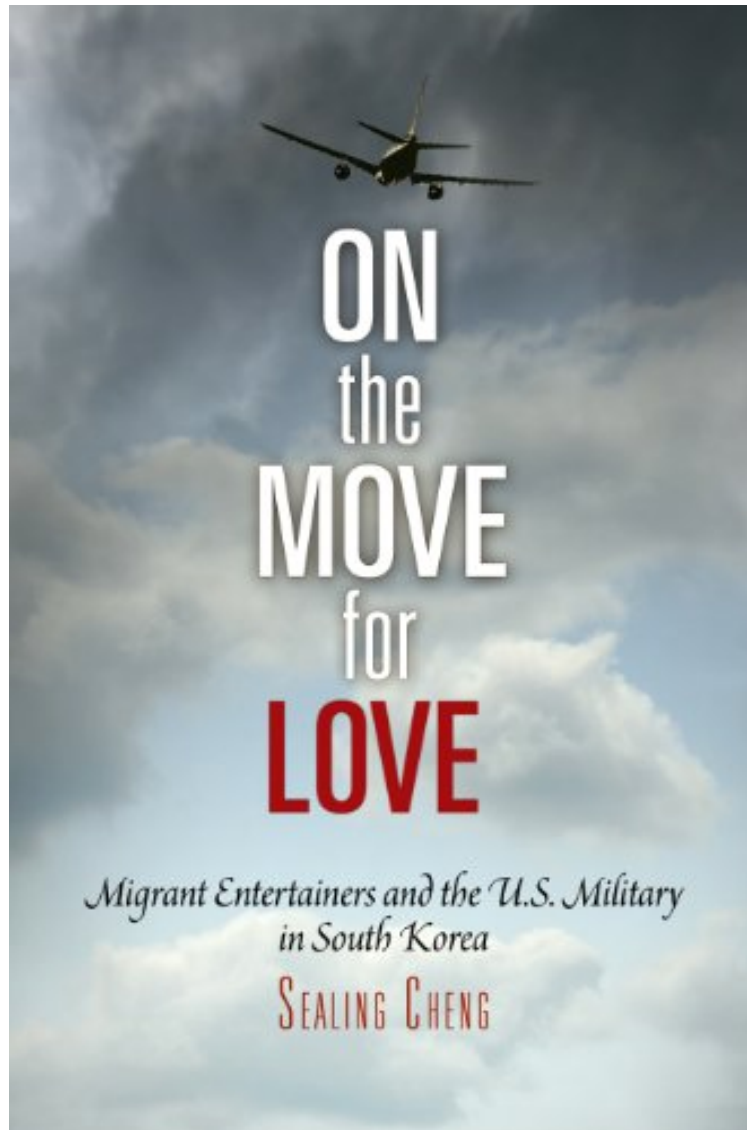


[Free read ebook] On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea
(Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights)

On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea (Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights)

Sealing Cheng

**Download PDF | ePub | DOC | audiobook | ebooks*



DOWNLOAD



+

READ ONLINE

#1992564 in Books 2013-07-16Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.90 x .80 x 6.00l, 1.00 #File Name:
0812222776304 pages | File size: 42.Mb

**Sealing Cheng : On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea
(Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my
time, and all praised On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea (Pennsylvania
Studies in Human Rights):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Three StarsBy CustomerCollege reading material, delivered as promised.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great sociology bookBy itsme.riveraRead this book for a sexuality course; it was pretty darn interesting!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy CHUNG, Yookjagood

Since the Korean War, *gijichon* U.S. military camp towns have been fixtures in South Korea. The most popular entertainment venues in *gijichon* are clubs, attracting military clientele with duty-free alcohol, music, shows, and women entertainers. In the 1990s, South Korea's rapid economic advancement, combined with the stigma and low pay attached to this work, led to a shortage of Korean women willing to serve American soldiers. Club owners brought in cheap labor, predominantly from the Philippines and ex-Soviet states, to fill the vacancies left by Korean women. The increasing presence of foreign workers has precipitated new conversations about modernity, nationalism, ethnicity, and human rights in South Korea. International NGOs, feminists, and media reports have identified women migrant entertainers as "victims of sex trafficking," insisting that their plight is one of forced prostitution. Are women who travel to work in such clubs victims of trafficking, sex slaves, or simply migrant women? How do these women understand their own experiences? Is antitrafficking activism helpful in protecting them? In *On the Move for Love*, Sealing Cheng attempts to answer these questions by following the lives of migrant Filipina entertainers working in various *gijichon* clubs. Focusing on their aspirations for love and a better future, Cheng's ethnography illuminates the complex relationships these women form with their employers, customer-boyfriends, and families. She offers an insightful critique of antitrafficking discourses, pointing to the inadequacy of recognizing women only as victims and ignoring their agency and aspirations. Cheng analyzes the women's experience in South Korea in relation to their subsequent journeys to other countries, providing a diachronic look at the way migrant issues of work, sex, and love fit within the larger context of transnationalism, identity, and global hierarchies of inequality.

"*On the Move for Love* vividly captures the intimate dialogues, rigorously challenges the established conceptual frameworks, and powerfully demonstrates the complexity of the lives of women who continuously hope for a better future. . . . A welcome addition to the field." *American Anthropologist* "A head-spinning, richly detailed, and fiercely original account of migrant Filipina entertainers in Korea. Sealing Cheng's rich ethnography captures migrant subjects who are also desiring subjects; romance as a mode of agency; and "projects of aspiration" as well as 'projects of need.' Deft and nuanced, embracing contradiction, and brave in honoring Filipinas' "dreams of flight", this book is absorbing, moving, and a great read. Destined to become a classic in gender/sexuality studies, migration, ethnography, and global South courses." Carole S. Vance, Columbia University "Cheng has struck the perfect balance between depicting the exploitation, pain, frustration, and sorrow experienced by the women in *gijichon* and the experiences that illustrate women's choices, hopes, strategies, good humor, and overall humanity." Nicole Constable, University of Pittsburgh "One of the best, most nuanced books I have read on militarized prostitution and sex trafficking. . . . Sealing Cheng successfully contrasts the thought-provoking individual stories of Filipino entertainers in South Korea (and their motives, resistance, and experiences) with the structural, rhetorical, and sometimes well-meaning impediments to migration, security, and a better life." Meredith Ralston, *Human Rights Quarterly* About the Author Sealing Cheng is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introduction The Angel Club One August morning in 1999 Winnie and six other Filipina entertainers ran away from the Angel Club in Dongducheon (known by GIs and Filipinas as "TDC"), the largest U.S. military camp town (*gijichon*) in South Korea, with about thirty clubs and approximately two hundred foreign entertainers. They made a two-hour southward journey by train and subway into Seoul to seek refuge with a Filipino priest, Father Glenn. Their plan was to stay with the priest for a transition period. Five of them would return to Dongducheon to find jobs at other clubs, and the other two would find jobs in one of the small factories that had been hiring a large number of migrant workers over the previous decade. As it turned out, Father Glenn not only provided shelter for them but also persuaded them to file reports at a Seoul police station against the owner of the club. They spent an entire night, until early morning, giving testimonies at the police station with an interpreter. Armed with charges of forced prostitution, the withholding of salaries, physical assault, and other abuses, the Seoul police went up north to Dongducheon. They raided the club and arrested the fifty-six-year-old club owner, whom I will call Ajumma (Aunt) Lee, and her thirty-year-old son, Mr. Lee. They also took possession of the women's passports, which had been kept by the club owner. Ten days after the Filipinas had taken refuge with Father Glenn, I met them in the capacity of interpreter-cum-mediator, at the behest of the Filipino priest. Mr. Lee, the son of the club owner, who had been released by the police, and his sister wanted to get their mother out of detention. They had called one of the Filipinas, who was staying at Father Glenn's shelter, to suggest meeting for a settlement. Father Glenn had called me at about 1:00 P.M. and said that he needed my help to meet with the women and the "club owners" at 3:00 P.M. in downtown Seoul. He wanted me to be the interpreter and to negotiate for compensation for the women in his place, as he would be busy holding a Saturday mass. I was concerned about my safety and the possible impact such involvement might have on my research in *gijichon*. However, failing to find a replacement, and unwilling to turn down Father Glenn's

request, I went to the meeting with a male Korean Ph.D. student. We met with the seven Filipinas and Mr. and Miss Lee in front of a convenience store in Jong-no, downtown Seoul. I introduced myself and went aside with the Filipinas to assure them that I had been sent by Father Glenn to help them negotiate for compensation. Some of them recognized me from a brief encounter in the fried chicken restaurant in Dongducheon, a favorite of the Filipinas when they wanted respite from the very different flavors of Korean cuisine. They liked the idea of compensation, but when I told them that Father Glenn had suggested a sum of ten thousand U.S. dollars per person, they all exclaimed that that was too much. I calmed them down to say that it was just a way to begin the negotiations. All of us then found a quiet meeting place in the backyard of a small church nearby. Over the ensuing seven hours the Filipinas, the Lees, the priest (who communicated with me by cell phone), as well as some Korean women activists who came midway through the meeting to assist with the negotiations, all had different opinions on how the dispute should be settled. Occasionally taking breaks to rest or for small group discussions, we sat on the four concrete benches placed in a square in the middle of the courtyard. The Lees sat on the bench across from my Korean friend and me, and the Filipinas on the other two benches. The Lees began by proposing an agreement that they had already written out, which offered payment of salaries and the return of personal belongings in exchange for the Filipinas' dropping of charges against their mother. However, a clause stating that the Filipinas' employment was being terminated as a result of their own fault brought unanimous objection. The Korean women activists wanted to take the case over and get lawyers involved, but the Filipinas resolutely refused, saying that that would take too long. They just wanted the settlement and "peace of mind." The multiple conversations were a mixture of hostility, ambivalence, and mistrust but also of sympathy. Miss Lee, the daughter of the club owner, was screaming in tears at one point, pained by the thought of her mother sitting in the cold cell yet she still refused to pay the compensation of ten thousand dollars per person demanded by the priest. The Filipinas did not want Ajumma Lee to be jailed even though she was a mean employer and had not treated them right. Some put their arms around Miss Lee when she broke down. Some joked with Mr. Lee when we took breaks. When it turned dark, we moved to a nearby Kentucky Fried Chicken, where the women signed and put their fingerprints on a second, handwritten agreement that promised them damages according to the length of time they had worked in the club, tickets back to the Philippines, and the return of their belongings. It was then 10:00 P.M. The Filipinas decided that, rather than return to the shelter, they would make the two-hour trip back to Dongducheon with Mr. and Miss Lee by train. They said that they wanted to retrieve their personal belongings from the club. It might have been my fatigue, but I found it hard to understand why they would want to leave with the Lees immediately after the exhausting tug-of-war and return to the club from which they had run away in the middle of the night. It seemed to me that the tears shed, the voices raised, the stomping feet, together with the levels of emotion and anxiety over the previous seven hours were being erased too quickly, too soon. I was baffled but could only say goodbye for the night as they left with the Lees for Dongducheon. Only when we met a week later did I find out that they had all been eager to meet their GI boyfriends that night. In fact, for most of the rest of their stays in South Korea for the next two weeks they were put up in motel rooms by their boyfriends. Two of them, over the next two years, married their GI boyfriends. Ajumma Lee was released three days after the conclusion of the negotiations. Before her release, the Filipinas received their promised compensation. Yet the drama developed exponentially. The day after the negotiation, on August 21, 1999, the police from Yongsan District in Seoul arrested Kim Kyung-su, the president of the Korea Special Tourism Association (a nationwide organization of gijichon club owners and the chief agent in bringing foreign women into gijichon). The arrest of Kim, a city council member in Dongducheon, for suspected crimes of forced prostitution made national news the next day. Kim was held in detention for three days while investigations continued. All gijichon clubs went into emergency mode, fearing that the arrests would continue. Most businesses either closed or forbade entertainers from approaching customers in the clubs. The dominant sentiment among the club owners was a fuming bitterness against both the seven runaways and their club owner, who had failed to manage the foreigners. Petitions for Kim to resign as councilman appeared in local newspapers, on the grounds that he had undone the hard work of over seventy thousand Dongducheon residents to clean up the city's gijichon image. With the arrest of the local councilman, a powerful local figure and the emergency state of the gijichon clubs, the Lees expressed their concern for the Filipinas' safety and suggested that they return to the Philippines rather than continue to roam around in Dongducheon and its vicinity. I agreed with the Lees. I was concerned about my own safety as well, in spite of my only indirect involvement in the incident. The Filipinas were, however, unaware of the severity of the wrath they had incited. In fact, Winnie even went bar-hopping in TDC with her staff-sergeant fiancé, Johnny, not realizing that one of the club owners recognized her as one of the Filipinas who had caused the havoc. The club owner called Miss Lee and threatened that if Winnie did not leave immediately, she would spend one hundred thousand won (approximately one hundred dollars) to have her killed by a Filipino. Miss Lee immediately called Winnie and asked her to leave and then called me the next day and asked me to convince the Filipinas that they should not return to the club area. Judging from the hostility of other club owners, I agreed with the Lees that it was not safe for the Filipinas to stay. I told them my perspective, and the Filipinas came to agree with me somewhat reluctantly, as they were looking forward to hanging out with their boyfriends and finding jobs in other clubs. However, their passports were being held by the Seoul police. I met with the seven Filipinas in Dongducheon, and we took a two-hour train journey to the Seoul

police station to retrieve their passports. The police ignored us and also turned down the Philippine Embassy officials who personally visited the police station, on the grounds that the police needed the passports for their investigation. It was not until a week later that the police station called the embassy to say that officials could pick up the passports. Phone calls were made between the Lees and the club owners' association, the Korea Special Tourism Association, which immediately purchased air tickets for the women. On their day of departure, I met the women at the airport. A Philippine Embassy official delivered the passports, which had just been picked up from the Seoul police station. At Immigration their passports were stamped, showing that the women were being deported and so would not be allowed back in South Korea for three years. I was perplexed when I saw the stamps were not the police documents attached to their passports supposed to state that they had been victims of what might have been crime and not criminals themselves? Neither the Filipino priest nor his interpreter, who accompanied the women into the Immigration Office, understood why the women were being deported. Strangely enough, none of the Filipinas, as they walked chirpily toward the gate, seemed to care. * * *

The above chain of events will be revisited throughout the following pages, as it contains all of the themes that this book sets out to explore. At the center of the story are the migrant Filipinas who, like millions of mobile people in this age of globalization, are in search of better lives through overseas employment. As migrants in a host country with limited protection of their rights, they are vulnerable to employers' abuses. Just when seven of them thought they were taking things into their own hands by running away from the abusive owner of the club where they worked, a cascading series of interventions effectively undermined not only their plans but also their legitimacy. While most can sympathize with the injustice of their unexpected ejection from the country, many will probably find the women's actions puzzling if not self-defeating: their trust in the club owner's family; their intimacy with the GIs, whose very presence was the reason they had gotten into the abusive situation in the first place; and their spurning of the generosity of the Filipino priest and the safety of the shelter. The Filipinas' actions thus defy the binaries conventionally used to understand an incident like this: the binaries of innocent Third World women vs. powerful First World men; well-intentioned nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) vs. evil-intentioned employers; the protection and shelter of rescuers vs. the danger of the clubs; and risks of migration vs. safety at home. These are the riddles that this ethnography tries to solve, first and foremost by understanding how the Filipinas make sense of their lives as migrant women in *gijichon*, where they are marginalized and stigmatized, yet hopeful and agentive. The title, *Dreams of Flight*, is a metaphor for their visions and aspirations as transnational migrants. It is now a cliché to say that "dreams of a better future" are what lead people to migrate. I want to emphasize these migrant women as cultural and social actors who creatively act against their constraints and negotiate practices and imaginings among disciplinary regimes of different scales in the transnational field: those of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation-state, and global capital, to name a few. Their active, engaged, and sometimes oppositional way of dreaming echoes what Arjun Appadurai has described as the capacity to aspire "a navigational capacity," meaning "knowledge of pathways to achieve the good life." "Flight" the mobility and freedom these migrant women dream of as escape from their gender, class, ethnic, and geographic embeddedness and as pursuit of "the good life" both describes the practice of and symbolizes migration. In the migrant entertainers' "dreams of flight" sex, love, and labor come to be overlapping and cross-cutting pathways toward "the good life." The Angel Club Filipinas showed that their prime concern, and preferable source of support, was their GI boyfriends. This strange intimacy between the Filipinas and the GIs in the context of *gijichon* is a main theme this book will explore "strange" because of the dominant/subordinate political, economic, and historical relationship between them, a structural relationship that has predominated in discourses about the U.S. military and women in rest and recreation (R R) facilities. The ethnography in the following chapters shows that while these migrant entertainers' movement into *gijichon* makes the operation of power visible, it also opens up avenues for transgression and subversion and makes the women's aspirations, including the pursuit of desires and pleasure, possible. This ethnography takes an "experience-near approach" to elucidate the logic of these migrant women's actions, desires, and dreams and their articulation with the changing political economy of the Asia-Pacific region. It examines how "romance" operates as a mode of agency for these women to develop their sense of self, pleasure, and work, and for the pursuit of an existential mobility toward a better future through migration. The ethnography privileges the voices of the women in order to understand their experiences of migration, with a keen awareness of the women's structural vulnerabilities but without any a priori understanding of them as victims whose sexuality has been violated. One of my arguments is that their romantic pursuits are rendered all the more comprehensible in relation to their vulnerabilities vis-à-vis the global system of material and symbolic inequality; the state apparatus of border control; and cultural constructions of racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies in other words, the very structures that brought them into *gijichon*. Since the late 1990s foreign migrant women have been working in the clubs in *gijichon*, the U.S. military camp towns in South Korea (*gijichon* literally means "military base villages"), as "entertainers" the term stated on the E-6 visas stamped on most of their passports. U.S. military camp towns have been fixtures in South Korea since the Korean War (1950-53). Korean women working in *gijichon* clubs have earned such derogatory terms as "Western whore" and "Western Princess," which refer to the selling of their bodies, as well as their nation, to "the West" specifically, to the United States. In the 1990s South Korea's rapid economic advancement, combined with the stigma and low pay attached to this work, led to a shortage of Korean women to serve these

American soldiers. Club owners then sought to bring in cheap labor from developing countries, much as employers in the small and medium-size manufacturing industry did in the late 1980s. The entry of foreign wage laborers is part of a restructuring of the South Korean labor market, which in turn is part of the country's globalization project within the changing political economy of the Asia-Pacific region. The entry of Filipinas marks the changing power relationships among the United States, South Korea, and the Philippines. While U.S. military domination continues in the Asia-Pacific region, it is no longer paralleled by exclusive U.S. economic might. South Korea's economic advancement has prevented many Korean women from following their predecessors in serving the U.S. military forces, and yet it has done so through the introduction of women from the "Third World" to fill the vacancies. The increasingly conspicuous presence of foreign workers, including migrant entertainers, has precipitated new conversations about modernity, nationalism, ethnicity, and human rights in South Korea. For the Koreans who work in *gijichon*, Filipinas have always been a "problem" (*munjae*): they are said to be lazy and difficult to control and have a reputation for selling themselves cheaply in *gijichon* and having sex with GIs for free. Such biased perceptions lay behind the death threat to Winnie. On the one hand, the threat suggests that a small sum (one hundred dollars) could make a Filipino not only give up his duty to protect a female compatriot but also lead him to inflict harm on her implying that the nation as a whole is amoral and easily corrupted. On the other hand, it indicates the Koreans' sense of superiority in being able to manipulate Filipinos for their own ends. The threat thus embodies both a derision of Filipino people as a whole and a flexing of power by the Koreans. From the perspective of border control, administrative regulation ensures that migrant entertainers remain as itinerants in the country. The E-6 visa is issued for six months and can normally be renewed only once. Most of the entertainers are on one-year contracts. The institutional marginalization of these migrant Filipinas is further exemplified in their encounters with the police and Immigration. The refusal of a local police station to accede to a diplomatic mission's request for the passports of its nationals who were plaintiffs and not suspects indicates the power relationship between the host country and the visitors' country. I could not but wonder if the same thing would happen if the plaintiffs had been U.S. nationals and not Filipinas. The ultimate deportation of the Filipinas by the Korean Immigration Office further illuminates the institutional presumption that these foreign women are "bad women" and disposable workers. In contrast, NGO activists such as Father Glenn and the Korean women activists have identified such women as victims in need of protection, on whose behalf they appealed to the legal system to penalize the club owners and to require them to compensate the women. It is from this perspective in particular that the women's affinity for the club owners and GIs becomes especially incomprehensible. This drive to identify such women as victims intensified with the burgeoning discourse of "trafficking in persons" at the turn of the twenty-first century. From 1999 onward various Korean and international NGOs, feminists, and media reports have identified the migrant entertainers studied here as "victims of sex trafficking," insisting that their plight is one of forced prostitution and that the deployment of these women reproduces the sexual objectification of Asian women for the reproduction of First World masculinity and military manhood. The emphasis on female passivity, innocence, and powerlessness that runs through this narrative of sexual victimhood can be found in a range of media, NGO, and academic representations. This ethnography, however, asks, To what extent do these representations reflect the experiences of women such as the Angel Club Filipinas? Echoing the upsurge of discourses about white slavery at the turn of the twentieth century, these discourses have a tendency to turn women into signifiers of victimhood and to overlook the complexity of contexts, identities, and agency involved. A critical lens may help us evaluate whether antitrafficking measures, peppered with claims to the protection of "women's human rights" and yet focused on crime and border control, are effective for alleviating the conditions of these migrant women, or whether they merely reproduce migrant women's marginality and vulnerability. As women out of place foreign women who have left home to work as "entertainers" (often understood to be a euphemism for "prostitutes") these Filipinas draw the regulatory impulse of their interlocutors, who turn the Filipinas' story into their own; project anxieties about gender, sexuality, and the nation-state onto these women's transgressive bodies; and impose specific disciplinary rationality. This is vividly yet only partially illustrated by the chain of events following the Angel Club Filipinas' attempt to escape. The Filipino priest sought justice for his female compatriots from the Korean police; the Korean women activists wanted the legal system to penalize the club owners; the capitol police force went after the "bad guys" in the provincial *gijichon*; the vindictive club owner threatened mortal harm against the troublesome migrant entertainer; and the Immigration Office actively excluded unwanted aliens from South Korean territory. Because of their transgressive sexuality, whether understood as that of "prostitutes," "sex slaves," or "victims of trafficking," these migrant entertainers became valuable and malleable symbols for the expression of discontent about social disorder, colonialism, global inequalities, foreign threats, changing gender roles, and sexual mores. My goal is to reveal some of the human stories entrenched in this phenomenon stories that have been covered under the blanket definition of "sex trafficking." The complexity of these women's lives and their creative responses suggest that looking at them only through the lens of sexual victimhood would continue the practice of defining women exclusively by their sexuality and of erasing the multiplicity of their identities, as well as their drive, motivation, and determination to struggle against their subordination. This ethnography thus takes a bifocal analytical approach, situating personalized accounts of Filipina entertainers' lives within a multilevel, macroanalytical framework. Instead of flattening the experiences of

the women as victims of an unbridled male sex drive and of transnational organized crime, we may understand better the context of their struggles what they are struggling for and what they are struggling against by recognizing them as migrant subjects and as desiring subjects. A key task is to examine the women entertainers as both laboring and erotic subjects in migration, an intersection that has yet to be developed in migration and sexuality studies. The gendering of labor migration has brought women from developing countries into developed economies mainly as care workers for example, domestic workers or nurses and as "entertainers," while their male counterparts predominantly work in construction, in factories, and as seafarers. The migration projects of these women laborers are projects not just of need but also of aspiration, fed by desires for the commodities, lifestyle, and identities that overseas employment seems to promise. However, migration and laboring as foreigners come with intersecting sets of vulnerabilities and uncertainties, particularly for women who work in the R R facilities and suffer from the "prostitute" stigma. From the diverse experiences of the women presented here, we may complicate the relationship between female victimhood and agency and develop an understanding of their vulnerability, not with reference to evil individuals or crime syndicates alone but also with reference to policies on labor migration, border control, and sexuality, as well as to larger structures of inequality engendered and maintained by neoliberalism. Although they are deployed as disposable labor, marginalized as migrants, and employed to perform as objects of desire to inspire male heterosexual fantasies, these do not erase the fact that entertainers in gijichon are also themselves subjects of desire (erotic subjects). The women bring into their workplaces and their migrations their own romantic and erotic imaginings, continuously blurring the boundary not only between labor and love, but also between the public and private, and between performance and authenticity. Nicole Constable has shown how romantic and erotic desires between Filipina or Chinese women and U.S. American men have been shaped by gendered imaginings in the history of U.S. imperialism in the Asia-Pacific region. Individuals' erotic imaginings and yearnings, therefore, are shaped by what I call the "political economy of desires." Through such an optic we may also come to understand how intimate longing and relationships with the Other can also be critical commentaries on gender and regional hierarchies within the larger political economy. In order to understand these women as migrant subjects, this ethnography draws on the literature of transnationalism and identity. Traveling on the lower rungs of transnational migration, these migrant entertainers devise their own "flexible citizenship" through informal networks, forged documents, and recruitersto attain their goals of cross-border travel and overseas employment. A case in point is provided by the story of the Angel Club Filipinas: even though all of them were deported with stamps on their passports prohibiting entry for three years, one of them soon returned to South Korea as an entertainer with another passport. In fact, using such forged documents is a commonplace strategy for transnationals "from below" in negotiating state regulation of population flows and borders. Thus, migrant Filipina entertainers are global actors who pursue desires and dreams shaped by the globalization of modernity and struggle for redistribution and recognition along their own paths, simultaneously reconstituting meanings and flows in the transnational field. As Marshall Berman suggests of modernization, "[t]hese world-historical processes have nourished an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own." The main goal of this ethnography is to show how migrant Filipinas make their deployment to South Korea "their own," as migrant women do not merely obey the call of global capital and leave home as commodified labor or sex objects but are also moved by their capacity to aspire, their will to change, and their dreams of flight.