied or performed, and what the material and discursive implications might be for Filipina migrants.

#### Embodying the good wife, mother, and daughter-in-law

All of the women interviewed were married or had been married, mostly to Japanese men. (Only two out of 10 participants had Filipino husbands.) For those women who came as wives to Japan, or who had worked, met, and then later married in Japan, the figuring out the roles of wife, mother, daughter-in-law in a Japanese family was a significant part of their life as migrants. This section outlines the expressed challenges of their experiences as Filipinas adjusting to and raising a family in Japan, and some important themes within those stories.

### *Gambatte kudasai!--- toughing it out in Japan*

The Filipinas I interviewed told many stories about the difficulties of their adjustment to married life in Japan. Although some already knew how to speak a little Japanese either from previous work experience as entertainers in Japanese clubs, and some Japanese husbands spoke English because of their work, language was a common difficulty. In addition, many were overwhelmed by the amount of work they were expected to do both inside the house and outside it --- doing a large proportion (if not all) of the housework, while also often helping husbands with work to supplement their family income<sup>7</sup>. A few like Dana, Fara, and Hope spoke of feeling like maids in their homes. The burden of house work Imee, for instance, who had worked professionally as a housekeeper and nanny in another country prior to marrying her Japanese husband (who was introduced to her by a common acquaintance in the Philippines), remarked that she had never experienced hardship the way she did upon coming to Japan. "I felt like I was going crazy. It's so hard. But I can't [give up] because I have children. I said, 'Lord, help me please because I can't understand the life he has. How do I adapt to what he wants?' Imee's situation is the most extreme as she became a victim of her husband's violence which eventually led to their divorce. However, many others echoed feelings of great frustration, loneliness, and exasperation; they were exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally from the stresses of learning a new language and culture, being away from everything that was familiar, carrying the burden of house work, and for several, balancing these demands with paid work. Hope, who found work as a part-time English teacher, expressed frustration about unequal care expectations in their family:

Hope: Sometimes I'm still in class and they'd bring me my child. That's ok but if it were the other way around would you [husband] agree? That's the sort of thing we argue about. There's lot's really [that make it challenging], see, here, it's rich country but there are no baby sitters. My siblings [in the Philippines] have baby sitters and house maids. (...) It was my first time abroad, and I found out it's like this.

I: Lots of work to do in the house.

Hope: Especially when it's just you in the house.

Although many of the participants saw and identified inequality in the sharing of house work as a stressor, this inequality often went unchallenged. As Dana said, "No, for me, it's like, natural. It's just that it's, um, in Japan, we go 'fight!' or as they say, 'gambatte'. You won't get anywhere [if you don't]." The attitude of keeping up the fight or toughing it out meant exercising great patience or forbearance in difficult situations, but also even under abusive conditions. Hope had to accept that she was expected to do all the cooking and cleaning for herself, her husband, and his parents, that she was not to have Filipina friends in the house, and that if she intended to take on paid work outside their home she cannot let it affect her ability to perform her chores at home. Despite not having done any housework in the Philippines herself, coming from a middle-class family that could afford to hire househelp, she aimed to "become the perfect wife" and did everything she was asked to do.

This last expectation about being to seamlessly run a household while also holding on to a (typically, part-time) job was something many of the participants recognized. A few waited until

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<sup>7</sup> Although participants cited various reasons for their interest in employment, four explicitly identified helping their husbands with the household expenses as one reason for going to work.

the children were older before they worked. A few found work they could do at home (like Cora, who did English tutorials at home). One (Fara) never worked after childbirth, but majority worked only part-time to make sure they had time to do housework and take care of their families. Fara's position as a full-time housewife who is well-supported financially by her husband is different from most others', but rather than describing the life as relaxing or luxurious, she described it thus: "I'm bored. I'm not doing anything because I'm only at home [all day]. I want to work, but the time needs to be adjusted to my husband's schedule. He doesn't want me to work, to leave the house early and come back in the afternoon, leaving them... not attending to them." Thus, Fara says she "grew old in the house". These stories around housework and employment indicate that the wife's primary duty is to her family, and its locus is the home. The women are bound by their duties to limit their movement and activities to the home. Such duties were felt to be frustratingly restrictive, especially by those whose expectations for themselves went beyond the confines of their home. As Hope articulated, "When I was 30 I still wanted to study. And I felt I was too much into my children. It's like, is this all I can be? And also, here in Japan, it may be that you are educated but when you get here you are illiterate."

In addition to these sometimes restrictive expectations, several women reported marital conflict that for three women (Alli, Dana, and Imee) ended in divorce from their Japanese husbands. Some conflicts commonly identified were related to difficulties in adjusting to local life, language, and culture, financial issues, negative attitudes of in-laws towards foreigners and difficulties living with in-laws. For the women who separated from their husbands, two had experienced physical assault. Interestingly, all three are still in contact with in-laws and are on good terms with them. None of the three were in a relationship at the time of the interviews, and all able to describe their ex-husbands as having been kind and helpful to them even if the relationship had ended poorly. Imee, who experienced more serious physical injuries from her husband and had to escape from him with her children, had felt conflicted about suing him in court to get a divorce, "Well, of course, no matter what has happened, I love my husband. Even if that's the life he has given me. He was still a part of my life."

For the remainder of this section, I will interrogate such experiences and expressions of hardship, love, and sacrifice and set it against larger social discourses on motherhood, femininity, marriage migration, and show how Filipinas negotiate for themselves a positive identity as mother, wife, and daughter-in-law in Japanese society.

### *Those other Filipinas*

In the literature, researchers have already shown that the image of the Filipina in Japan as either wife material or whore, and as victim or exploiter remain robust and relevant to Filipina migrants' everyday life (Nakamatsu, 2005; Suzuki, 2000). In talking about themselves, most participants also talked about 'other Filipinas' which they differentiated themselves from. These 'other Filipinas' are described in many ways, but spoken of with some negativity (such as disapproval, derision, pity). These are the kind of women the participants sought to distance themselves from to demonstrate their own sensible, moral, and responsible behavior.

Some of these 'other Filipinas' include those that marry only for money (which lead Imee to assert that she did not think of money but adventure when she married a man she had only just met and with

whom she could hardly communicate); those that think only of getting the most of what they can out of Japan without giving back; those who continue to work at night in bars even when they already have children; those who spend lavishly on family in the Philippines but do not help their Japanese husbands financially; those who become single mothers and state dependents; those who come from a lower class status or education in the Philippines; those who have affairs with other men even though they may be married to Japanese already. For example, the four participants who met their Japanese husbands outside of the Japan all spoke of a reluctance to marry and live in Japan, and of having had good career/business opportunities outside Japan --- Cora said she often remarked to other Filipinas that her story was very different from the others'.

It is important to note that these remarks are always gendered--- the others spoken about are always other Filipinas, and are strongly linked to the existing stereotypes of Filipinas in Japan. This discursive maneuvering served to create divisions and levels within a group that is often seen to be homogenous. For instance, Gina experienced being mistaken by doctors in the Philippines as 'Japayuki' and reported feeling upset about it. Cora also remarked that people who asked how she and her husband met must be suspecting that she had worked as a hostess and met her husband in a bar (she did not). In talking about 'other Filipinas' as they talk about themselves, participants were creating spaces for their experiences and realities that stereotyped images excluded. More importantly, it allowed them to negotiate positive views of themselves despite their similarity in other ways (e.g. having previously worked as entertainers, having married a Japanese man) to the 'other Filipinas' in Japan. The regularity with which participants remarked upon and contrasted themselves against 'other Filipinas' speaks of the power with which their lives are shaped by such discourses. The limits imposed on them by the negative stereotypes are felt in the friendships that may be lost, in poor regard and service among health professionals, and in the limited opportunities for employment available to them. And even though the sample is far from representative of the population of Filipina migrants in Japan in that they may have better education and are in a better financial status than the majority, these remarks demonstrate that these participants are not entirely immune to the impact of such discourses, and hint at the difficulties Filipinas face in Japan.

#### *Filipinas serving as Japanese wives*

Studies on Filipina migrants' lives as mothers and wives in Japan have indicated that the performance of such roles is an important source of a positive subjectivity for them (Faier, 2012; Suzuki, 2000; Umeda, 2009). Data from this study supports this and demonstrates how, in the effort to create a more positive identity apart from the stereotype of 'other Filipinas' in Japan, women perform the good wife, mother, and daughter-in-law even when it comes at great personal cost.

A few women spoke about being 'trained' by their mothers-in-law to be 'Japanese wives', or to do things the 'Japanese way'. It involved matters important for everyday life--- going to the market, preparing Japanese food for the family, assisting in or attending to important family events or festivals. The participants very quickly learned that wives carried a greater burden of the work inside the home:

Dana: And then she [mother-in-law] taught me. This is what a Japanese man's wife does. She said you need to wake up early, cook for them, stuff like that. I was crying. I saw myself as a maid. (...) Well, it's only the women who care enough to teach you anything. I don't know anything. I wasn't used to cooking. I wasn't used to doing the laundry. I

knew nothing back home [in the Philippines]. When I arrived here, I wanted to become the perfect wife. I followed everything [she taught me].

The idea of the perfect wife, specifically the perfect *Japanese* wife, is an ideal that is difficult even for Japanese women to achieve. Still, working within a context where Filipina women are generally devalued (because of association with bar work and prostitution, or with an exploitative, money-hungry nature) or valued *only* for being good wife and mother material<sup>8</sup>, participants are enjoined to embody the good Japanese wife and mother through the performance of care work for the family. That Alli proposed being long-suffering as a trait that Japanese men valued in Filipina wives exposes how Filipinas are expected to suffer much in the performance of their roles as wives to Japanese men. Indeed, other researchers have shown that Filipinas are coming to fill ‘vacancies’ left by Japanese women who were refusing to take on the burdens associated with marriage and raising children, particularly in rural areas in Japan (Douglass, 2000; Yoshihide, 2002). As a result of the narrow space Filipinas are allowed to claim a positive identity--- as good wife, mother, and daughter-in-law) --- participants bore a great part, if not all of, the burden of carework in their homes (including caring for elderly or ill in-laws), many struggled to juggle work at home and paid work (if they took it on), and a few put up with abusive treatment from in-laws and husbands.

However, as other researchers (Faier, 2012; Umeda, 2009) have found, to have succeeded in their suffering was a source of pride for women. Just as common as stories of conflict between in-laws and the Filipinas were expressions (often by the same women) of gratitude towards the in-laws for their support and acceptance, and pride at having gained their trust and affection. Hope, who said at first that she and her mother-in-law did not get along, said she was very touched that her mother-in-law said to Hope’s neighbor that she was “better/kinder than Japanese”. Dana said with pride that she has continued to visit and take care of her in-laws for 15 years after the divorce with her husband, and that they were both wanting to live with her in the future if one of them passes away.

Participants took pride in their being long-suffering (Dana and Imee), in being able to adjust (Cora), and in serving their in-laws, husbands, and children well. And while they also mentioned understanding and supportive husbands as important to marital and family life success, the more common attribution for success was to the individual woman’s own abilities, hard work, and forbearance. While this is a powerful narrative theme that points to women’s agency and ability to make the best of their situation, such a narrative does not allow women to question *why* they had to carry much of the burden of carework, and why there were so few other ways to secure a positive subjectivity outside of the space of the home and one’s family. So that, as the discourse of the Filipina as good wife and mother finds materiality in the everyday performance of these women and is strengthened thereby, the stigma against Othered Filipinas – those who continue to work in the entertainment industry for lack of other income opportunities, those who become state dependents, those who ‘fail’ at their marriages— remains. Together with the notion of ‘fighting’ (*gambatte*) and of the long-suffering, patient, and caring nature of Filipinas, these ‘other Filipinas’ are constructed to be personally responsible for

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<sup>88</sup> Alli said that Filipinas are popular as wives among Japanese men perhaps because they are “long-suffering, attentive, affectionate, and cheerful”.

their failures in being unable to embody the ideal wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Such notions conceal the difficulties migrant Filipinas encounter that result, not from a lack of proper attitude, will, or skill, but from the discrimination they suffer as women and as Filipinas, and from poor structural support for migrants in Japan.

#### *Embodying the good migrant*

This section discusses a large set of themes that pertain broadly to work, acculturation, and helping family and others. While seemingly unrelated, the three are relevant to establishing one's identity as a good migrant in the eyes of Japanese society and Philippine society. In Japan, much of the apprehension about migration stems from ideas about migrants threatening Japanese society through failure to contribute productively and failure to assimilate. This is why there is an emphasis on skilled migrants in Japanese immigration policy (Coulmas, 2007; Shipper, 2008), and also why ethnic and cultural similarities are emphasized while ethnic and cultural differences are downplayed where appropriate by marriage introduction companies (Nakamatsu, 2005). Filipina participants are positioned especially precariously among migrants to Japan as they are stereotyped very strongly in a negative light, limiting their options and opportunities for jobs and meaningful social interaction with Japanese. This section discusses more fully how Filipinas circumvent these limits and create spaces and possibilities for a positive subjectivity as migrants to Japan.

In Philippine society, the discourse around overseas Filipinos, men and women alike, are epitomized in the state-produced image of the Bagong Bayani (literally, 'new' or 'modern' heroes). The Bagong Bayani discourse constructs Filipinos as flexible and skilled workers well-suited for work abroad and as having the responsibility of helping support their individual families as well as the country through their remittances. This section will discuss how such expectations for migrants to contribute to development work shape the participants' subjectivity and affects their decisions regarding work, their finances, and their bodily presentation.

#### *"I came to Japan to work": The good, responsible worker as ideal migrant*

Of the ten participants, only three were not working at the time of the interviews. Of these three, two had worked part-time (employed or in business) for most of their lives in Japan and only one had not worked from the time she had gotten pregnant. Work is a significant part of these participants' lives in Japan, and has an impact on how they view and plan for growing older.

Many participants were motivated to work because they felt lonely and bored. Evie articulated it best when she said, "If I don't leave the house, I'd feel more anxious, I think. A bit. Because I have no one to talk to. I had to work not just for the money but for the psychological. Probably if I didn't work I'd be more anxious." Of course, money was strong motivator as well. Evie worked to contribute to her husband's income, to help pay for their mortgage. Other participants also took on work to help their husbands, and those who were later divorced also needed to work to ensure their own and their children's survival.

Job options for the participants were limited because of their limited language ability, especially at the beginning of their life in Japan (please see the methodology section for a description of the range of jobs participants held). Curiously, none of the participants themselves described the pursuit of a paid employment as difficult or the job options as limited. Instead, they highlighted the ease with which they

got jobs (albeit low-paid factory work, poor working conditions<sup>9</sup>, part-time only, or work that did not match their training and experience in the Philippines), the high (relative to the Philippines) pay, and the availability of opportunities for work even for those who are 'older'<sup>10</sup>. Beth said that she would work for as long as she can, because the opportunity for work in Japan was good, and that the work (in a bento factory) was easy. Despite the challenges that those employed in more poorly-paid factory work also cited--- physically taxing work, language problems, conflict with co-workers (both Japanese, Filipinos, and other migrant workers), and smaller chances for finding permanent employment--- these participants generally viewed employment conditions positively and chose to remain employed in the jobs they had found. Many of these difficulties are dismissed with a "*ganyan sila/dito*" (that's how they (Japanese) are/that's how it is here) suggesting that these conditions are accepted as givens and not to be confronted or questioned but accepted as part of the society they were living in. As such, the solutions presented by the participants showed them striving harder (*'gambaru'*) to be good workers--- refusing to quit work, doing their job well, learning to set their pride aside<sup>11</sup>, and managing conflict at work. As Beth often said to co-workers she had problems with, "I didn't come here to fight. I came to Japan to work". Despite such efforts, the negative impact of the difficulties Filipinas face at work (e.g. mental and physical stresses, the effect of night shift work, part-time work with little or no pension and health benefits) are significant. The negative effects of their disadvantages accumulate over time and become more apparent as the women age; at the same time, options for work become narrower and narrower<sup>12</sup>.

This construction of success at work as an individual responsibility is extended into particular notions of citizenship or membership in Japanese society. Many endorsed working well into old age, or for as long as physically possible, and avoid becoming state dependents. As Imee said:

See, here in Japan, it's better (than in the Philippines) because here, 60, 65, you can work as long as you can do it. And then here there is a pension when you turn 65 but I don't like to depend on the pension. I think it feels better if you're working. Or have your own income. See, here, it feels like, if you say one is pensioned it's like you're merely dependent on the nation's tax, that's what it feels like.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Beth's first job at a factory required that she wake up at 2am, be ready to be picked up by the company vehicle at 3am so that they could pick up other workers and arrive at the factory to start work by 5am.

<sup>10</sup> Despite having had a difficult time after her divorce with her abusive husband, Imee refused to go back home to the Philippines. She reasoned that, being in her early 30s and not having a college degree, she would no longer be able to secure the same jobs (e.g. seamstress, department store sales lady) she used to have in the Philippines. She said she had heard from neighbors that people over 65 could still work in Japan. Of course, while this is not untrue, the nature of employment, pay, and type of jobs available for those over 65 are much more limited than for younger people.

<sup>11</sup> As Jeng recounted, her friends in the Philippines could not believe that she would take on a job as housekeeper and babysitter as she had a graduate degree and ran her own largely successful business in the Philippines. She said, "Night and day, I was on my knees. You know how it feels when you're at the top and then you go to the bottom? That's so hard. That's so hard to accept. To become a maid when your position was so high. You were somebody in society. I bore with that for my family."

<sup>12</sup> Alli, who continued to work occasionally as a hostess well into her forties, said that that job was no longer open to older women, and that one must accept that one needs to find a different job (usually more poorly-paying than work as a hostess). Dana also mentioned she used to do night shifts (for which she received extra pay) at her workplace but now can only do it once a week (rather than thrice, as she used to) because she was "no longer young" her body could not take it anymore.

Globally, and also in Japan, there is mounting pressure to avoid becoming a burden to society. For Filipina migrants whose value to society is already suspect, the pressure is more keenly felt and results in individuals striving to occupy a more valued space through continued employment, avoiding state dependency, and taking responsibility for oneself in ageing. Jeng, in her application for permanent residency, said “I promised to the immigration before that I will not stay to be a burden in your society.” She aims to go back to the Philippines when she is no longer able to do housekeeping work. Thus, despite various expressed reasons for work (psychological need, financial need) such ‘needs’ cannot be understood outside of the economic and political pressures for individuals, but especially migrants, to be productive (read: engaged in paid employment) members of society; and while Filipina migrants are disadvantaged in many ways by socially-constructed inequalities (against gender, age, and ethnicity) in Japanese society, such disadvantages are dismissed as ‘just the way things are’. So that, to work in jobs that are way below their education and experience has become an acceptable norm for migrants in Japan. Jeng, who has experienced the most extreme gap in terms of occupation (housekeeper/nanny) and education (post-graduate degree) among the participants justified her position thus:

I just tell myself, this is my office. 9 o'clock [start] and then 5 o'clock I go home so I have my money. 13,000 yen. 14,000 yen. So I don't think about what kind of position you have. What's important is when you go home [to the Philippines] you are the boss. (laughs) You're better than the people you work for here because they don't have their own home. They only rent, in fact. And when they lose their jobs, some of them they become homeless. There are so many homeless here.

Jeng, like many others, still saw opportunities for herself and her family and argued that the status she may have lost in becoming a housekeeper in Japan is less important than the status she has gained in the Philippines through financial success, demonstrated by ownership of various properties. The idea of being conscientious about one's money and financial planning is something others repeat. Most participants mentioned taking care to pay for their health insurance and pension payments every month, and repeatedly dispensed advice about taking good advantage of earning opportunities while they are available and not squandering one's money. Dana struggled to work and study in order to get qualifications that will give her a better chance at securing a permanent job, “I want a permanent job because I want a pension when I grow older. (...) Most foreigners don't get a permanent job. To this day I have not heard of a Filipina getting permanent employment [not two-year long renewable contracts] in Japan.” I will return to this idea of self-responsibility, financial success and status as an important aspect of embodying the good migrant at a later point in this section.

In contrast, participants referred to ‘other Filipinas’ who were poor co-workers (source of conflict for the participants), who got into relationships with married Japanese men for money rather than work honestly, who did not work or plan well, who spent too much of their husband's money, and those who abused the system and received welfare benefits and then spent them irresponsibly. Alli, who divorced her husband and was qualified for seikatsu hogo when her children were younger spoke extensively about Filipinas who received such benefits:

Some of them are not deserving. It may be that back then, they were sick, or they were divorced. I didn't (take any myself). Child support, yes. But not like everything was free. So I'm pleased. I'm proud of myself. Because I was not part of that. I didn't become like, a

headache to them [Japanese government or society]. Not all Filipinas are like that. Because, it's my children who will carry that burden, right? Although, my husband then, he was paying a huge tax. See, that where they get that (welfare) from, from the taxes. (...) When we divorced, although I could have applied then, maybe I was just too principled. I have legs, I have hands. It's like you're disabled (if you go on welfare). Maybe it's really for people who really can't work. They can't move, and really need it. They are deserving. For me, I am not deserving (of welfare).

Dependency on the state and the abuse of welfare services by others is looked down upon by the participants. The idea that the main reason for being in Japan was to work is so strong among the participants that several participants said they would go home if they were no longer able to work (because of illness or age). Despite their many years of contribution to Japanese society through paid work and through care work for their families, participants may feel, like Alli, that they do not 'deserve' to receive support if they can no longer work or, like Jeng, that her permanent resident's visa in Japan is a well-earned privilege that gives her work opportunities but is premised on her not being a burden to Japanese society.

### *Successful acculturation*

Another way by which participant claimed to be good migrants was through demonstrating successful acculturation into Japanese society. This included gaining facility in the local language, becoming familiar with local customs and cuisine, and gaining a 'Japanese sensibility' or way of doing things. Acculturation was spoken of as important for everyday life in Japan (living with and caring for their Japanese families, working, etc.) and was described as being due to individual accommodation to new tastes and ways of doing things, and individual diligence at acquiring new skills (e.g. language skills, cooking and home-making skills, work-related skills).

Majority of participants spoke little to no Japanese on their first sojourn to Japan, and yet all but one claimed to be conversant, and two of the participants had gained enough facility in the Japanese language to work as translators, and one has been able to gain a professional license for which the exam is in Japanese. As Gina explained, one's language abilities depends on one's interest or motivation:

If you're interested in learning, then you'll work hard at it, right? See, I know a lot who are about the same age as me, we've both been here in Japan a long time, but she's still way behind in her speaking [Japanese]. In her language. Because maybe she's thinking, 'Well, I'm not staying here long'. (...) "Why should I study? What for?" It's a waste of time as she will go on back home [to the Philippines] I say, all right, I get you. But for now, you're here. So it really depends on the person. It doesn't matter what your work was, who you were. It depends how hard you work. If you want to live in a country with a culture that's different [from yours] of course you have to learn their culture as well.

While Gina's exposition began with language, she eventually carried over the idea of attitude and motivation being important for learning onto the broader concept of culture. She disagrees that the issue is merely a matter for pragmatics (that one who intends to go back to the Philippines need not waste time on learning Nihongo) and suggested that it is a responsibility of any migrant to make the effort to learn the host society's culture ("of course you have to learn their culture"). In this excerpt, Gina made clear that those who fail to gain a good grasp of the Japanese language despite having

lived many years in Japan are people who failed at their responsibility to be good migrants, and failed at exerting the right amount of effort to acculturate.

As in Gina's account, acculturation was shown to be possible through hard work in Dana's story. She studied every day and biked to the city center for her Nihongo classes. However, she also showed how invested her Japanese family members were in ensuring she became 'Japanese'. Her husband quizzed her nightly on Nihongo words. Her mother-in-law enrolled her in Nihongo classes and in ikebana classes, and had her wear a kimono for special occasions. "She made me Japanese," said Gina. To 'be Japanese' was important for claiming respectability for Filipinas whose value was suspect (having been associated with undesirable jobs or backgrounds). Learning the language well meant for Gina that she would not look so pitiful being dependent on her husband to translate everything. She also followed Japanese fashion trends appropriate for her age and her job, aiming to look neat, tidy, and not "out-of-place", so as to earn respect. On the other hand, Hope talked about never leaving the house without some make-up on because to do so would be to appear 'nama' (raw or unpolished), which she understood to be unacceptable for women in Japan to do. To not embody what is expected of women in Japan would mean inviting criticism, especially difficult for Evie who looks ethnically Japanese, and who worried that, "When they [the Japanese] see me they think I'm Japanese, they will judge from the point of view of being Japanese. You'll now be um, [the odd one]. The Japanese is not following the Japanese rule, right?" Rewards for successful acculturation were also apparent. Dana spoke proudly about her language ability, "I became president of the school [parents' association]. Because I'm really good at Japanese, and I really read well. I really studied all of it." It is clear then, that learning the language, norms, and practices of the Japanese is important for practical reasons (such as being able to communicate with one's Japanese family, behaving appropriately in public), but also for enhancing feelings of pride and self-efficacy in migrants. Those who are successful can enjoy the attendant rewards take pride in their accomplishments, while those who are unsuccessful may feel ashamed or incompetent and have more limited opportunities for participating actively in their communities and families.

#### *From Japayuki to Bagong Bayani*

The term *Bagong Bayani*, which translates to new or modern-day hero, was first used by President Corazon C. Aquino to refer to overseas Filipino workers in a speech she made to them in Hong Kong in 1988. The term has been argued to emphasize the role of overseas Filipinos in nation-building (Guevarra, 2009), and is explicitly linked by the Philippine government to particular obligations such as remittance-sending, paying taxes, and becoming a development partner through investments (Guevarra, 2009; Rodriguez, 2002; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). The idea of helping one's country and one's family (becoming a hero) and making sacrifices for them is well-entrenched in popular discourse and is a common theme in the participants' stories, and can be an important source of a positive sense of self as a migrant in Japan.

In fulfilling these expectations for a successful Filipino migrant, Jeng (who worked for 30 years as a housekeeper in Japan, living by herself apart from her husband and children) spoke proudly of her accomplishments and looked forward to enjoying them further when she retired:

Jeng: For the long term, what I really want is [to live in] the Philippines. I will definitely go home. (...) Because my house there is so large. I have an apartment. I have lands. I also want to enjoy the fruits of my hard work. And also I will be able to help a lot more people. I have people I am sending to school. I sponsor them.

Jeng may be described as having experienced ‘contradictory class mobility’ — a term migrant scholar Rhacel Parreñas (2001) used to refer to Filipinas’ experience of the simultaneous increase in financial status because of overseas employment, alongside a decline in their social status because of the low regard for domestic work. However, in Jeng’s story, what is highlighted is not so much the loss in status (although it is never denied) but the increase in her status not just because of financial gain but her having been able to help others secure better options for their future through education, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Jeng: At least financially, I’m not, um [doing so bad] because I’ve helped a lot of people. I’m not rich. Just right. But I’ve given others a lot.

I: A lot of help?

Jeng: Yes. See, that’s what’s important: you are not selfish.

The idea of helping others, both family and non-family, fellow Filipinos in the Philippines and in Japan, is valued highly by the participants. All participants are engaged in these various forms of helping, one way or the other. Some are helping send siblings or siblings’ children to school, some are continuing to send money for elderly parents’ living costs; many are involved in community-or church-related organizations that help support others (e.g. Filipino community in Japan, Japanese in difficult circumstances, other migrants in Japan).

I do not wish to diminish the value of the helping that these women do, nor the pleasure, pride, and status the gain within their community for doing these. However, I do need to point out that such helping comes at a cost. Filipinas struggling with narrower job options as migrants and as women in Japan and then balancing paid work and care work at home are also expected to contribute to their societies through investing their time and money in/for the benefit of others. Those who are in more difficult situations (say, are unemployed, divorced, are ill, or caring for an ill or elderly spouse or in-law) are less able to make those investments and are then at risk of being labelled ‘selfish’ or ‘lazy’ --- not having worked hard enough or sacrificed enough to meet the challenges that came their way. A few participants talked about other Filipinas who were ageing in poverty (Santos, 2016) and who refused to go home because they were ashamed and worried about not having been able to save enough. Jeng’s story of success, told with pride, is also fraught with difficulties and pain:

When I was building my house in 20XX, it was as if I was being chased by a horse. (...) Once you start building a house, you can’t stop it. It is continuous. The money just flows out. You really work, work. I was like a, I think I pushed too hard. I got hypertension.

The image of being chased by a horse captures quite clearly the relentlessness of the need to make money, and also send it (flowing endlessly, continuously) back to the Philippines. Alli reflected on this and on her diminishing financial capacity as she grows older and said to her children, “Please let me ‘graduate’ [from sending money continuously]. When I am I going to graduate? Apparently mothers never graduate [from this duty/burden].” Like Alli, other participants also anticipated a continued need

for them to help family members even as their ability to generate income through paid employment in Japan decreased, and are motivated to find ways to continue helping them financially. A few have already started businesses in the Philippines and a few plan others to do so not just for their own benefit but for the benefit of their families. With such a high value placed on these women based mainly on their financial contributions to their family, it is no wonder that a few reported feeling unhappy that they had diminished financial capacities and could no longer give as much as they used to.

### *The looks of success*

Many of the participants remarked that their bodies have changed over the years --- weight gain, wrinkles, health issues, decline in energy, hearing or sight problems; the changes are sometimes compared favorably to others, especially same-age family or friends back in the Philippines. Some see the changes as natural in ageing. Others see the changes as being due to living in Japan. This section will focus on those bodily changes, perceived reasons, and motivations for pursuing body work (i.e. working on the body through exercise, diet, or use of some products to produce a particular look or result) that are related to living as migrants in Japan. I will argue that Filipinas' bodies are read for signs of success in migration; the maintenance of youth and beauty thus carry this meaning in addition to an interest in desirability or avoiding stigma as it is often discussed in the literature bodies (Clarke, Griffin, & Maliha, 2009; Holstein, 2006; Lupton, 1996; Slevin, 2010).

Migrant success has been discussed in other literature as being demonstrated through consumption (Danzer, Dietz, Gatskova, & Schmillen, 2014; Leonini & Rebughini, 2012; Mills, 1997). Anthropologist Umeda's (2009) field work among Filipinas married to Japanese men in rural Japan showed that their *satogaeri* (the wife's first trip to her natal family) meant large feasts and numerous gifts for family and the community which served to demonstrate not just their affluence in Japan but their husbands' support. Cora talked about being satisfied with her life with her husband in Japan, expressed thus: "I mean, I cannot ask for more. Anyone would be happy to be his wife because you can eat where you want to eat. I can buy what I want to buy. I can travel [if I want]." Such ability for consumption is demonstrated on the body which one is able to invest in (e.g. purchase of good food, gym membership, beauty products); Dana shared that her friends in the Philippines remarked upon seeing her, "Money makes quite a difference [in one's looks]!" Fara explained that if she had not had the fortune of marrying and living in Japan, she might look quite different:

Fara: You'd really look like a mother who, is, nothing, ordinary [person], like.

I: What do you mean, really look like a mother? You're a mother here, too, right?

Fara: Yeah, but even if you're a mother, it's still different.

I: Is the life here different that's why the body, the looks are different?

Fara: Yes. You're able to take care of yourself here. Because you have time for yourself and even if it's just a little you have some money to buy stuff for yourself to get yourself done. And, if you were in the Philippines, would you be able to buy that? If you had a husband, how many children would you have? Instead of on yourself, it will all go to your children. It's different if you compare it to life here. And the things you want to do or want to eat, you

can eat here. Even if your life is ordinary, if you have money, you can eat what you want. Back home [in the Philippines], no. (...) Here, even if you're poor, but you have a job, you have money to pay for these things, you can buy what you want.

Fara suggested the more radical idea that there is greater social equality in Japan than in the Philippines, and that this equality at the chance for a good quality of life is what makes for a difference in how she looks, despite being an 'ordinary' housewife in Japan. Other than a significant difference in one's resources (i.e. time and money) for 'taking care' of oneself, participants also suggested that the culture or environment in Japan could also be the cause of the changes (or non-change) in their bodies--- they were able to walk or ride bicycles more in Japan, the quality of air and food are better, the affordability of good quality food, makes it almost inevitable for those who have lived in Japan to display 'better' bodies --- more youthful, more fit, and, therefore, more attractive than their counterparts in the Philippines. Even fat bodies are seen to be a desirable result in some way: "That is my wealth," claimed Gina, after hearing others comment on her increasing waistline; "It's just shiawase (happiness, good fortune)", said Imee to co-workers who also noticed the same.

This seemingly 'natural' outcome of life as a migrant in Japan is belied by the amount of money, time, and self-control participants exercised in order to produce a particular body. And although participants talked about using makeup and beauty products, fashion items (which for a few included expensive designer goods), gym memberships, vitamins and supplements, for various reasons --- to feel youthful, to stay attractive, for health reasons, for their own pleasure, the value of these investments for signaling a successful life as a migrant in Japan cannot be dismissed. As Jeng admonished, "Don't go home looking like a loser. That's how it should be." Imee, who arguably had a more difficult life than most of the other participants after having suffered domestic violence, divorce, and single parenthood in Japan, was motivated to "not be defeated" by loneliness and problems:

So I tell myself, if I let my loneliness overtake me, nothing's good is going to happen, there will only be more lines [on my face]. Right? If you let the loneliness take over, my god, the lines, my goodness. You'll see lots in the mirror, jesusmaryandjoseph. I don't care if my body is shapeless like a drum, but I don't want to see my wrinkles, yeah?

This 'natural' outcome is much more difficult to achieve for women who have less time and money to spare. Filipinas who suffer greater stresses due to loneliness, poor social integration, divorce, and who work in more physically demanding jobs and more demanding schedules (long shifts, night shifts) for less pay are less likely to maintain a conventionally beautiful body. These women may not only feel ugly and old, but also feel like failures as migrants compared to other Filipinas who are able to present more 'beautiful' bodies and faces. Just as Filipina migrants can find the building of homes in the Philippines a concrete expression of their achievements in migration (Faier, 2012), bodies can also be physical, intimate expressions of such success; but while the size, structure, and design of houses can be infinitely malleable, ageing human bodies are not so 'docile' and are much more limited in how they can be shaped (Ong, 2015).

analysis part 3: modern retiree

### Embodying the modern retiree

Discussions around an increasingly elderly Japanese population have centered around the costs of such a population to society. In more recent years, global discourse and policy-making on ageing has come to reflect neoliberal ideas and focus on individual choice and responsibility for one's ageing while diminishing state regulation of and support for services for older people (Coole, 2011). The image of the 'modern retiree' (Rozanova, 2008) who is enjoying a 'positive' or 'successful' ageing in popular discourse has been criticized as being deceptively empowering, in that ageing persons are given the power and choice for their well-being but also blamed for it when they are ill and poor. The discourse of the 'modern retiree' ignores the diverse social contexts and multiple disadvantages individuals can experience over their lifetime which affect their ability to achieve 'successful' outcomes in ageing. This section argues that such a discourse is familiar to and is valued by Filipina migrants in Japan, and is shaping how they think about, plan for, and act on their own ageing. Filipina migrants understand that it is their responsibility to manage their own finances, their health, and their care in the future so as to ensure they are not a burden to society and to their families. Distinct to them as Filipina migrants is the possibility of transnational retirement as a strategy for 'successful' ageing, and the idea of managing their families' expectations for continued financial support.

### Managing one's finances

Many of the participants expressed fearing or worrying about becoming a burden to their children as they aged. They saw it as their responsibility to ensure that they had the financial capacity to meet their needs in the years to come. Several (Beth, Evie, Gina, Cora) mentioned living more simply and consciously spending less on non-essentials (e.g. designer goods, eating out, travel). Three (Hope, Gina, and Jeng) had already begun to establish businesses for the purpose of ensuring a steady and adequate income and some are planning to do business in the Philippines or in Japan. More overwhelmingly, participants reported being conscientious about paying for their insurance (of which there are many types and options) to ensure that they received pensions and had medical coverage when they needed it. A few others pointed out that they could very well continue to find employment in Japan past the age of 65. The following two excerpts are examples:

Alli: You see, here [in Japan], (...) age doesn't matter. I know one Filipina. She's become my inspiration. Although I've known her a while, I only just found out her age. She's still working in a hotel.

Imee: Yeah you can't stay forever in the Philippines because first of all, there, when you get to 65, you won't be able to work anymore, and you only get a pension at the start. Aside from that, the government here helps with the... we have a health card here where you pay, really, only a small amount. (...) Yes [you do pay for it] but it's really affordable. They know your age, that you can't pay very much, so that's it. (...) Whatever happens, here [in Japan], as long as you have a health card and you're qualified, you can go to a hospital without paying for a single cent.

A common theme in participants' explanation of their plans and ideas for their ageing is that better possibilities are available to them because they are migrants in Japan, and that they must then be responsible and take advantage of these opportunities --- the opportunity to continue working past 65 (albeit as a chambermaid in a hotel), to pay for health insurance to ensure

affordable care in the future. Many make comparisons in the opportunities for financial security in the Philippines and in Japan, and come to the conclusion that being a migrant in Japan has afforded them certain advantages for securing a 'successful' ageing. That said, other perspectives offer a more nuanced view. Evie and Cora brought up the fact that hospitalization can be very expensive (even with insurance, which will not cover room cost according to Evie), and so strove to not get sick. In addition, Evie observed that the cost of living in Japan was getting higher and higher, that pensions were not always enough, and that "everybody worries about it now." In light of these observations, it becomes clear that while being able to work past 65 and the availability of health insurance may be seen as opportunities unavailable in the Philippines that Filipina migrants one can 'choose' to take advantage of or not, they may also be regarded as necessities not only by migrants but by the vast majority of people growing older in Japan. Indeed, as Evie remarked, "If you had worked here [in Japan] and contributed to the pension fund somehow, you get some, somehow. But if zero [contributions], then nothing. Only from your children then, if you live with them." Migrants, especially women migrants, are disadvantaged under such a system as Evie described, because they will have worked for less years in the country and will have been limited in the jobs and the employment type (contractual, part-time employment rather than permanent, full-time employment). And yet, in order to claim an identity as a responsible older person, citizen, and mother, they are called on to exhaust their physical, emotional, and financial resources to avoid being a 'burden' to their children and to society.

#### *Managing one's health*

Other than their finances, all participants reported feeling concerned about and responsible for their health. Some identified natural changes in ageing, work conditions and stresses, and genetics as reasons for their current health complaints. However, a strong theme running through stories about health, particularly in the maintenance of good health, was the idea of responsibility and self-control. Many participants endorsed the idea of responsibility for health and reported controlling what they ate, exercising (or planning to exercise), consuming health supplements, seeking advice from medical practitioners, and looking for and evaluating health-related information (from television, from seminars, from the internet) in order to maintain or regain good health. The imperative to take responsibility for one's health echoed in many other participants' accounts can be seen in this extended quote from Fara:

Fara: Here in Japan, you really need to go get a check-up all the time. See here, I don't know how it is for others, but me and my husband we go get a medical check-up every year. Because, when you get to 40 [years of age], you're obliged to get a check-up.

I: Yearly?

Fara: Yearly.

I: You have to pay for that?

Fara: Yes, of course you have to pay. And there's also insurance here. Like health insurance in the Philippines. You're really obliged to um.

I: How come you say obliged? You can't not get a check-up?

Fara: No, it's not that. Here in Japan, there are people who don't go for check-ups, and then they'll find out when they get sick that it's already very bad. There are cases like that. So

that's why they say when you get to 40, that's when your body starts to um [deteriorate], you'll start to feel a lot [going wrong] so while it's early you need to go on check-ups so they can catch it early. Especially the Japanese. It's often cancer that they get. As much as possible, to avoid or solve it immediately, you need to go on your check-ups all the time.

Such actions and such a way of thinking is consistent with a growing healthism, a term coined by Robert Crawford (1980) upon observing that health was becoming a moral and social concern (particularly for the American middle class). The concern for health expanded to include more 'holistic' notions of well-being and success, defining good citizenship and positive personal identities (Crawford, 2006). Self-control in and self-responsibility for health can have important symbolic value even though assiduous effort at preventing illness and promoting fitness cannot guarantee perfect health (Crawford, 2006). In the context of ageing, the concern for maintaining the health of a body that is progressively moving farther from the 'ideal' of a youthful one has important implications for subjectivity, as evidenced by participants calling themselves 'lazy' or implying they are 'irresponsible' or 'selfish' for being unable or unwilling to pursue health effectively. Compounding the pressure to be 'responsible' older citizens pursuing a 'successful' ageing is the perception that a major barrier to health (cost of health care and monitoring) has been eliminated or drastically reduced in Japan compared to the Philippines. Several other participants note that healthcare is free or far more affordable in Japan (For instance, Jeng said, "Thank God, I have general check-ups, and that's free. That's what's great here in Japan, you're taken care of."). Again, the inequalities that Filipina migrants in Japan experience which have an impact on their health and their resources for maintaining it are obscured. Beth has suggested that her work may have been at least partially responsible for her contracting diabetes<sup>13</sup>, and Imee's back problem is not likely to improve given that her job requires her to lift heavy objects. Beth's limited understanding of Nihongo makes doctor visits challenging for her and requires that a family member (with better Nihongo) accompany her. It has happened that she has delayed consulting with a doctor for a health issue because no family member was available to go with her.

#### *The aging Bagong Bayani's responsibility*

As discussed in the previous section on the good migrant, participants acknowledge an obligation to help their families in the Philippines financially. Many continue to help family members and send money occasionally or as the need arises. However, in recognition of their diminishing capacity and opportunities for work, participants negotiated with their own families to decrease or stop sending remittances so that they can also save for their own futures. Other participants said something similar to Beth:

So sometimes I speak frankly to them [my siblings]: You, your own children have families, now. You have to learn to find a way when you need something, and not just run to me because I'm getting on in years. Of course I have to focus on my own ageing, too. (...) [You have to explain to your family] so they won't depend on you so much; see, it's like you're the one who allowed/encouraged their dependence on you.

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<sup>13</sup> Beth said, "As I said, 'Doc, maybe that's how I got diabetes because when I was working the night shift it made me sleepy. I had nothing to take my mind off it but to put my hand in my pocket which was full of chocolate. I didn't take care of myself. But when I was in the Philippines I did often check... my sugar. (...) I suppose it's also my fault that I got it [diabetes]. Beth explained her night work was a factor, but she also claimed responsibility for having developed diabetes.

Beth talked lengthily about helping her siblings and their families, saying that she had been overly generous with them before. “It was also my fault, then. I was the one who just kept going like that (makes repeated handing over motion to indicate giving).” It appears that migrant Filipinas are not only obliged to help family members (see previous section), but also obliged to regulate or manage such help so these people do not become dependent on them, and also to protect their own finances. Despite the encouragement to express their success through consumption (see previous section), migrant Filipinas must also take care not to do this to excess so as not to jeopardize their future, as illustrated in this exchange with Fara:

Fara: There are some Filipinas who work themselves to the bone working here for their families. All their siblings’ needs, they give even if they suffer here. Me, I don’t want that. What I say is, I will help if I can but if I have nothing then don’t rely on me. That’s what I always tell my siblings. You work for yourselves. Some people here, such show-offs when they go to the Philippines. You’ll think they have lots of money but nobody knows they have so much debt here. (...) That’s what I cannot do. I will not suffer for their whims/luxuries.

(...)

I: Why is it that, why is it other are pressured, or forced to, say, give [to their families]?

Fara: Maybe they don’t want um [people to know] their life here, they’re poor here, their families don’t know what they do here.

This balance is a difficult thing to accomplish as consumption and remittances are important sources of a positive identity for migrants, given the emphasis on these as indicators of success. However, for ageing migrants, the changes brought about by ageing can be an useful platform for negotiating with family for less financial support (as Beth did in the above excerpt). Alli, who said that she still continues to extend financial help to her adult children in the Philippines, has said, “They understand me now. ‘Mama’s not young anymore.’” indicating that her pleadings or complaints<sup>14</sup> to them about asking her for money were now being heard.

#### *Exploring transnational retirement: The modern retiree migrant’s strategy for success*

Asked about their plans for the future, many participants (5/10) said they would prefer to go home to the Philippines eventually, to live there permanently or to go back and forth<sup>15</sup> the Philippines and Japan. They explained that settling in the Philippines meant being able to enjoy a comfortable life (physically, socially, and financially) --- being able to enjoy warm weather throughout the year, the company and care of family members and community (which they say is not likely in Japan), and the lower cost of living in the Philippines. As Fara said, “As long as you have money in the Philippines, life is good in the Philippines.” I will interrogate this statement to show what it implies about what a good life is, the differences between Japan and the Philippines, and the necessity of money, as the discussion goes further.

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<sup>14</sup> The original in Filipino is ‘ingay’, literally translated as noise (“Ang ano nila, nagbibigay nga ako pero maingay naman.” They say, I do give [them money] but I make a lot of noise.). It could mean that she is perceived by her children to nag at them, to complain or speak harshly everytime they ask her for money.

<sup>15</sup> Participants who want to keep their permanent resident’s visa must travel to Japan yearly.

All participants generally spoke highly of the Japanese government's support for the elderly (see previous discussions), and of Japan as a safe, peaceful, and beautiful place to live in. And yet, quite a few planned to go back to the Philippines in old age because they had negative views of elderly care in Japan:

Cora: If, shall we say, you're there (in the home for the elderly), you pay for it, and then what happens to you? Then you're imprisoned. I call some of them the living dead. You are alive, but you're imprisoned there. You can't just [go], you have no freedom. You're like a prisoner or something. (...) So that someone will watch over them, they [the children] put them there [in the homes for the elderly]. That's what I don't want. Think about it, you're still fine/sane, but still you can't come and go as you please. So many things you're not allowed. If you're by yourself, or with your relatives, even if you're not eating all three meals, you will eat. But I'm sure you'll live. See, there [in those homes for the elderly] their brains will go blank because there's no communication.

Dana: Back home [in the Philippines], when you grow old, even if, say, no one takes care of you, the neighbors won't let anything happen to you. Isn't it like that back home? I suppose it depends, I don't know how it is in other places, but in our town, me, we had a neighbor there, the old person was living alone, my relative would bring him/her food all the time. Gives them a shower. Takes care of them even if they're not related. Just neighbors. It seems we have what the Japanese call 'ataakai'. We have love, care. We have all of that.

I: It seems odd they have that word, atataakai, but you don't see them doing that for their neighbor.

Dana: Oh no. Here nobody minds anybody. (...) They're like that, too. They have it too. Anywhere you go there is that. But if you want atataakai, or you want it good, well, since I'd already worked so hard here, what I want is, when I go home, when you grow old, you're in the Philippines. You'll have a good um, even if your life is not all good but your environment. Here, when you grow old, it's all the same. Your children are busy, too. (...) I'm afraid to grow old here. (...) When I'm old I might get shouted at by my daughter-in-laws. That happens often here.

In Dana and Cora's accounts, echoed in other participants' stories, care provision in Japan (whether in homes, living with or close to family or by oneself, or in communal homes run by public or private organizations) is contrasted highly with that in the Philippines and evaluated to be unacceptable. Love, concern, or caring is seen to be absent or in short supply in Japan, while the Philippines is idealized to have these in great amounts ("We have love, care. We have all of that."). While clearly and consistently described to be poorer in other accounts (see above discussions on managing health and finances), the Philippines is almost romanticized in the context of caring for the elderly --- the Filipino community and family is imagined to be abundant in love or atataakai even if deficient in financial and structural support for the elderly. There is little recognition (except perhaps by individuals such as Gina, who herself had to take care of her ailing Japanese mother-in-law) that carework can be extremely taxing physically, emotionally, and financially on the caregiver, that providing carework can have serious financial consequences for the person (typically the woman) who provides this care (Wakabayashi & Donato,

2006), or that securing the best possible care under qualified professionals in an environment built to accommodate the elderly's needs can be a valid expression of love.

As a way of meeting their needs for a 'loving' community in ageing, many participants, even the three who said they would not want to permanently stay in the Philippines as they grew older (Evie, Gina and Imee), plan to practice what is now known in scholarly literature as *transnational retirement* (Gustafson, 2002; Toyota & Xiang, 2012). Transnational retirement, a fairly recent phenomenon where retirees set up residence in another country in order to maximize their pensions and enjoy a preferred lifestyle, has been made possible by more affordable transportation and technological advances in communication, greater longevity, affluence and globalised systems (Gorringe, 2003) as well as changes in lifestyle preferences and more widespread experiences of living and working abroad (Gustafson, 2008). Unique to the participants as migrants to Japan is the option of transnational retirement in a country that they regard (also) to be home, different from that of other transnational migrants more typically discussed in the current literature (for instance, Swedish retirees residing in Spain during winter in Gustafson, 2002). The participants who wanted to live in the Philippines clearly articulated the financial advantages of living there, but all participants desired to go on a regular basis for visits to their hometown and their families there (extended and immediate--- a few had children, grandchildren and parents there). Those who decided they would stay in Japan permanently said that their children were here and that the cost of health care in the Philippines was a worry; this worry about finances in the Philippines in case of a personal or family emergency was one that even those who planned to stay there permanently recognized. This dilemma is best summed up in this excerpt from Cora:

But I'm thinking if I go home like for medicare, or medical needs, I'm disadvantaged in the Philippines. But the sadness, I'm disadvantaged here. And here, you'll be imprisoned [in a home for the elderly]—you haven't got a lot to talk to. If you're alone. You could die here and your neighbor wouldn't know. Right? But as for hospitalization, all of those things, I'm for here [Japan]. See, here, the [Japanese] government will not neglect you. (...) In the Philippines (...) if you get sick, where will you run if you do n't have any money? But then again it's lonely [here in Japan]. Whereas there, your neighbor, especially if you like to talk, since you're there anyway you can make friends, you'll be occupied. Even if you start to argue, at least you have someone to argue with.

Cora's back-and-forth comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the Philippines and Japan reflects the back-and-forth travel that many participants plan to do in order to try and gain as much of the positive from both countries as they can --- enjoy the perceived peace and (relative) prosperity of Japan and the warm weather and relationships they have nurtured over the years in the Philippines. It also reflects the fact that, despite the seeming expansion of their options as migrants in Japan, the kind of comfortable ageing they imagine—one with financial security, relatively good health and access to health services, and meaningful relationships with family and community—remains elusive for most.

### Conclusion

Economic, political, and cultural changes, gendered processes, and ageism shape policies and the everyday realities of migrants. Across its history, Japan has used migration to fill in labor gaps and to fulfil nationalist needs for expansion, but has used women in very specific ways. Some migrants are more privileged than others, but the current status of Filipina migrants is precarious --- they are held between the dichotomy of mother and whore, the innocent and the exploiter, moral and immoral.

Always, the migrant is imagined to be young--- productive and/or reproductive, able to contribute to Japan's shrinking population and economy. Migrants and the elderly are both regarded cautiously, as they are constructed as having great economic and social costs but also, in recent times, as potentially offering opportunities for Japanese society.

It is within this context of precariousness and flux that we find older Filipina migrants struggling to craft a positive subjectivity and to secure a 'good life' for themselves and their families. Data has shown that the socially-produced constraints in opportunities and resources arising from stereotypes about Filipinas limit their options severely, making the embodiment of the good wife and mother extremely significant to them. They have shown that because of Japan's wariness of migrants, and the Philippine's regard of overseas Filipinos as resources for economic development, Filipinas are motivated to seek paid employment and contribute as much as they can to the economies of two countries. They have shown that given fears about the burden of an ageing population have, Filipinas are taking steps to avoid becoming burdens to their families and their countries. Despite limited support for language learning, limited job opportunities, the stresses of managing paid work and care work for their families, the demands for financial support from family in the Philippines, and the bodily changes due to age, Filipina migrants in Japan are called on to 'gambaru' and keep on, being fully responsible for their success (and for its display through consumption) as well as their failures. The injustice does not go unnoticed --- some participants called themselves 'maids' in their homes, and raised the question to their families in the Philippines, "When will I graduate [from sending money]?". While there is some resistance, and with participants given marginal space to refuse or at least renegotiate the terms of their service to their families (both in Japan and in the Philippines) given the material changes in their ageing bodies, such spaces are small and fragile as the more powerful ideals related to being a 'good' woman, 'good' migrant, and 'good' older person remain unchallenged. Hopefully, in showing how the reduction of people into mere economic resources or burdens (even as they articulate more complex desires and motivations) diminishes human beings, this study contributes to challenging those ideals and showing how social inequalities determine to a great degree how well we achieve a comfortable and meaningful life in ageing.

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