

***Queering the Global Filipina Body: Contested Nationalisms in the Filipina/o Diaspora*, by Gina K. Velasco. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020, 176 pp. \$26.00 paper, ISBN 978-0-252-04347-5.**

Gina K. Velasco's *Queering the Global Filipina Body: Contested Nationalisms in the Filipina/o Diaspora* takes to task how tropes of the global Filipina body—as mail-order bride, the balikbayan, the sex worker/trafficked woman, or cyborg—highlight the heteronormative and masculinist nationalisms in the makings of the Philippine nation across the diaspora. Focusing on contemporary cultural productions created between the 1990s to the mid-2010s, Velasco argues the figure of the global Filipina body is paramount to understanding heteropatriarchal nationalisms under global capitalism, as well as the gendered, sexualized, and affective dimensions of labor and nation-building. By examining cultural and political nationalisms across transnational sites within the Philippine diaspora—particularly Manila and San Francisco—Velasco skillfully critiques how heteropatriarchal nationalisms instate the global Filipina body as the Philippine nation itself, while transnational queer and feminist visual artists, filmmakers, and performers alternatively use the sign of the global Filipina body to disrupt those notions.

Velasco navigates these contradictory terrains by implementing interdisciplinary methods from cultural studies and anthropology. Using “queer diasporic approaches,” Velasco’s central argument contends that “even as the figure of the global Filipina body signifies the failure of the heteropatriarchal nation under global capitalism, the ‘queering’ of this figure within Filipina/o American diasporic cultural production can destabilize the gendered and sexual politics of diasporic nationalisms” (7). Her vast archive stretches across mediums and forms, from films, texts, and performances, and to everyday programs and policies enacted across the Philippines and the United States. Velasco’s dialogic approach includes “visual and performance texts [that] are put into conversation with everyday interactions among Filipino/a Americans” (13). Velasco’s book is divided into two parts and each chapter focuses on a different gendered trope: the balikbayan, the “trafficked woman,” the mail-order bride, and the cyborg.

In Part I, in her first two chapters, she outlines the “heteropatriarchal politics” that assigns the global Filipina body as representative of the Philippine nation. In Chapter 1, “Mapping Diasporic Nationalisms: The Filipina/o American Balikbayan in the Philippines” studies heritage language programs primarily catered towards Filipino/a American youth. Employing skillful ethnographic methods, she analyzes how the figure of the balikbayan—the returned immigrant—plays a crucial role in diasporic nationalist movements and the Philippine national imaginary. In turn, she writes about how heteronormative and masculinist nationalisms are articulated and contested in the heritage programs.

In Chapter 2, “Imagining the Filipina Trafficked Woman/Sex Worker: The Politics of Filipina/o American Solidarity,” one of the strongest chapters of the book, Velasco writes about how the “trafficked woman” and “sex worker” becomes collapsed, and how this figure circulates across Filipino/a American Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCNs) in the United States to films across the diaspora. Velasco intervenes in analysis of the “trafficked woman” as national heroes by focusing on Rachel Rivera’s film *Sin City Diary* (1992). In the film, Filipina American balikbayan Rivera travels to the Philippines and interviews three sex workers in Olongapo City, site of the Subic Naval Base. Velasco untangles how the “trafficked woman/sex worker stands in for sexual exploitation of the Philippine labor while balikbayan symbolizes the figure of the American dream and upward mobility” (56). Velasco expertly examines how Rivera’s film includes “exilic memories” to confront the mourning and loss she uses to frame the Filipina sex worker and to create a “Filipina/o American diasporic subjectivity in the film” (57). The narrator’s positionality is set in contrast to the three interviewees and sex workers, Glenda, Juliet, and Josephine, that Velasco argues are depicted as “damaged Others.” However, Velasco interprets Glenda as one interviewee who introduces a “sex worker subjectivity that fractures the narrative of sex worker as damaged Other” (61).

In Part II, Velasco analyzes queer Filipina/o cultural productions that disrupt the gendered and sexual politics of nationalism. In Chapter 3, “Performing the Filipina Mail-Order Bride: Queer Neoliberalism, Affective Labor, and Homonationalism,” Velasco examines the video art group Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. Velasco close reads their video *Always a Bridesmaid, Never*

a *Bride*, and (AABNAB). Velasco theorizes how M.O.B. draws on performances of “feminist camp” and “ethnic drag” to queer the Filipina mail-order bride by arguing that AABNAB “links a critique of the heteropatriarchal politics of Filipina/o American respectability to an analysis of the inability of US homonationalist politics to account for racialized labor” (67). Looking at marriage scenes at City Hall, Velasco calls into question the affective dimensions of labor and sexuality that M.O.B. parodies throughout their piece.

Lastly, Chapter 4, “The Queer Cyborg in Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood*,” examines the figure of queer Filipina cyborg as a way to think about queer Filipina futurity. Drawing from José Esteban Muñoz’s theories of queer of color utopias, Velasco studies how Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood* enacts a reimagination of the global Filipina body. Velasco conducts a fantastic close reading of Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s performance *Cosmic Blood*, a melismatic science fiction rewriting of “contact” zones between European colonizers and indigenous peoples across Asia, the Americas, and Africa. In this performance, Otálvaro-Hormillosa crafts alternative origin stories of the “cosmic blood” myth. According to Velasco, by centering queer cyborg bodies and desires, rather than the violence and dichotomies of colonizer/colonized, Otálvaro-Hormillosa subverts the heteropatriarchal makings of women as nation. Through eroticisms and the rewritings of the mestiza figures as nation-building projects, *Cosmic Blood* fashions new worlds of being and kinship relations for queer Filipina women that “exceed the nation” (99).

Velasco’s monograph further contributes to Filipinx studies scholarship on the gendered and laboring Filipina body such as those engaged by Rhacel Parreñas, Neferti Tadiar, Denise Cruz, Nerissa Balce, and Valerie Francisco-Menchavez. In particular, her astute theorizations of the global Filipina as a “geobody” expertly situates how Filipina bodies and their feminized labor are exploited and devalued within contemporary neoliberalization. Velasco’s study could have been further nuanced with attention to cultural productions and performances outside the common entry points of Manila to San Francisco. For instance, her study could have examined how the Filipina geobody traffics differently across the Philippine diaspora in lesser studied spaces like the U.S. Midwest, South, and East Coast, in rural or suburban places such as the work of Karen Tongson or transnationally

across the Asia-Pacific and Middle East such as Rhacel Parreñas' work. Nonetheless, Velasco's stunning critiques of contemporary Philippine nationalisms and queer globalization across the Philippines and the States greatly contribute to debates revolving around the politics of queer Filipinx bodies, nationalism, and affective labor in Filipinx Studies as seen in the works of Martin Manalansan, Martin Joseph Ponce, Emmanuel David, Robert Diaz, Marissa Largo, and Fritz Pino, while offering incisive feminist models of critique through visual culture and performance studies. Scholars particularly in Philippine and Filipinx American Studies, Transnational Feminisms, Queer Globalization Studies, American Studies, Performance Studies, and U.S. Empire Studies would greatly learn from this truly original and exciting monograph.

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