Review of Social Studies
Gender and Migration

London Centre for Social Studies
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Gender and Migration

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Consequences of Feminised Migration on Families: The Case of Filipino Women

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Abstract

The continued dependence on Filipino women’s migration by their families for their economic well-being has been leading to social change. Such change has taken various forms such as the restructuring of households, redefinition of families and gender relations and change in women’s status. Migration is deeply embedded in the context of family norms, therefore, making it essential to study its impact on the family left behind. Prolonged absence of the migrant woman from her family impacts the structures and processes of family life, reorganisation of households, parenting and childcare. It also affects the psychosocial roles of household members, husband-wife power relationships, and migrant mother-child relationships. Such findings are derived from a study of the life stories of fourteen Filipino migrant women who have worked as domestic workers in various parts of the world for six to twenty two years, and have since returned to the Philippines permanently. Returning home for the migrant women has meant re-establishing physical and emotional bonds with children and restoring fractured relationships with spouses. Conflicts and contradictions between them and the children have emerged amidst the pressures of prolonged absence from home and the desire to maintain a standard of living. For some women migrants, relationships with their husbands improved due to the increased value and status as a result of their economic contributions. They also exercised greater decision-making power in their households thereby changing the power dynamics.

Keywords

migration, families, return, empowerment, gender

Introduction

Migration presents a rich, complex and fascinating field of study. This is particularly true for a country like the Philippines, with its long history of generations leaving the country to work, live or settle elsewhere, and where this phenomenon has taken different forms over time. Official statistics estimate that out of the total national population of 100.6 million, about 3.8 million are temporary overseas workers and about 1.3 million are on irregular status, without valid residence or work permits in countries they work (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2012). Migrant workers from the Philippines are in various regions of the world including Africa, East and South Asia, West Asia, Europe and in the America/Trust Territories. In
2008, Filipino migrant workers sent home a record $16.4 billion USD (Lema 2009), about 12 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), or the total amount of goods and services produced by the economy (Dumlao 2008). This kind of emigration has been one of the means for the government to reduce financial problems, since remittances would become vital financial revenue to the Philippine economy (Asian Migrant Forum 1996).

The huge unemployment problem led the government to adopt aggressive measures to promote and maintain labour export. Hence, the Labor Code of 1974 formalised the promotion of overseas contract work as a strategy for addressing unemployment and foreign exchange requirements. Although it was meant to be a temporary strategy, over the years, successive governments have institutionalised the labour export programme rather than adopt measures and reforms to address root causes of unemployment (Center for Migrant Advocacy 2006). Furthermore, the export of Philippine labour, as a source of economic boost, remains unabated and through the years, women have increasingly dominated the scene. In 2007, the top occupational group for the new hires was household related work, of which 98 per cent were women, with the trend continuing (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2007). Hence, increasingly, over the years, labour migration from the Philippines has become feminised. Studies on the migration experience of women have shown that its effects on the women themselves are unclear, ambiguous and even contradictory (Boyd 2006; Lim and Oishi 1996; Parreñas 2006). Migration can be both exploitative and liberating, simultaneously offering new opportunities and horizons, as well as new forms, structures and processes of oppression and marginalisation.

At the household level, migrant workers’ remittances have been utilised mainly for education, housing, and day-to-day living expenses. Some studies have indicated that remittances do help lift households out of poverty (Pernia 2006). Consequently, many migrant households continue to send members to work abroad in order to maintain the standard of living and level of income to which they have grown accustomed. As a result, migrant workers spend several years away from the country and their families. Uncovering and understanding the consequences of the prolonged absence of women migrant workers is a topic worth undertaking, as it unveils major implications for the women themselves, labour export policy of the Philippine government and for Philippine society as a whole.

International labour migration is a complex phenomenon involving a myriad of issues. These issues are social, political, and economic, one
impinging on the other. The social issue is concerned with the implications of the growing numbers of women migrating. The political and economic issues involve the ambivalence in migration policy-making stemming from the economic imperatives on the one hand, and the desire to protect the welfare and rights of migrant workers on the other hand. The social, political and economic issues focus on the debates on the impact of remittances on poverty alleviation and sustainable growth and development, and the social consequences of migration.

The continued and prolonged dependence on migration by the Philippine government to address unemployment on one hand, and by Filipino families for their economic well-being on the other hand, has been leading to social change. This has been expressed through restructuring of households and redefinition of families and gender relations, as well as in the rise of a societal culture of migration. The culture of migration has bred an increasing dependence on women migrating to work in mainly gender-segregated occupations, with low status and low value, which in turn subjects women to vulnerabilities such as abuse and exploitation, and at times involve deskilling for educated and skilled women taking on such jobs. Such phenomenon is a characteristic feature of feminised migration.

**Feminisation of Migration**

One of the main features of a globalised economy is the increased employment of women workers in the world which have led to a ‘renewed surge of feminization of labour activity’ (Standing 1989:107). However, what this has meant is not only an increase in numbers of income-earning women. It has also meant deregulation of labour standards, flexible and more disposable work and lower labour costs.

The *ILO Report on Global Employment Trends for Women* (2007) states that women who work are often confined to less productive sectors of the economy with less likelihood of meeting the characteristics that define decent work, including access to social protection, basic rights and a voice at work. In addition, women earn less than men. Women workers face persistent problems of occupational segregation. Around the world, women are mainly concentrated in jobs seen as extensions of their caring and nurturing roles such as teaching, nursing, human resources and social services and tend to remain in lower job categories than men.

The feminisation of international labour migration has been most pronounced in the case of Asia and this constitutes one of the most significant economic and social phenomena of recent times (Lim and Oishi 1996). According to Wille and Passl (2001: 9):
International labour contracts are highly gendered. Women are nearly exclusively found in the service sector and domestic and care-giver work and entertainment work. The number of women in factories is also increasing but remains small in comparison to the service industry. Southeast Asia’s women, therefore take part in ‘specific female migration systems’ rather than being part of the same flows as their male counterparts.

It is important to determine under what conditions does feminisation of migration occur. Moreover, the impact of women’s status and gender equality on their propensity to migrate can be examined at three different levels: the larger society, the family and the individual. Societal factors include the capacity of the state to protect its members and their livelihood, state policy toward migration, and community norms and cultural values that determine whether or not women can migrate and, if they can, how and with whom (Boyd 2006). Migration values and motivations are shaped within families (Tacoli 1999; Zontini 2004). Families and households determine a woman’s position relative to other family members and influence her decision-making capacity and ability to access familial-based resources for purpose of migration. Women’s ability to move is also indicative of their autonomy and decision-making power within their households, particularly in terms of financial matters as in the case of Filipino women migrants (Oishi 2002).

State policies in which migrants are viewed as valuable sources of remittances may favour the migration of women and men alike. In the Philippines, long-standing patterns of female migration have normalised the continued migration of women as in the movement of domestics and nurses from the Philippines as well as of male migration as in the outflow of male seafarers (Boyd 2006). Moreover, as expressed by Asis (2002:69):

In the course of some 30 years of international migration, the state, the migration industry and migrant networks have laid down the groundwork and process of migration. Having been routinized, information about migration is available, migration has become acceptable (or even desirable) and the pathways of going abroad (including irregular channels) are already in place.

By the mid-1980s, a combination of key factors heightened the global demand and employment of Filipino women: rapid economic decline in the Philippines, growth in the international service sector demand in both Asia and the Middle East, declines in male labour demand in the Middle East construction sector and aggressive global labour marketing by Philippines’ government (Ball 2004).

From 2003 up to 2008, among the Filipino migrant workers, there were far more female service workers than female professional, medical and technical workers. In 2006, for example, there were only 24,046 women in
the latter category and 128,186 in the former category. In 2008, there were 21,717 women hired as professional, technical and related workers and half of these were nurses while 100,570 women were hired as service workers. In 2013, 164,396 women were hired as household service workers, compared to 16,604 nurses. Clearly, the majority of Filipino women hired to work overseas are persistently in the service sectors, majority of whom are domestic workers, caregivers and related workers (POEA 2013).

Feminisation of labour migration is not just depicted in the increasing numbers of migrant women workers. It is also predicated in the understanding of how the experience and implication of migration differ for women and men, who face different sets of constraints and responsibilities. It includes examining the context and the circumstances within which migration takes place and analysing the consequences of migration for women themselves, their families and society. This paper is devoted to analysing these consequences, particularly on the children they leave behind.

Migration and Family

Motivations for working abroad are shaped largely by family norms, values and aspirations. From this study, it appears that women’s migration is mainly compelled by the desire to enhance the family’s welfare and well-being (Asis 2002; Hugo 1995; Zlotnik 1995). It is pertinent therefore to determine whether migration has indeed benefited the family’s welfare or not. At the same time, the family itself is a gendered social institution, where relations are governed by the interplay of labour, power and emotions (Connell, 1987). Prolonged absence of the woman migrant, as the mother, the wife, the daughter, not only reconstitutes the family’s structure but also the dynamics of relationships amongst its various members (Zlotnik 1995).

Specifically, this paper seeks to determine how migration of the woman in the family affects the home, the family left behind, in terms of family structures and processes, gender roles and gender shifts occurring in the family where in the woman is away and becomes the breadwinner. It also examines the sense of security and insecurity that international migration brings and whether there are any differences between the male and female children in the way they are affected and how. It explains how the spouses left behind cope with the absence of the women as wives and mothers in the family structure. The paper finally seeks to determine how migration of the women in the family affected the status and decision-making role of the women.
Methodology

The life story method was used in this study of the migrant women workers. The life stories sought to unearth the experiences of migration from the perspective of Filipino women migrants. In the process, the life story enables one to understand fully the dynamics of change that migration has brought to bear on the lives of the migrant women and their families.

Findings of the study conducted from 2004 - 2005, are based mainly on the life stories of 14 Filipino women migrants performing mainly domestic work in various countries for a period ranging from 6 years to 22 years, who have since returned to the Philippines.

I have triangulated the main method of life stories and narratives with other methods such as focus group discussions, analysis of government reports and international agency reports, and the secondary literature review. Fourteen women migrants of varying civil status (single, married, separated or widowed), ages, and migration experiences are my key informants and narrators. A series of focus group discussions held in various parts of the country, in both rural and urban areas, with women migrants and members of families left behind, complement the life stories of the women migrants interviewed. Altogether, about 120 women, men and young people participated in the group discussions.

The home that has changed

The home that the migrant returns to has changed in both a literal and a figurative sense. In the Philippines, the once humble home of thatched roofs and local materials like bamboo or nipa, has now given way to a concrete abode, a source of pride, a symbol of achievement. For an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), a concrete house is a testimony to years of hard toil and labour in a distant land (Gardner 1995; King 2000). Inside these dwellings, one finds a family where one or even both parents are away for long years working overseas while children are left behind to the care of fathers, grandparents or other members of the extended family, usually women.

For some migrant women, there is no home to return to where relationships have disintegrated, the spouse has left or the children have started to lead their own lives. Some children left behind felt a sense of abandonment. Others faced difficulty in communicating with their mothers and felt distant. For many of the returning mothers in this study, restoring strained or fractured relationships was an immediate and paramount concern.
Change in family structure and dynamics of gender relationships

The Filipino family is in transition and according to Medina (2001), in recent years it has become difficult to define families, as significant changes in living arrangements are taking place. The phenomenon of overseas contract workers has given rise to incomplete households where one or both parents are absent, or to expanded households where children of such workers are cared for by aunts and grandparents or by friends and hired workers. In some instances, households would be headed by older children of migrant workers. The prolonged separation of families has brought about a radical change in family structures and the harsh reality is that while Filipino women work for families abroad, millions of Filipino children grow up without their mothers (Balana 2006).

Migration has clearly reconfigured families in both structure and transformed gender relationships. As Katy Gardner (2002:226) contends, ‘migration has multiple effects on gender relations… migration is inherently contradictory for it involves physical separation in a society which so greatly values togetherness’. When a woman leaves, her roles as wife and mother are drastically affected. In the Filipino society, much of the caring, nurturing and housekeeping roles rest with the mother. Therefore, her absence clearly creates a void in families and households, a void that often is difficult to fill. In her study of children of migrants left behind, Rhacel Parreñas maintains that children of migrant mothers express greater difficulties in their family life than children of migrant fathers do. This is because to the children and to the society as a whole, the caring act of extended kin ‘does not adequately substitute for the nurturing acts performed by their biological mothers’ (Parreñas 2006: 121).

In Ester’s story, her daughter felt abandoned for all the years that she had been away. Hence, the sense of abandonment is also gendered.

Ester was away for 23 years. Every year or two, she would return for a month’s visit at a time. When she finally returned home for good, all the children had grown. To her, the biggest initial adjustment was being with her husband at home and largely by themselves:

I felt strange eating with someone and a MALE. Back in Hong Kong, I was used to eating all by myself. I felt strange sleeping with someone and so for some time, I slept with my stuffed toys. I felt like I didn’t have a husband, just a friend. My youngest child, a son, who was now an adult wanted to sleep with me when I returned home. My only daughter felt abandoned all the years that I have been away.
Apart from re-establishing her physical and emotional bonds with her two younger children, Ester had to restore her relationship with her husband which was severely fractured during the early years of her migration journey. She argues that: “It is difficult if you are not able to forgive (referring to her husband’s infidelity). You cannot build (rebuild) a family if the father is absent.”

In the Philippines, the father is perceived as ‘the pillar of the home’ and the mother as the ‘light of the home’. This is a common metaphor designating the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the carer and nurturer. Therefore, for a home to stand firm and strong, the father and the mother should be present.

When Zeny, another one of the women in this study, returned, her daughters had grown into adults. They had become distant from her. Moreover, the older daughter was particularly angry at her for her years of absence. Unlike the other women who returned home in between their long years of work abroad, Zeny did not. In the interview she stated that it was difficult to get home leave from the hospital where she worked in, in the Middle East. Moreover, she wanted to save as much as she could and visiting home would have meant spending her savings. Zeny exclaimed:

My daughter gave me all sorts of problems when I returned. She stopped working. She got married to a jobless man. Later, she decided to have a child knowing that her health was not good. I used up all my resources to attend to her needs. I even purchased a tricycle for her husband so he could use it to earn some money rather than be in the company of friends who did nothing but get drunk. But what hurts me most is that my daughter does not respect me at all. She did not value what I have provided her. It was all for nothing.

In her narrative, Zeny expressed a resignation to the situation where she could no longer repair the breakdown in her relationship with her elder daughter.

Like Zeny, Siony returned to a home where relationships were strained. In the span of 22 years that she worked in Malaysia as a domestic help, she visited home only three times. She wanted to save so she could redeem the land she mortgaged to pay for agency fee when she first arrived in Malaysia in the 1980s. Siony desired to buy farming equipment and cattle to boost the earnings from her farm. When she finally returned, the 8 year-old son she left behind was now a man with a family. Siony did not like the woman her son had married in her absence and the two could not get along. She could not even show affection for her grandchildren. This hurt the son a lot. He felt rejected and unloved by his own mother.
Nora, on the other hand, stated that:

It took a week before my youngest child warmed up to me after I had come home for good. I did not witness his growing up. My family and relatives thought I was alright working abroad but it hurt a lot. Tiniis ko lahat para makaangat ng kaunti (I endured it all so that we could rise above poverty just a little bit).

Other people in the community think it is good to go abroad because of the economic benefits one derives. But it is difficult to leave your children when they are young. My children would ask me all the time during my yearly visits, “Ma, when are you coming home”?

Several women in the focus group discussions were disappointed when they finally came home because the home had changed in form, structure and ‘substance’. As one woman remarked:

When I came home, I expected my family to be complete and happy as before I left. We used to share our problems, eat our meals together, exchange anecdotes, share dreams. When I came home, each one is to her own life, there is no one to talk to at times, no one is at home. Things have changed. Something is now sorely lacking. What is important to me now is that I have returned after being away for eight long years.

Children left behind and impact of mothers’ return

Children left behind by migrant parents, particularly by migrant mothers have clearly been affected, whether materially or psychologically and emotionally. Specifically, my study shows that when the migrant mothers returned to their families, conflicts and contradictions between them and the children emerged in their lives.

Berto (Rita’s son) was five years old when his mother left for Hong Kong. He recalled that whenever his mother came home for a visit, he was ‘super spoiled’ by her and she brought loads of toys. Although his mother was away for 13 years, she visited him at least once a year. When asked how he coped with his mother’s absence, he replied:

I had gotten used to her absence. My grandmother took care of me very well. I was her favourite grandchild then; I had an aunt who was most special and most loving and later, I was also taken care of very well by another woman hired to look after me. She too was special to me.

Clearly, the female members of Berto’s family carried the burden of care in the absence of his mother and Berto felt secure in the love of his extended family. While this is a single instance, it appears to run counter to the dominantly-held notion by Filipino families that a mother’s care is
irreplaceable (Añonuevo and Añonuevo 2003). Observations and studies on migrants’ families point to a trend where increasingly, grandparents assume a big role in taking care of their grandchildren who are left behind. This phenomenon evokes difficult concerns for grandparents taking on such responsibility at a phase in their lives when they themselves need care and to be free of care-giving responsibilities (Dungo 2009). One grandmother shared during the focus group discussions, the financial burden (on top of her care-giving role) she had to carry when her daughter could no longer send enough funds for the children’s needs. She had to use her retirement money to provide for her grandchildren.

Life after Berto’s mother’s return to the Philippines became problematic. As Berto expressed:

It was difficult when my mother came back as we no longer had enough money. We had arguments and fights over many things, both small and big. My mother remarked that I was so used to a good life and therefore, I needed to experience hard life. But I argued with her and said that she should not have returned yet since we needed money to complete my education. Finally, we both got tired of quarrels and so we reconciled and learned to live with each other again harmoniously.

While Berto was cared for by devoted relatives in the absence of his mother, Melinda recalls that when her mother (Manang) left for Saudi Arabia, she and her brothers were left to fend for themselves because their father had abandoned them even before her mother’s working abroad. ‘Nawalan kami ng dalawang haligi sa pamilya’ (‘We lost two pillars of the family’).

Her brother shared the same sentiment.

Even if we received money from my mother, it was a lonely life for us. There was emptiness around us. It is different if your parents are around to look after you and have someone to turn to when needed.

Melinda further remarked:

My mother sent us money regularly but my brothers were always fighting and were gallivanting most of the time. Later on, my siblings and I realised how difficult life can be without parents and so we resolved to work hard and earn some money. What my mother sent was not much but we tried hard to budget it to meet our needs.

Now that my mother is back, we are happier and life is a bit better for us. We have grown, we have our families and we have some source of livelihood. We now give our mother some money, she is much older now and so we need to look after her.

A conflict of values and attitudes has taken place in migrants’ families. The parent who is away believes that she is out there to fulfil the material needs of her children and her absence is justified so long as she can carry out this
role. The children, while they recognise their material needs and wants, put priority on their emotional and psychological needs especially when they are at the age of adolescence (Dungo 2009; Episcopal Commission et al 2004).

The children as a whole understood why their mother had to be away but all of them shared the difficulty of growing up by themselves. On the other hand, a few saw the absence of their mothers as an opportunity for them to develop.

A study on children and family showed that most children of OFWs experienced ‘emotional displacement’ due to the prolonged absence of one or both parents but more so with children of migrant mothers. The children of migrant mothers ‘reported feeling lonely, angry, unloved, unfeeling, afraid, worried…’ (Episcopal Commission et al.. 2004:55). The adolescents in the focus group discussion revealed deep feelings of loneliness and alienation from parents. The study also points out that children of OFWs were in a better educational position compared to children of non-OFWs because they were enrolled in private schools, and had greater opportunities of participating in extra-curricular activities such as field trips, school programmes, and the like. Their migration indeed brought about economic and material benefits but at emotional and psychological costs to children and to the migrant women and mothers themselves. At the same time, Edillon (2008) concluded that such benefits may not be sustainable because children of OFWs are vulnerable to economic and psycho-social shocks.

In a similar investigation of children in Moldova left behind by migrating parents, Cezar Gavriliuc (2008) concluded that the parents’ departure affected not only the children’s material conditions but their emotional development, social relations and school performance. It is difficult to predict what might turn out to be the long-term consequence of such emotional deprivation on the children. A number of factors would come into play such as the age of the children when left behind, the quality of care of the carers especially by fathers left behind, community support and as Gavriliuc (2008) emphasised, the child’s preparation for an independent life.

Gina and Berto expressed that it could have been better for their mothers not to have returned home because at the point they did, they were not through with their college education, something that meant so much to them and to their parents as well. However, their mothers left to work abroad at a time when they were both very young, just about three years old.
so that the years of separation had caused pain to Berto’s mother and Gina’s father.

Gina further shared what she perceived were contradictions in their life upon her mother’s return.

At times, I had wished that my mother were still abroad, working so that I could continue with my studies and not only my brother. Every day, my mother leaves our house trying to sell real estate property. We ourselves do not have our own house and land. She does not have time for the house and she earns little. Because she is always away, it seems like she is abroad. But it is better for her to be abroad because then we would have sufficient money.

At the time the parents were working abroad, Berto felt secure emotionally and materially and Gina was secure materially, at least. However, when their mothers returned, financial insecurity set in. Both Berto and Gina faced difficulties in starting and completing their tertiary education. Hence, the impact of migrant parents’ return on the children would also be influenced by the timing of the return of the migrant mother and the life stage of the children. Working overseas, even as a domestic help, gives one a sense of security because of a regular income, in contrast to being back home, where unemployment is high or where labour is hired and contracted on a short-term basis. Therefore, upon return of the migrant worker, insecurity sets in for various members of the household.

**Pressure on children to assume adult roles**

Migration of parents, particularly that of mothers, places pressure on children to take over the caring responsibility in families where the father fails to do so. Therefore, the children suddenly take on adult roles in the absence of their mothers and/or parents.

Conrado, as the second child in his family and the brightest, was forced to grow up fast when his mother left to work abroad. He had to learn to manage the remittances his mother entrusted to him and not to the father who had left home for another woman. The family broke apart and care of siblings was split between maternal and paternal grandparents, dividing households and loyalties.

Alma, a 12-year-old, whose mother started working in Hong Kong when she was only one year old, expressed being trapped in a role she could barely manage. During the weekly telephone calls her mother made, she needed to account on how remittances from the mother were spent. She also spoke of being intimidated by her older brother as he would complain of the inadequacy of his weekly allowance set by their mother. Their father,
a soldier, was assigned in another province and he would visit them only once in three months. The children were taken cared by a woman hired by their mother. According to their caregiver, Alma and her brother fared poorly in school. The children pined for their parents often and every night, Alma insisted that the caregiver sleeps with her.

We can observe in Alma’s family how the burden of household care and management is shouldered by Alma herself and a hired caregiver. Alma’s mother herself is a caregiver in Hong Kong. Herein, one observes, the chain of care-giving roles, which Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002) call the ‘global care chain’. It depicts a series of personal links between people of varied social class status based on the paid or unpaid work of caring. While the chain usually stops at the caregiver for families or children left behind, in Alma’s family, the chain extends to her because certain household tasks had been passed on to her by her mother.

The existing literature point out that children left behind are mostly cared for by female members of families, households and kin network (Añonuevo and Añonuevo 2002, Dungo 2008, Parreñas 2006). However, based on this research, it is argued that it is not always the case that the female members of the family shoulder the responsibility of looking after the children left behind. In some families, it is the older sibling or the child considered more responsible than the others (like Conrado or Alma) whether female or male, who usually took care of the younger siblings. The eldest child in the Filipino family is often regarded as the responsible family member who needs to look after the younger siblings especially when the parents are unable to.

In Edna’s household, the children learned to manage by themselves although the greatest burden fell on the eldest child, a son. Their father worked during the day when he could because he was often ill. Moreover, he indulged in drinking with his peers and was also merely contented with waiting for the monthly remittance from their mother. The eldest son had to cook, wash their clothes at times and even had to go to market for food provisions. Unable to cope with household responsibilities, he dropped out from high school.

The above stories demonstrate the various kinds of strains, burdens and displacements on children left behind by mothers and left with fathers who are unable or unwilling to take over the change in gender roles and responsibilities. The male and female children shared the burden of caring for the family even though the father was with them and not without psychological costs. Other children had to bear the emotional pain of their
father’s infidelity. Many have also been emotionally scarred so that even if children acknowledge and realise the economic value of an overseas job and even when their mothers have returned home, they still felt the emotional and psychological consequences of being left behind. These are the social consequences of migration which although are currently discussed within various sectors of Filipino society, seem to be accepted as given.

**Dynamics of gendered relationships between migrant wives and spouses**

Alice Pingol (2001), in a pioneering study, explored the changes that occurred in Filipino men left behind by wives who went overseas to work who have become the main providers in the family. She investigated the patterns of gender relations among couples whose lives have been transformed by global labour migration. Specifically, the study examined how the men dealt with traditional norms of masculinity which constitute being good providers, virile sex partners, and firm and strong fathers. Her findings showed among other things, that the husbands required psychological adjustments from being a main provider to that of a nurturer, and from being faithful and loyal despite their sexual deprivation. They had to be emotionally stable to sustain the emotional needs of their children. In the process, these men had to remake and redefine their masculinities.

Another group of men could not cope well, had conflicts with in-laws, mismanaged remittances and entered into sexual liaisons. In this study, it was found that the latter group of men predominated. For example, returning home for Ana meant a separation from her husband who had been unfaithful and who had misused money sent to him while she worked in Taiwan.

Mila also returned to a home where she had difficulty living with a husband who continued to be unfaithful in her years of absence. Mila expressed:

> Upon my return I tried to pick up the pieces and put them back together but could not. He still wanted to embrace me but I no longer had any feelings for him. I have slowly killed all my feelings, no more love for him. I wanted to separate from him but my father prevented me. I ignored my husband often so that my feelings for him would just fade away. I refused to share a bedroom with him.

When Amy finally returned home after a total of 12 years abroad, she learned that her husband had mismanaged the funds which she remitted regularly. He had lent most of the money to his siblings to finance their overseas employment fees and other expenses and the money was never repaid. Amy rebelled and left home for about two months. When she returned, she demanded that the husband utilise the lump-sum payment he
received from the army upon his retirement then to purchase household appliances, to which he acceded.

Upon return from Malaysia, Edna learned that her husband had gotten involved with the woman she had hired to take care of the children. This revelation caused conflicts and miseries in their household. Edna also found out that the second son had run away and sought refuge in his grandmother’s house in the province area. Like Mila, Edna rebuked her husband for his infidelity and even asked him to leave the household. Her husband was repentant, but Edna could no longer bring herself to re-establish their marital relationship. Edna remarked: ‘The children have lost respect for their father. They only listen to me now’.

What are the implications of these fractured relationships which have been narrated above? The male spouses left behind were unable to cope with the wives’ absence from home and with the adjustments in their masculinity and/or sexual abstinence. Thus, they mismanaged funds or became unfaithful partners. The migrant wives with unfaithful husbands had to bear the emotional and psychological costs entailed. The children suffered too in the process. Another woman (Ana) turned to a more complicated relationship, and in the process lost the material rewards from her migration experience and the love of her children. While the relationships between returning migrant wives and their spouses were clearly destabilised, it is maintained that the women migrants were not passive women, as they demonstrated resistance and negotiated power relationships. Moreover, to some of them, their role and status in the households were enhanced.

**Enhanced Status and Decision-Making**

Marta Tienda and Karen Booth assert that evaluating changes in women’s position following migration is an empirical question to be answered based on concrete situations. In their effort to draw generalisations from existing literature, they maintain three possible outcomes in women’s status: improvement, erosion, and restructured asymmetries, meaning that ‘the relative position of women remains unequal vis-à-vis men, but the concrete circumstances of their position are drastically changed’ (Tienda and Booth 1991:56).

Six women narrators expressed that their relationships with their husbands improved due to the greater value and status placed on them for bringing about economic contributions to their families. Ester’s husband, Dencio, shared the following:
There has been a big change in our life. In the past, we lived in just one room of our extended family house. Now, we have a house of our own. Our children are educated. Two completed college. Our son, the engineer is now working abroad and is a big help to us, to the family. He desires to help in the education of his nieces and nephews.

Their husbands became more caring and considerate. The women exercised greater decision-making power in major concerns of the household as in investment matters: purchase of land, pedicab (tricycle), house construction. Such power stemmed mainly from their income earning capacity and sustenance to the family. Edna maintains that her relationship with her husband had always been egalitarian, but because migration enabled her to contribute greatly to the economic needs of the family, her decision-making role became more pronounced. For example, while abroad, she decided that her income from several months of work should be invested in a vehicle for income generating purposes. Upon return, large and small decisions on household and other matters fell mainly on her.

A few husbands took upon themselves responsibilities in household tasks when the migrant women were away working overseas and continued these upon return of their migrant wives. As shared by three husbands: ‘We had to make adjustments. It was difficult. You had to be both father and mother, cooking and washing clothes’.

One husband added:

I needed to be patient, to persevere. My wife and I had set goals in life and we wanted to attain them. I had a job but my earnings were not enough for the family’s needs and so my wife had to go abroad and work.

Nora, who now tends a small food catering business, commented that her husband helps her in running the business. He goes to the market and takes care of cutting up the meat and vegetables. Likewise, Nena’s husband helps her manage their small convenience store and food stall.

However, while sharing of household tasks and responsibilities continued upon return of the migrant women, based on my interviews and visits to some households, it was observed that the women were still the same persevering and hardworking women (as when they were abroad), undertaking all sorts of work to financially support their households which often were extended households.

The experience of overseas migration has raised the consciousness of the women of their capacity to earn and provide for their families and to successfully overcome the rigours of a migrant’s life. Hence, this strengthened their character and sense of autonomy. Women were further
empowered as shown by their ability to challenge gender norms and to negotiate with their husbands. For example, when husbands mismanaged remittances, the women sent such remittances directly to their responsible children as Nora and Ester did. In addition, Ester ensured that the properties she had acquired were placed under her children’s names rather than her husband’s. Others demanded equal sharing in meeting household needs and responsibilities. Two women sought separation from their unfaithful husbands. Clearly, these women have tilted the balance of power to their side, being in control and making key decisions in their lives, and thus, transforming the gender relations in all three aspects: labour (sexual division of labour), power (men’s domination and control in decision-making, access and control of resources) and catheksis (emotional and sexual attachments) according to Connell’s (1987) conceptualisation.

Conclusion

This study has shown that long years of international migration by women have clearly generated material benefits for families and non-material gains to the women migrants themselves. However, this research has also shown that the social consequences and costs on families and children left behind are deep and widely ranging. The women migrants, though empowered at a certain level, had to face several social, psychological and emotional consequences of their prolonged absence from home.

This study points out areas for future research in the context of gender, migration and social change. In my investigation, I came across families with several members who have also migrated overseas, leaving behind their children and husbands. The Filipino society is now witnessing a new generation of migrant women workers. There is a need for longitudinal studies to show whether families’ situations and well-being progressively improved inter-generationally. My study also revealed the increasing numbers of women leaving from the same communities and clearly, the phenomenon necessitates an investigation into the social change occurring in such communities and how communities address the changes.

It is suggested that further research be made on the children left behind by both parents for overseas work and examine the long-term socio-psychological impacts on them. When these children grow up, do they also leave to go abroad and work? If so, what are their experiences? Finally, it is also recommended that a study be made on the implications for a society where caregivers are grandparents of children left behind by migrant parents.
Consequences of Feminised Migration on Families, Sri Tharan

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