HEARING THE VOICES OF FILIPINO WOMEN:
VIOLENCE, MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND
CONTESTED REALITIES

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed) _________________________________________________________
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This thesis is a feminist exploration of how violence against Filipino women in Australia is represented in the Australian and Philippine media and the relationship between the women’s lives and media images of their abuse. It is fundamentally concerned with the problem of the absent and silenced voices of Filipino women in media portrayals of violence. It aims at creating a space in which the women’s stories can be told. Based on interview data and discourse analysis of Australian and Philippine newspaper articles, the study investigates how the homicides and disappearance of seven Filipino women are represented. Case studies drawn from interviews with family members and friends of these women comprise the core of the study. An exploration of additional articles and interviews further reinforces the issues and themes that emerge in the case studies.

The case studies contextualise the women’s experiences. Analysing media images in light of the interviews reinstates the absent and silenced voice in media accounts of violence. By charting the lives of these seven women, their hopes and aspirations as well as the pain and fear they suffered at the hands of abusive male partners, the case studies illuminate the way media accounts have largely misrepresented their experiences. Many of the Australian articles, in particular, bore little resemblance to the women’s lived realities. Juxtaposing Australian with Philippine portrayals further illuminates the racism and sexism of a large section of the Australian print media. A major theme to emerge out of this study is that the relationship between media image and actual violence also involves struggle and conflict over constructions of identity. It is a site of contested realities.

Most of the articles analysed in this study failed to tell the story from the deceased woman’s perspective. It is argued that to hear these women’s voices, journalists need to move beyond using sexist, racist and class-based stereotypes, such as mail order bride, to describe Filipino women or explain their abuse. It also means accounting for the history of domestic violence that was a large part of their lives.
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<td>CATW</td>
<td>Coalition Against Trafficking in Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATW-AP</td>
<td>Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFED</td>
<td>Collective of Filipinas for Empowerment and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPCN</td>
<td>Centre for Philippine Concerns-Australia</td>
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<td>FWWP</td>
<td>New South Wales Filipino Women’s Working Party</td>
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<td>HREOC</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAKAMMPI</td>
<td>Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anak ng Migranteng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc</td>
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<td>KALAKASAN</td>
<td>Kababaihan Laban sa Karahasan</td>
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<tr>
<td>KALAYAAN</td>
<td>Katipunan ng Kababaihan Para sa Kalayaan</td>
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<tr>
<td>MRC</td>
<td>Migrant Resource Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCW</td>
<td>Overseas Contract Worker</td>
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<td>OFW</td>
<td>Overseas Filipino Worker</td>
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<td>OWWA</td>
<td>Overseas Workers Welfare Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCIJ</td>
<td>Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism</td>
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<td>PO</td>
<td>People’s organisations</td>
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<td>POEA</td>
<td>Philippines Overseas Employment Administration</td>
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<td>Qld</td>
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<td>R &amp; R</td>
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<td>SAMPA</td>
<td>Samahan ng Pilipino sa Australia</td>
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<td>SAPS</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Programs</td>
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<td>SPAN</td>
<td>Solidarity Philippines Australia Network</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<td>VFA</td>
<td>Visiting Forces Agreement</td>
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<td>WEDPRO</td>
<td>Women’s Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization</td>
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