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# Body Modification and the Negotiation of Identity of Filipino Migrants in Japan

Nelia G. Balgoa\*

## Abstract

Within the context of transnationalism and international marriages, negotiation of identity always ensues. Spouses may employ strategies to resolve or heighten the conflicts in the process of negotiation and assertion of identity. One of these strategies is that within family relations, spouses assert their identity, particularly that of cultural<sup>2</sup> practices, in raising their children. Questions then on when and how important is the negotiation and assertion of one's identity in marriage may arise.

This paper analyzes the meanings assigned to the "body modification" of children of Filipino women who are married to Japanese men suggesting that this becomes a site for the negotiation of the mother's identity in her marital relationship. Body modification may refer to how a body is shaped, "invaded", classified and transformed as a result of participation in the society. In particular, this paper will study the Filipino practice of circumcision for sons of Filipino wives and Japanese husbands as a tool of negotiation and assertion of identity by the Filipino migrants.

This paper makes use of the data gathered from interviews of Filipino migrants who are members of Filipino communities in Osaka and Nagoya from 2008 to the present. Questions about cultural transmission relating to the practices of circumcision

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were studied and utilized.

Body in this aspect becomes more than a body; it becomes a vehicle for the representation of two cultural practices. It is found out that negotiation over “body modifications” becomes a space for attempting to assert identity while it simultaneously becomes a site of power of negotiation for Filipino wives in their relations with their Japanese husbands.

In viewing international marriage within this context, this paper emphasizes the importance of how conflicting cultural practices may regulate and sustain certain social institutions such as marriage.

## Introduction

Transnationalism represents a distinct phenomenon of the logic of globalization. Studies that deal with this emergent phenomenon attribute it to the flow of capital, movement of people, and changing global market. In the age of globalization, movement of people and goods within nation states have become easier because borders have also become flexible and unbound. This idea of transnationalism stems from this flexibility as people, who are mobile and constantly moving exhibit transnational practices.

Transnationalism can be roughly defined as maintaining ties with two or more nation states. Attempts to conceptualize and give theoretical from to transnationalism have been dealt with in previous studies (Portes 1996). Basch *et al* (1994, p.6) put forward a definition of this phenomenon and define transnationalism as:

The processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders… an essential element is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies.

This definition of Basch et al emphasizes the ties that migrants maintain both in their home countries and host countries. These ties may involve cultural, geographic and political borders and may represent a unique aspect of how migrants adapt to the traditional patterns of migration. Benedict Anderson suggests that mass media and technology have reshaped and redefined how migrants imagined their communities; these communities are imagined as both limited and sovereign. They are limited in that nations have “finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations and sovereign because no authority can claim over them. Thus, in this sense, the ties that migrants maintain cross borders and are transnational by nature.

Previous studies on transnationalism explored the ties of migrants to their country of origin in terms of economic and political relations (Portes, 1997; San Juan, 2000). The aspect of sending remittances and the institutions that facilitate the flow of these remittances are emphasized in the discussion of how migrants maintain ties both with their host countries and countries of origin. In particular, previous studies also dealt with the effect of these transnational communities and remittances to the country of origin but not to the host countries.

Lyons and Mandaville (2008) also argued that political dynamics around the globe have been transformed by globalization, new patterns of human mobility, and the development of innovative transnational social networks. These result to the rise to prominence for new forms of political action to gain salience. These new political processes are rooted in communities and networks that are not restricted by geographic location. As a result of increased human mobility and new forms of communications, the relevant constituencies engaged in a specific political process or issue often live in different locales or move between locations.

Ong (1999) also elaborated on transnationalism as a kind of “flexible citizenship”, and discusses the transnationality induced by global capital circulating around the Asia Pacific region. Ong is primarily concerned with the cultural logics of the dynamics that shape migration and the human and political responses that go with it. Kelly (2007) analyzed Filipino migration in relation to transnationalism and class

identity among Filipino migrants who have settled in Canada. Kelly argues that class analysis must be a part of understanding the migration process, but it becomes interpreted and articulated in unexpected and sometimes viewed in contradictory ways when viewed from the perspective and spaces of migrants themselves. In this sense, class mobility of the Filipino depends on the “narratives of location”; how Filipino migrants see themselves in terms of class depending on who and where they are located.

In this aspect, transnational communities are perceived to be mobile; “neither here nor there” but in both places simultaneously because of the economic ties that migrants maintain with their countries of origin. Linkages, economic enterprises, sending institutions are the bases for the maintenance of the ties of the migrants to their countries of origin.

There are few studies however that analyzed transnational communities and how are they formed in the host countries and the migrants’ participation in the process of its formation. What is not exhaustively dealt with in the previous studies are the communities that are formed by specific group of migrants, in a specific location and bounded by specific commonalities and shared experiences and whose ties with the host countries and their countries of origin go beyond the economic aspect. In other words, these are the “fixed” communities. Also neglected are the cultural processes and transformations that migrants experience while participating in the dynamics of these communities. These “fixed” communities, bounded by specific space in the host country yet at the same time deterritorialized is a potential site for the research and study of how these cultural processes are transformed.

The focus of this paper then is to analyze how cultural practices and transmission are affected by this logic of transnationalism, an aspect which has not been dealt with exhaustively in previous studies. As migrants participate in the processes of transnationalism, they develop multiple identities making their participation in this phenomenon problematic.

## I . Transnational Communities and the Question of Identity

Transnational communities relate to issues of identity, dual or at times even multiple, since they are connected to two countries. From the migrants' perspective, they often acknowledge that they belong to a community spanning borders and form organizations that express their identity as a transnational group. In that sense, they link the country of origin to the country of residence and promote participation in both spaces, while taking into account the societal system put in place by the countries of residence (Tsakiri 2005). From the perspective, however, of the country of residence and host country, at times transnational communities are seen as a challenge to the single allegiance required by a membership in a community-cultural, political or other, as well as leading to a redefinition of the balance between community structures and the state.

When people move, migrants bring with them their own identity, as shaped amongst others by culture, religion or even ethnicity. This identity is nevertheless reshaped during the migrants' process of adaptation in the country of residence and influence they received from the societies in which they live. New identities, single or multiple are therefore formed. This reiterates the point that identity is neither fixed nor singular and is therefore socially constructed and highly dependent on context.

Transnational processes have shaped how dispersed communities have developed and articulated their identities and strategic plans. This articulation can be shown through the migrants' cultural practices. In the process of moving, they do not only orient their behavior to a society different from that of their homeland but also maintain ties with it. Their cultural practices are thus affected, regulated and negotiated. Because identities are produced, consumed and regulated within culture (Woodward in Rex, 2002), identities of the migrants are also influenced resulting to negotiation of their identity. Conflicts arise in the process of negotiation because according to Bhaba (1990), a transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or the dominant culture which says that other cultures are acceptable but they must be located within the grid of this dominant culture. This results to limited tolerance

of cultural diversity and containment of cultural differences.

## **II. Cultural Transmission and the Negotiation of Identity**

Increasing human mobility, transnational networks and mass media have resulted in significant populations that identify with a particular community and are still engaged in specific cultural practices of this group but are not residents in the “homeland” of that community at any given time. These communities can be possible spaces where migrants can participate in the dynamics of cultural transformation and transmission. Culture is thought of as changing and developing in complex ways and therefore subject to transformation when migrants settle in the host countries (Rex, 2002). But it can be argued that migrants bring with them their traditional culture and which may challenge the dominant culture in the host country. In this sense, culture is an evolving entity because of the simultaneous participation of migrants in the culture of another nation state where they settle and in their attempts to continue their ethnic culture despite being away from their homeland.

The struggles faced by the migrants in the participation of these two conflicting cultural dynamics may lead to the negotiation of identity because in this case, conflicts are not always muted. Conflicts in most cases are always asserted. In the process of negotiation of identity, especially in cultural transmission, migrants may employ certain strategies to fulfill their various roles in the host country. Rex (2002) further asserted that the key unit of a migrant community is the family which brings to forth the question of how families negotiate their identities within the context of transnationalism.

One of these strategies is that within family relations, spouses assert their identity, particularly that of cultural practices, in raising their children. Questions then on when and how important is the negotiation and assertion of one's identity for the spouses in marriage may arise.

This paper will study international marriages within the context of transnationalism particularly that of the marriage between a Filipino and Japanese and how Filipino

wives assert their identity in terms of certain cultural practices. One very noticeable conflicting practice between a Filipino wife and a Japanese husband is the practice of “body modification”. Borrowing Turner’s (2008) definition, body modification is defined in this paper as how society has “invaded”, “shaped”, and “classified” and made the body meaningful and the body is named as theoretical space yet this space remains undertheorized.

The need to study “body modification” as a tool for the negotiation of identity stems from Turner’s contention that although studies on the theories on the sociology of the body are already established, there is a dearth however of ethnographic studies. The need for the study of the embodiment and lived experiences of “body modification” is not only for understanding of body modification itself but also for the body in general and how social institutions may control the body. Herein then lies the significance of this cultural practice between Filipino wives and Japanese husbands within the context of international marriage since male circumcision is a representation of identity for both spouses in marriage.

This paper then analyzes the meanings assigned to the “body modification” of children of Filipino women who are married to Japanese men suggesting that this becomes a site for the negotiation of the mother’s identity in her marital relationship. Here, “body modification” refers to the cultural practice of male circumcision for sons of Filipino wives and Japanese husbands as a tool of negotiation and assertion of identity by the Filipino migrants.

### **III. Methodology**

This report makes use of the data gathered from the interviews of five Filipino migrants<sup>3</sup> who are members of Filipino communities in Osaka and Nagoya conducted from November 2008 to the present. Questions about cultural transmission particularly that of the practice of circumcision among sons of international marriage between a Filipino and Japanese were utilized. In depth interviews last from 45 minutes to one and a half hour. Data were also collected from one focus group discussion of

four members of the community from Osaka conducted last August 2008.

This paper will first present what is male circumcision within the Philippine and Japanese context and will next present key concepts and theories sociology of the body. The data collected from the interviews will illustrate such concepts as analysis.

#### **IV. *Pagtutuli* (Male Circumcision) in Philippine context**

Summer in the Philippines is considered to be the best time for Filipino boys aged between 10-14 years old to have their “*pagtutuli*” or male circumcision. A few decades ago, genital incision of Filipino boys was purely a traditional custom. An amateur called “*manunuli*” would perform it on local boys. In some areas, the boys sit astride a banana log into which a wooden plug has been inserted as an “*anvil*”. The traditional rite is only superincision, a dorsal slit, removing no tissue (but with variations). More recently, however, “*pagtutuli*” is becoming medicalized and commercialized.

There are two kinds of male circumcision in the Philippines-medical and ritual circumcision procedures. Boys who live in the cities are most likely to undergo medical circumcision because of their access to clinics and hospitals. Conversely, ritual circumcision is most likely to occur to boys living in rural areas. It is important to note that in the Philippines, it has strong elements of a “rite of passage” to manhood, a symbol of masculinity and in some aspects, for hygienic purposes. A study made by Lee (2004) revealed that among 114 Filipino circumcised males who surveyed, 76 of them said that the reason they underwent circumcision was to avoid being called “*supot*” or intact while 47 said circumcision is part of tradition and they were already of the right age to be circumcised. Other reasons that were cited were “to grow tall physically”, “wanted his penis to be free of smegma (hygiene purposes)” and “to be able to cause pregnancy”.

This study of Lee shows that majority of the Filipino males consider male circumcision to be culturally and psychologically part of their lives. It also reinforces

their “macho” image. Thus, according to Ramos and Boyle (2000) understanding the individual’s motivation to undergo the procedure requires a good knowledge of the Filipino culture.

Boyle and Ramos argued that Filipino males’ willingness to undergo circumcision is because of the perceived values of “hiya” and “amor propio”. In Filipino culture, amor-proprio is literally “love of self,” or in other words, self-respect. In Philippine society, building up one’s self-esteem is essential, and to this end amor-proprio reinforces “hiya”. “Hiya” is shame, a universal social sanction that creates a deep emotional realization of having failed to live up to the standards of society. It controls and motivates individuals and social behavior. “Hiya” may be translated as “a sense of propriety,” as a preventive that makes for conformity to community norms. When a boy violates such cultural norms he ordinarily feels a deep sense of shame, a realization that he has not lived up to the standards of the society. Thus, group pressure leads Filipinos to willingly undergo what others consider as an unethical and violent procedure.

Michael Tan, a respected medical doctor and anthropologist and who writes a regular column on Philippine culture in a widely circulated newspaper in the Philippines states that people are now considering the medical benefits of circumcision. Some readers, according to Tan, have been asking him whether circumcision can prevent HIV/AIDS. Tan added that medical researches have found out that there generally seems to fewer HIV infections in countries where circumcision is practiced. In Asia, these countries include the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indonesia. The website of United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS also discussed the perceived medical effects of circumcision and reported that with latest research findings suggesting that circumcised men have a significantly lower risk of becoming infected with HIV, demand for safe, affordable, male circumcision is expected to increase rapidly.

In Southern Philippines, where five percent of the Muslim Filipinos predominantly live, male circumcision is considered to be a religious ritual for boys. Some scholars

claim that male circumcision is a strong Islamic legacy to this predominantly Catholic country (Islam in the Philippines Encyclopedia 2009). Tan (2007) also affirms this when he said that male circumcision is part of the Philippine's pre-colonial Muslim heritage. One informant I interviewed said that Muslims in the Philippines considered male circumcision to be the beginning of "Islamization" of a young boy and he who is not circumcised is considered to be "unclean" and a "coward". Also, it is essential for a Muslim man to be circumcised before he can go to Mecca for the pilgrimage and become a hajj.

It can be said therefore that although male circumcision in the Philippines is driven by traditional factor and peer pressure for the Filipino Christians (though this traditional factor may be religious in origin) and religious for the male Muslims in the South, still it can be said that circumcision is more related with social customs and practices. Although there are now medical groups that challenge the necessity of this practice, at least for now, in the Philippines, it would still be an important rite of passage for most Filipino men.

## **V. 割礼 "Katsurei" (Male Circumcision) in Japanese Context**

If majority of the Filipino males are circumcised, the practice of circumcision is frowned upon by most Japanese men. The website [www.circumstitions](http://www.circumstitions.com) (this a website focusing entirely about circumcision practices around the world) claims that circumcision is very rare in Japan and quotes a figure that only 3 percent of the Japanese male is circumcised. Denniston et al (1999) in debunking the myth that circumcision can prevent penile cancer argued that despite the fact that the rate of male circumcision is for all intents and purposes zero, the rate of penile cancer in Japan is 0.3 per 100,000. This shows that male circumcision is not as popular in Japan as it is in the Philippines.

Many Japanese consider mutilating the body as something sacrilegious, thus the practice of male circumcision might be considered by most Japanese as an act of violation of the body. Others say that since there is no proven medical benefits

to this practice, many Japanese men opt not to undergo it.

According to some Japanese mothers I interviewed about the circumcision of their sons, foreskins naturally retract and become loose, thus there is no need for circumcision. During the bath, they gently attempt to push their sons' penis' foreskins back. Although they claimed that it may take years for the foreskin to become loose, smegma will naturally be discharged and washed away.

While Japanese young men are not usually circumcised at birth, many young men are now having the foreskin surgically removed at male only clinics. (*Circumcision in Japan becoming more popular* 2000). A desire to be more appealing to women, who say that circumcised penis is cleaner and looks better is often concealed in rhetoric about health concerns..In advertising for a male clinic only in Shinjuku for instance, a claim is made that an uncircumcised penis is not popular with women who feels that it is *fuketsu* (不潔) impure (Suzuki and Robertson 2000). In other words, societal and peer pressure may make male circumcision a popular practice in the future

The discussion above show how male circumcision are perceived in two countries. There are obviously conflicting views to this practice, thus, making this as a tool for negotiation quite problematic and open to conflict.

## VI. Sociology of the Body: Key Concepts and Analysis

Bryan Turner's book, "The Body and Society" (2008) is a major contribution to the sociological understanding of the body and the debate about body and embodiment. According to Turner, some of the ideological justifications such as the divide between nature and nurture , the unequal gender division of labor in the society must be clearly reassessed since developments in natural sciences have contributed to a profound change in the ways in which the human body is conceptualized, managed and produced. Also discussed exhaustively in the book is how institutions condition human behavior and how through these institutions that human life becomes coherent, meaningful and continuous.

Two perspectives will be used to emphasize the social constructionists' views of the body; the first view would tell us how society has "invaded", "shaped", and "classified" and made the body meaningful. Social constructionists argue that what appear to be natural phenomena are in fact products of social processes.

This view can be best illustrated on how Filipino women who are married to Japanese feel about the importance of their sons being circumcised. Wife A<sup>4</sup> for example, brought her middle son to the Philippines and had her circumcised when her son was about 12 years old. Her eldest and youngest sons, however, refused to be circumcised when they saw their brother in pain. Wife A added that her son was influenced by her brothers (uncles) who are in the Philippines and who told her middle son that to be "uncut" is not manly and clean. Wife A surmised that her middle son was the one easily convinced because she considers him as the most cosmopolitan, most "international" and liberated among her three children.

Wife A feels that it is important for her son to be circumcised because it is the Philippine tradition and custom. Male circumcision is thus her representation of her "Filipinoness". Her husband, on the other hand, refused at first because "it is not part of Japan's culture". Eventually, the Japanese husband agreed to his sons' circumcision saying that they are already grown up and it is their choice. This dynamics between the Filipino wife and Japanese husband regarding circumcision of their children show how the body, as being represented by their sons, is regulated to become a space of contention between two cultural practices. The body becomes more meaningful; it has become more than a body but rather it is regulated to affirm or negotiate a certain identity. The Filipino wife insisted that there is a difference between a circumcised and a non-circumcised man. For her, it hinges more on being clean and more hygienic whereas for the Japanese husband, it a sort of mutilation and wounding of the body and is thus unnatural. By insisting on her sons' circumcision, which for the Filipino wife is a part of Filipino custom, and is part of the society where she came from before coming to Japan (as represented by the Filipino uncles of her sons) she was able to negotiate her identity through

the space represented by her sons' bodies.

The middle son, who agreed to be circumcised, is viewed by the mother as being "international"- one who is more open to non-Japanese practices while the other two, in the words of the mother are more "traditional" and are therefore more "Japanese". The middle son agrees to have his body invaded, shaped according to what he considers to be a non-Japanese practice, making his identity more ambivalent but at the same time giving space and perhaps power to her mother to negotiate her own identity within the context of transnational marriage.

The Filipino mother on the other hand is influenced by her gendered upbringing back in the Philippines and thus believes that a circumcised son is more masculine and is a true measure of manhood, thus clearly being influenced and regulated by society.

The second key concept that can be used in this section is the argument that that the human body is most profitably conceptualized as an unfinished biological phenomenon which is taken up and transformed as a result of participation in society (Shilling 1993).

Like Wife A, Wife B also wants her son circumcised. Being the only son of a Japanese father who is the eldest in the family, the son is expected to carry the family name and will be buried in the ancestral grave. The son decided to have circumcision upon entering the university, perhaps because of the influence of the mother. According to Wife B, she washed the penis of her son when he was little, slowly pushing back the foreskins. This must have an effect on the son while growing up.

The son, according to Wife B consciously knew that circumcision is a custom of the Philippines and is routinely done by Filipino adolescents. Thus, when her son entered the university, he decided to have circumcision and they paid about Y100,000 for it because it was considered as a minor surgery and was not covered by the health insurance in Japan.

The fact that the son made his own choice of being circumcised despite the

knowledge that he grew up in a country where circumcision is not widely practiced, maybe viewed as an attempt on his part to build and sustain a self identity which is partly influenced by his Filipino mother. Themes of personal identity construction may surface in this situation. His choice of circumcision is an affirmation of his mother's identity and being "proud" of it. According to Wife B, she often asked her children whether they are ashamed that their mother is a Filipino and her son answered that she is more "Japanese" than the "real" Japanese mothers. By this, the son meant that her Filipino mother is "more caring, more responsible and more presentable" than the Japanese mothers, affirming his gendered view of mothers. Thus, the body becomes an unfinished phenomenon; for the son, it is not enough that the foreskins be just pushed but he had to undergo "surgery" in order to be clean, a notion that is influenced by the mother. In this case, identity is fundamentally embodied, because subjective and objective identity cannot be easily separated from embodiment (Turner 1992). The son's objective identity is that of being "Japanese" in a Japanese society perhaps because of his outward, body appearance but his subjective identity is partly constructed by what cannot be seen but is constructed because of his Filipino mother. His transformation as achieved by his circumcision is not visible to the society where he lives. Like his mother whom he considers as more "Japanese" rather than a Filipino, this circumcision is invisible but allowed him to transformed his body and in the process his self identity. This "Filipinoness" of the mother, and his circumcision maybe his unconscious desire to separate his "self" from a society that perhaps views his mother as invisible also.

Identity then, in this sense, is passed on by the Filipino mother to his son. This claim can be reinforced by a study made by Miyabara (2007) on the biopolitics of Chinese in the Philippines. In this study, he analyzed how the male Chinese's intermarriage to a Filipino woman can provide a body for the propagation of the Chinese population in the Philippines, thus regulating the body of the Filipino women. This shows how the practice of circumcision is conveyed by the Filipino mothers to her son. In this case, male circumcision represents localization by the

Chinese men and implies that their body can be buried in the Philippine soil.

For the Filipino mother who is married to Japanese, her identity is also passed on to her son through male circumcision and the body becomes an unfinished biological phenomenon because it can be regulated. She reinforces her ties with her homeland through this cultural practice. The son, who considers himself “half-half”, on the hand, tries to reconstruct an identity; this reconstruction is perhaps emphasized on his decision to undergo circumcision. The body is then seen as a malleable entity, which is “unfinished”, always “becoming” as he tries to negotiate perhaps his identity through his participation in two different societies. In negotiating his identity through his circumcision, he is also giving his mother the space and the power to negotiate her own identity.

## **VII. Perception of the Filipino Wives to their Non-circumcised Japanese Husbands**

According to Turner (2008) sociology of the body is a study of the problem of social order and it can be organized around four issues. These are the reproduction and regulations of populations in time and space, and the restraint and representation of the body as a vehicle of the self.

In this context, I will try to analyze how the Filipino wives perceived their Japanese husbands who are not circumcised and how they reconcile this to their traditional and gendered views that men ought to be circumcised.

Wife C is a 35-year old, former entertainer Filipina who has been married to her Japanese husband when she was 17 (her passport at this time showed that she was 18) and thus has stayed in Japan longer more than she had lived in the Philippines. Her husband was her first lover and when I asked her about her husband's uncircumcised penis, she answered:

I do not know the difference. Is there? Because he is the first man in my life. I never had experienced with a Filipino man. But my sister told

me that Filipino men are more passionate than Japanese men. She was also an entertainer in Japan before I came here and she was really against me marrying a Japanese because she said they are not passionate.

Wife C did not exactly point out whether this lack of passion of her husband is because of not being circumcised. But the implication she gets from her sister, who was a former entertainer and who might be more familiar with Japanese men is that marriage involves passion, and therefore the ability for reproduction is quite important to maintain the marriage. Body modification, like circumcision may be a source of potential problem in sustaining the marriage and in the process reproduction.

Wife B upon hearing our conversation then said that:

"I think there is no difference (Laughs loudly)." My husband's penis gets stimulated; it hardens; they release (meaning sexually aroused and able to have orgasm). So there is actually no difference between an uncircumcised male and a circumcised male".

Like Wife C. Wife B also married her Japanese husband when she was 18 and has now lived in Japan for more 20 years. She claims to have no other boyfriend and no sexual relations other than her husband. During the interview, Wife B and Wife C kept asking me how it is to have a Filipino boyfriend and how do they treat their partners in a relationship implying how is it to be married to a circumcised male.

Both wives' notion of sexual relationship is defined according to the issue of non-circumcision of their husbands. Unable to discover the difference, they rely on the "basic", "primitive" notion of sexual relationship: to be aroused and have an orgasm. But the regulation and restraints of this sexuality comes in the form of this acceptance when both wives said that "It's their custom. We can't do anything

about it". In this case, negotiation ensues for both wives whose idea of a "clean", "typical" male should be circumcised. A gendered upbringing back in the Philippines might have influenced this notion but being married to Japanese who do not consider circumcision as a symbol of manhood, limits their choices and therefore negotiating their identity through marriage and through acceptance of this particular custom in the process.

Non-circumcision is representation of the Japanese husbands of themselves; the body as vehicle of themselves. Their Filipino wives, though having to negotiate their acceptance of their husbands being uncircumcised, never consider them as "unclean" or "non typical". Japanese husbands therefore are able to show their control and maintain their own space. When Wife C said that "Well it (circumcision) doesn't matter I guess because I was able to bear two children after several years of trying", reproduction becomes more important than what the body represents. Wife B further reasons out that circumcision does not matter because "Japanese husbands are more responsible than Filipino husbands", thus, economic consideration comes in, superseding circumcision and in the process, maintains and sustains the order of the marriage.

## Conclusion

The body becomes more than a body within the context of the practice of circumcision between a Filipino wife and a Japanese husband. The body becomes a vehicle of the representation of two cultural practices. The body can be shaped, modified, made meaningful and invaded by society and can be theorized. In this case, what is evident is that through the mother's insistence of having her son circumcised, the body becomes a space for the negotiation of identity and a site of power of Filipino wives in international marriages. The mother's "Filipinoness" is thus represented by her son's circumcision.

The body is also becoming and forever changing as seen by a son's choice to have circumcision despite the knowledge that this is not widely accepted in a

country where he grew up. The body becomes a vehicle for him to build his own identity which is also influenced by his Filipino mother.

Filipino wives whose Japanese husbands are not circumcised tries to negotiate their identity by accepting that circumcision is not part of their husbands' customs. They negotiate on the grounds that Japanese husbands are more responsible, and are able to reproduce and perform their sexual obligations. Although feelings of ambivalence may surface, restraint is clearly practiced because of their concerns for reproduction and sustenance of order in their marriage.

These analyses therefore illustrate how transnationalism can be practiced and lived through cultural transmission such as body modification, showing that identity can be negotiated and is thus not fixed.

#### Notes

- 1 Upon the request of the respondents, no real names will be used to protect their privacy and to maintain confidentiality
- 2 Data for this research were also gathered from informal gathering such as Bible studies and get together with the Filipino wives.

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