

## NOTES

1. Several valuable histories of the Internet exist online. See Bruce Sterling, "A Short History of the Internet," at [www.aces.uiuc.edu/AIM/SCALE/mehistory.html](http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/AIM/SCALE/mehistory.html) (10 August 2000); and Barry Leiner et al., "A Brief History of the Internet," at [www.isoc.org/Internet-history/brief.html](http://www.isoc.org/Internet-history/brief.html) (4 September 2000).
2. Charles J. Stivale, "Cyber/Inter/Mind/Assemblage" in *Berg On Line: New Subjectivities* ed. Alan Sondheim sp. issue of *Lusitania* no. 8, 1996, pp. 119–25.
3. My most sincere thanks go to Rosío Alvarez for trying to help me understand the intricate workings of digital communication. I have been a poor student, however, preferring instead to whittle away my time in chat rooms. Technical errors in describing a technology I do not fully understand are therefore my own.
4. Of course, attempts to regulate the Internet are numerous and multifaceted. For further reading on legal issues related to the Internet, including freedom of expression in cyberspace, intellectual property issues, privacy and encryption, jurisdiction and transborder issues, personal safety and equity issues, see UCLA Online Institute for Cyberspace Law and Policy.
5. See *¡Ya Basta!* Web page, [www.ezln.org](http://www.ezln.org).
6. News groups are asynchronous, structured around wide-ranging topics of interest. The initials generally give some indication of the list. Those that begin with alt., for example, generally have to do with alternative lifestyles; rec. refers to recreation and includes games, the occult, and fan-based groups; soc. refers to society and includes many newsgroups of international and cultural interest. On some of these lists, queer groups use the initials *mors* (members of the same sex) as a

means of encrypting their content and warding off entry to potentially homophobic users.

7. Rumor functions in all news media. Minutes before the final 1998 World Cup game between Brazil and France, *Univisión* erroneously reported that Rolando, the Brazilian sensation, would not be in the initial lineup. After Brazil's crushing defeat, it was rumored that Nike, one of Brazil's primary sponsors, had applied pressure to start Rolando despite injury. Nike denied the rumor.
8. Of course, what we should have done was go directly to Orishnet, at [www.seanet.com/~efummywa/ochanet.html](http://www.seanet.com/~efummywa/ochanet.html).
9. See "Ricardo L. Ortiz, Café, Culpa, and Capital: Nostalgic Additions of Cuban Exile," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 10.1 (1997): 63–84, for his reading of Albita. On the cover and promotional photographs for her first U.S. album, *No Se Parce a Nada*, Albita is shown wearing men's suits and two-toned wingtips, and several of the song lyrics have an overt lesbian subtext. Under the promotional tutelage of Emilio Estefan's record company, she has since drastically altered her image to present a more feminine persona. Rumors of her lesbian sexuality have flourished since her arrival to the U.S. Latin music scene in 1995.
10. Jodi O'Brien, "Changing the Subject," *Women & Performance* 17 (undated). Online at [www.echony.com/~women/issue17/art-obrien.html](http://www.echony.com/~women/issue17/art-obrien.html) (14 May 1998). O'Brien details how online practices, while allowing users to manipulate gender, require a receptive audience in order for alternative gender performances to function. O'Brien also argues that attempts at gender transformation online often result in a reinscription and reification of binary gender categories.

## READING C

## FILIPINA.COM

Wives, Workers, and Whores on the Cyberfrontier

Vernadette V. Gonzalez and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez

*Vernadette Gonzalez, an ethics studies scholar, and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, a community activist and sociologist, look here at the coding of Filipinas on the Internet as exclusively mail-order brides, sex workers, and maids. Like Juana Maria Rodriguez in the previous piece, Gonzalez and Rodriguez counter mainstream depictions of cyberspace as a "new world of possibilities." Rather, they show how the Internet allows for the confision of Filipina with "sex worker" in the service of U.S. neoinperialism and global capitalist profit.*

Three different images of Asia and the Internet frame this introduction. The first is of two young, hip, androgynous Asians who grace the cover of the July/September 2000 special edition of *Newsweek International*. They boast a cyborg aesthetic, complete with red-streaked hair, futuristic microfiber clothing, and metallic makeup. These representatives of the "New Asia" stand against a traditional dragon backdrop like modern technocrats emerging from an oriental chrysalis. The accompanying articles boost the idea of this new modern, liberal subject. As leaders of the "quiet revolution," their technology of "liberation" is the Internet.<sup>1</sup>

[...] For the "New Asian Woman" in particular, the Internet heralds a "new world of possibilities" in information technology-led economies, signifying progress from Oriental patriarchies and traditional, circumscribed gender roles.<sup>2</sup> The profiles of several Asian women prominent in their fields testify to the

role that the Internet has had in their success. The celebrated androgyny on the front cover testifies to how gender is both ostensibly unmarked and unremarkable; the playing field is leveled in cyberspace.

Ironically, on the inside page of the special edition, a Singapore Airlines ad—the second image—contradicts the notion of a departure from old patriarchy. Two Asian female flight attendants, dressed in exotic native costume, smile while serving a white businessman in a suit and hover around his luxuriously appointed first-class seat, evoking long-established logics of colonial service. The color scheme is "old world," with rich but muted colors suggesting tradition, old money, and the comforts of wealth. This ad calls attention to an important dissonance in the celebratory discourses of cyberspace, epitomized by the triumphalist *Newsweek* issue. Against and alongside an emerging vision of a rejuvenated, modernized, and competitive Asia, a different reality exists—one cut by class, race, and gender lines in ways that echo old colonialisms and that bring to mind emergent imperialisms in the age of globalization.

However, while Asian women in general continue to function as markers of sexualized difference in virtual and material realities, we argue that the bodies of Filipinas haunt this dawning Asian "cyberdemocracy" in a historically specific way.<sup>3</sup> Typing *Filipina* on virtually any Internet search engine yields the third image—the following sites at a "100% match": "Filipina 4 Love"; "Filipina Ladies" (an Internet introduction service); "A Filipina Bride: Mail Order Brides Dating Personals" (which offers a low-priced, professional service); "FILIPINA LADY—Who is She?" (a pen-pal service); and "Erotic explicit filipina pussy pictures" (which

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spread of modernist ideals.<sup>12</sup> The easy access to information furthers the aims of neoliberalism, as rational economic actors are enabled to make (more) rational economic choices. Information technology unleashes the liberating forces of the (more perfect) market. What difference may have threatened, informationalism can overcome. The "free trade" of commodities that developmentalism sought to secure, enforced by institutions like the World Trade Organization in partnership with global capital and third world states, has become more efficiently facilitated with the Internet.

Ultimately, then, information technology is about the surveillance of new subjects and the creation of new markets.

[...] Following Coco Fusco, we argue that information and communication technology is not merely about knowledge and democratizing information exchange but also about the consolidation of a cash nexus for globalizing capital.

[...] As Fusco notes, "The digital revolution has provided the technology that has reorganized what used to be known as the third world, making those territories into low-end markets and low-wage labor pools for multinational corporations."<sup>13</sup> New technologies, imbricated in capitalism, thrive on difference.

[...] "Information" on the Internet is never objective or exhaustive. The creation of a world of information to be searched is predicated on critical exclusions and inequities.

[...] The process of creating "objective" information is deeply subjective. Several kinds of search-engine companies exist to index the information available on the web. These companies first create "universes" of Web pages that their search engines "crawl" and from which they retrieve particular kinds of search requests. The "directory style" search engine utilizes a clearly subjective process for reviewing, registering, and indexing websites to include in its "universe." This is dependent on human editors, who hand-index information.

consumption by prospective husbands (in Europe and the United States) and middle-class women (in Asia's Tiger economies, as well as in the Philippines itself).

[...] At the same time that Filipinas stand for the "other" on the cyberfrontier, representations of Filipinas that litter the Internet rely on prefabricated, already constituted notions of Filipinas that erase important differences among them. Filipinas embody continuing histories of violent imperialism. Images of Filipinas on the Internet sustain old imperial fictions, fantasies, and imaginaries that shape desires for relaxation, wives, prostitutes, and ultimately domesticated and low-wage workers.

[...] Cyberspace, created by new and expanding communications technologies, cannot be abstracted from the social and material relations in which it is embedded. The Internet is still the domain of the first world. The basic technological infrastructure that enables the creation of search engines and the enormous databases they must support are owned and located mainly in the United States and a very few European nations. With the American deregulation of ICTs in 1996, the concentration of ownership in this industry has increased. Even now, with the rest of the world supposedly becoming wired, the United States and Europe still control how information is delivered on a simple search like "Filipina." Meaning making is not a democratic process.<sup>10</sup>

[...] *Newsweek's* "New Asia" illustrates how ICTs are imbricated in a self-consciously "progressive" colonizing project that looks to the third world as a frontier. "Technologic" has made the "less-developed" countries of the third world objects of various interventions "by uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people."<sup>11</sup>

While technologic is used as a means of justifying intervention, technology itself is an intervention. Development experts promote the expansion of new technologies (production, communication, etc.) that also serve as a kind of "moral force" enabling the

history of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines established the "rest and recreation" industry on a large scale for its military troops stationed there. In its present anti-terrorist reincarnation, U.S. militarization of the Philippines slips comfortably into long-established infrastructures and cultures of imperialism. As Cynthia Enloe argues, the masculinity and morale of the "martial races" must be supported by domestic feminine troops.<sup>5</sup>

[...] For Filipinas, American militarization in the Asia Pacific (to "protect" its territories) has meant efficient interpellation into the military industrial and ideological apparatus as sex workers. The specificity of the Philippines as an American frontier—one that had and has tragic consequences for Filipinas living in that border zone—must be tied to the ways in which the Philippines functions as an outpost of difference on the cyberfrontier. As U.S. "wards," Filipinas have served and continue to serve as bodies of pleasure and labor.<sup>6</sup> For Filipinas who circulate as global domestics, entertainers, wives, and otherwise, this has meant an ongoing national and cultural marketing and marketing as historically circulated consumer items. Following Rolando Tolentino, we suggest that the ways in which Filipinas circulate in cyberspace is symptomatic of U.S.-Philippine neocolonial relations.<sup>7</sup> The circuits of cyberspace disseminate concealed politics of power and desire that underpins what Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialist nostalgia."<sup>8</sup>

Circuits of multinationalism, militarism, and transnationalism, symptomatic of U.S.-Philippine colonial and neocolonial relations, continue to enmesh representations and realities of Filipina bodies in global capitalism's networks of desire and consumption. Filipinas circulate as particular commodities—of labor and pleasure—within intra-Asian national hierarchies. *Newsweek's* "New Asia" elides the ways in which communications technologies like the Internet discursively and materially discipline Filipina bodies in multiple, historically familiar ways. This regulation of Filipina bodies is perpetuated for the flexible accumulation of the Philippine state and global capital, and for the pleasure of and

speaks for itself). Following these choices are a grouping of sites from "Hearts of Asia" (another mail-order bride/introduction-service site) conveniently arranged by age group. While occasionally a search like this can yield a personal website by or about a Filipina that is not about mail-order brides, pornographic representations, or questionable per-pal services, the overwhelming character of the results center around the "1st Lady-FREE" introductions to "prescreened Filipinas" model. This is a particularly gendered phenomenon: typing *Filipino* yields links on culture, the Philippines as a nation, food, and entertainment of the more innocuous type. Filipino men are not a hypervisible commodity to be traded on the Internet (even as they, too, make up a significant number of the labor exported by the Philippine state). *Filipina*, in this case, becomes a marker of sexual difference that has historical roots.

It is clear that *Newsweek's* construction of the "New Asian Woman" does not take into account the thousands of websites that depend on the continuing availability of the "backward" Filipina woman as financially independent and technologically savvy Asian capitalist.<sup>4</sup> Information and communications technologies exacerbate intra-Asian and imperialist histories of exploitation in the present, creating a specificity of experience that begs for a critical rethinking of the Internet as a revolutionary technology. The exotic and serviceable bodies advertised in the Singapore Airlines ad as well as numerous websites provide material and discursive counterpoints to the *Newsweek* cover, complicating the Internet's claim as the harbinger of the ultimate "quiet revolution" and the emergent tool for "first world" and "third world" feminists.

[...] We turn to the site of Filipinas on the cyberfrontier because they embody the difference that enables and haunts capitalist circuits. Filipinas, as they circulate on the Internet, unravel capitalism's democratic myth.

[...] The Philippines continues to function under the facto if not de jure American imperialism. The

One of the more popular search engines, Yahoo!, is not really a search engine at all, but rather "a team of editors [who] index the Internet." Yahoo! creates its universe from individually submitted forms that contain information about the site.<sup>14</sup> The second kind of search engine (that of Google, Alta Vista, or Excite) uses computer-generated algorithms. These function according to the "personality" of the particular search-engine company, which decides how to organize searches and create a hierarchy of information. For instance, Google's link-based search algorithm prioritizes websites according to the number of sites to which they are linked. Others are linguistically based, with search results depending on the number of search words on particular sites. In either case, a certain kind of cultural capital is necessary in order to create a website that will appear at the top of a search result: "Some people will do almost anything to receive a top ranking from a heavily used search engine . . . [because] the first response in a search will bring more viewers, more business."<sup>15</sup> These techniques include pages that repeat a key word many times in "invisible type" (that is, using the same color as the color of the page) so that the search engine ranks a certain website as more relevant and therefore higher on the search results list.<sup>16</sup>

[...]  
Search engines change the Filipina into cyberscript, change and conflating her body into "sex/worker"—rendering her into a universal code. The results of a search using *Filipina* illustrate the ways in which cyberspace erases and conflates difference. Examining websites of Filipina mail-order bride companies and domestic-helper agencies demonstrates the interchangeability of Filipina identities on the Internet. On these websites, Filipinas are commodities displayed, processed, and sold (sometimes returned) to particular kinds of consumers. Specific visualizations render Asian women, and, we argue, Filipinas in particular, as "the most immediately conjurable" embodiment of "garment worker," "factory girl," or "G.I. prostitute." This Asian working body is simultaneously erased of historical and material specificities, then exported and circulated as a specular signifier of broader socioeconomic

formations such as "the global assembly line," the "export processing zone," "military prostitution," and/or "sex/tourism."<sup>17</sup> Filipinas in cyberspace are the site at which these various identities are conflated. In websites for pen pals, brides, and domestics, we note a significant similarity in the ways Filipinas are represented.

[...]  
A search for *foreign domestic helper*, *Filipina domestic*, or *domestic helper* also pulled up mail-order bride sites. Under *Filipina domestic*, websites like the ones described above were found, but some websites featured specific women, drawn from "pen pal" or "introductory" services, who identified themselves as domestic workers, in countries outside of the Philippines. What these websites and searches actually suggest is that Filipina bodies are sighted as simultaneously bodies of pleasure and consumption, as well as bodies for labor. Filipina women's bodies are important for their corporeality (age, height, weight) and the desires their corporeal bodies can fulfill—as good wives and diligent domestic helpers. Search engines and webmasters, as well as the services themselves, often conflate these categories. Filipinas are closely inspected and ultimately processed for their desirability in a way analogous to American slave auctions. Mail-order bride and domestic-helper sites ultimately promise deliverance for Filipinas while guaranteeing "love" for prospective husbands and help to middle-class women. The benevolence of love or a job belies the commodification of Filipina women's bodies and the ways in which these visualizations rob Filipinas of subjectivity. While some of these sites offer space for women to speak for themselves, it is rarely outside of the parameters set by businesses catering to their customer's desires.<sup>18</sup>

[...]  
As the Philippines continue to export thousands of Filipinas to work as domestics, entertainers, and low-wage service workers throughout Asia, it becomes clear that Filipinas render specific purposes in the bodies they occupy. The circulation of Filipina workers' bodies is not innocent or natural. They are disciplined as "sincere," "loyal," and "quiet," which invariably translates into "docile" and "cheap"—

a boon to the struggling Philippine state and the profit-seeking multinational corporation. Filipinas women are fixed in cyberspace to be sighted and known by ostensibly first-world or "modern" users for their pleasure and consumption. A Filipina in cyberspace "speaks" to the desires, fantasies, and imaginations her viewer is thought to have; her self-narrations are prescreened for her consumer.

The question with which we struggle now is, given the ways in which Filipina women are circulated as icons and offspring of an unholy alliance between militarism and capitalism on the Internet, how can this same technology offer subversive potentials to undo histories of exploitation today?

[...]  
We argue that while representations of Filipinas in cyberspace leave room for incisive political critique, cyberspace as it exists in its first world-centered, class-biased incarnation is a limited space of agency for Filipinas and other women who are passed around in global capitalism's circuits of desire. It may in fact not be the critical space for the exercise of agency and resistance—at least on the part of Filipinas who are being trafficked in various ways.

## KEY TERMS

**export processing zones** Regions in countries that are set apart for multinational of transnational corporations and have special conditions for the corporations' benefit. These may include prohibitions on union activity; exemption from taxes; export-import dues, or trade licenses; and easy access to cheap labor.

**flexible accumulation** A term introduced by geographer David Harvey in his 1989 book *The Condition of Postmodernity*. The term refers to the new mobility of capital that has been used by transnational corporations to move production to

new places with cheaper labor costs, to create products for which parts have come from many different factories in different countries, and to create global assembly lines.

**global assembly line** In the new global economy, the search for low-wage labor by transnational corporations has led to the creation of new factories in impoverished regions of Asia and Latin America.

**ICT** Integrated circuit technology, which created the silicon chip.